

# Should Working from Home Become the Standard?

**An Exploratory Study of Social Relations in Remote Work**

---

**Heidi Faust and Elena Foglio**

**Master's Program in Managing People, Knowledge and Change**

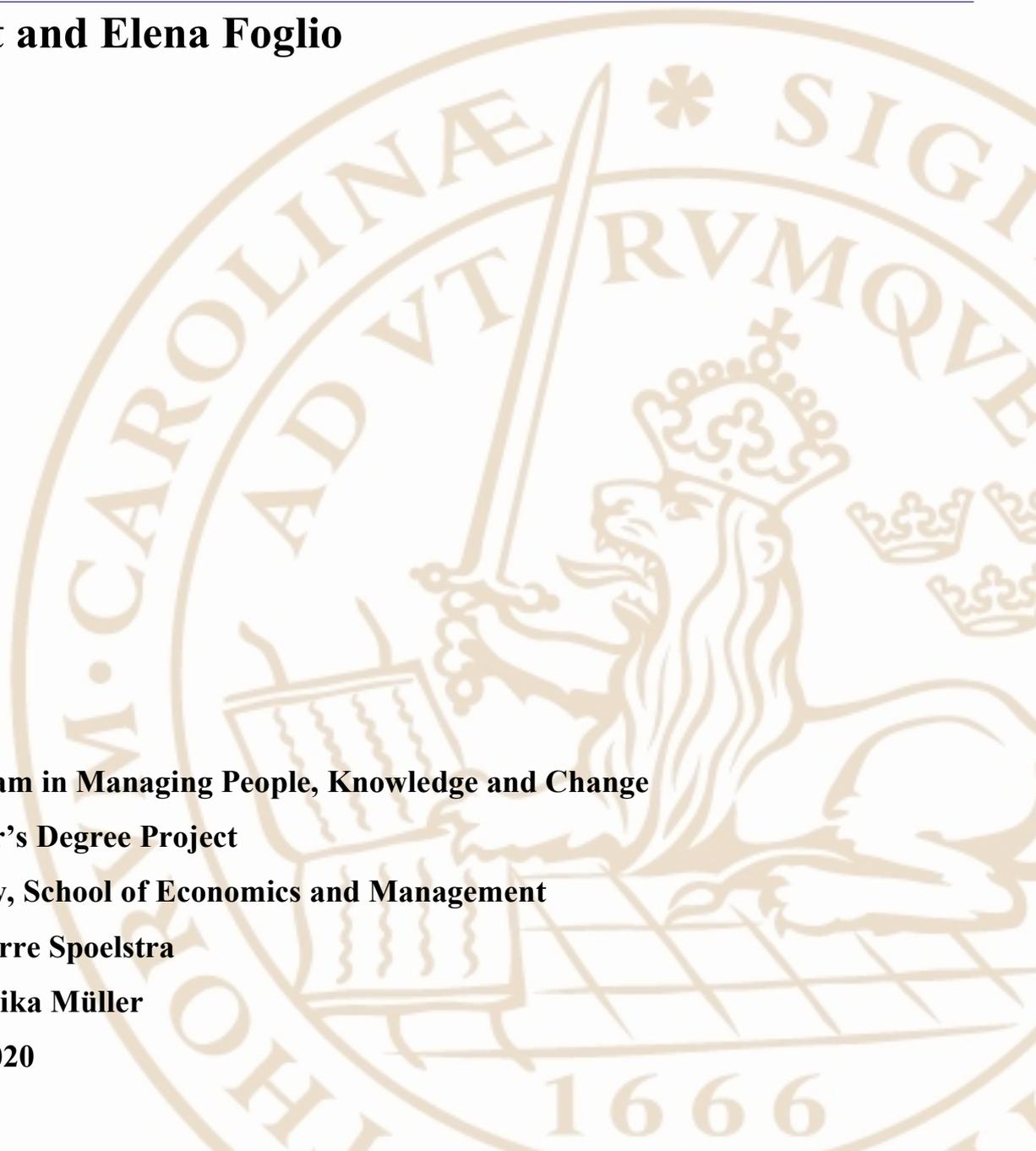
**BUSN49 Master's Degree Project**

**Lund University, School of Economics and Management**

**Supervisor: Sverre Spoelstra**

**Examiner: Monika Müller**

**Date: June 1, 2020**



# ABSTRACT

<b>Title</b>	Should Working from Home Become the Standard? An exploratory study of social relations in remote work
<b>Authors</b>	Heidi Faust and Elena Foglio
<b>Supervisor</b>	Sverre Spoelstra, <i>Lund University, Sweden</i>
<b>Examiner</b>	Monika Müller, <i>Lund University, Sweden</i>
<b>Course</b>	BUSN49 Degree Project, <i>Managing People, Knowledge &amp; Change</i>
<b>Seminar Date</b>	June 1, 2020
<b>Research Questions</b>	In organizations which do not typically support telecommuting, how do employees experience social interactions while working remotely during a global pandemic? As organizations are forced to work remotely during a global pandemic, how did the experience influence the mentality around remote working?
<b>Methodology</b>	The research is an interpretive and qualitative study. We conducted semi-structured interviews, which were the main tool for empirical material collection.
<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	Our literature review outlines previous research related to remote work and telecommuting. We highlight themes of trust, control, identity, motivation and productivity related to remote working.
<b>Conclusions</b>	We conclude that, during the pandemic, employees experience working social interactions as a bridge to the world. They look for new ways to communicate and recreate in-person communication, which appear to be more appreciated when they are natural and genuine. The study also identifies a more open mentality towards remote working. Finally, the research contributes to literature with two new theoretical findings: motivation and productivity are negatively influenced when remote workers miss out on work related social interactions, and trust is not such an issue under these pandemic circumstances. We argue the concept of <i>carryover trust</i> better summarizes the new approach to organizational trust. Future research could further explore this form of trust.
<b>Keywords</b>	Remote work, telecommuting, professional relationships, social interactions, pandemic, carryover trust, Covid-19

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the process of this thesis. First, we would like to express our gratitude to our supervisor, Sverre Spoelstra, who showed patience and gave us precious feedback before and during the writing process. Thank you for listening and for helping us to open our minds to new scenarios for the research when we were struggling.

We are also very grateful to everyone who spent a bit of their time with us, answering our questions in the interviews. This would have not been possible without your support.

Last but not least, a special thank you to everyone in the MPKC course: students, professors, and staff, who allowed us to learn and discuss topics which we believe will be always a strong insight for both our professional and personal lives.

We hope whoever reads this thesis will find it as interesting as we do!

Heidi Faust & Elena Foglio

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Research Purpose and Research Questions	2
1.3 Relevance	3
1.4 Structure of the Study	4
<b>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Remote Work	6
2.2. Working Relationships in Virtual Teams	9
2.2.1 Trust in Virtual Teams	9
2.2.2 Control in Virtual Organizations	11
2.2.3 Identity in the Virtual Context	13
2.3 Motivation and Productivity	16
Chapter Summary	18
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 A Qualitative Research Approach	20
3.2 An Exploratory Study	21
3.2.1 Collection of the Empirical Material	21
3.2.2 Analysis (Coding, Sorting, and Reducing)	25
Chapter Summary	27
<b>CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1 Remote Working Can Be Done	28
4.1.1 A Newfound Respect and Understanding Thanks to Covid-19	29
4.1.2 A Trial Run: What Does Remote Working Look Like in My Organization?	32
4.1.3 Trust Was a Given	33
4.2 But There Are Challenges	36
4.2.1 The Difficulty of Setting Boundaries and Routines	37
4.2.2 Becoming Demotivated Due to Lack of Social Interaction	41
4.2.3 Decreased Motivation Leading to Decreased Efficiency	43
4.2.4 My Organization Wasn't Ready	44
4.3 Recreating and Compensating for Missed Social Interactions	46
4.3.1 Checking in, Getting Personal	46
4.3.2 Managing Expectations and Adjusting Routines	47

4.3.3 The Importance of Transparent Communication	49
4.3.4 Being Positive and Finding Humor in an Uncomfortable Situation	51
4.3.5 But ... Do These New Ways of Social Interaction Actually Work?	54
Chapter Summary	56
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>57</b>
5.1 Introducing a New Form of Trust: Carryover Trust	57
5.2 A More Respected Remote Worker	59
5.3 Attempting to Connect with the Rest of the Organization	61
5.4 Should Remote Working Become the Standard?	63
Chapter Summary	64
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1 Empirical Findings	65
6.2 Theoretical Contribution	67
6.3 Limitations	68
6.4 Future Research	69
6.5 Practical Implications for Organizations	70
<b>REFERENCE LIST</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>79</b>
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide	79

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Respondents' Name, Age, Position and Organization</i>	22
Table 2: <i>List of Themes Used for Coding and Sorting Respondent Quotes</i>	26

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

---

## 1.1 Background of the Study

There are vast resources providing information and data about people working remotely in diverse geographical locations around the world. Even if they may differ a bit from one another, there is one thing most experts agree upon: the increasing implementation of teleworking (Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova, & Polakova, 2016; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Baker, 2020). As technology advances, the opportunities to work from anywhere have increased and employees now realize they can have more autonomy, which businesses seem increasingly willing to permit (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013). If remote working was already trending a few years back, the current situation of pandemic emergency the world is in has caused teleworking to become a necessity to keep businesses operating during this time, and as a result, we have seen an acceleration of the use of digital technologies (Karabag, 2020). In fact, this spring the novel coronavirus, Covid-19, has spread to a global scale, imposing remote working as a way to stop the contagion, or at least minimize the dispersion (Karabag, 2020). Teleworking became not only a necessity, but also a huge asset, allowing many individuals to keep their jobs and companies to continue at least a portion of their activities (Slack, 2020). In order to understand the scale of the problem, it is enough to mention that companies like Amazon advised *all* of their employees to work from home when possible (Semuels, 2020a).

Our study finds its inspiration in the fact that this situation is affecting all of our lives in some way in this present moment. As the number of remote working employees is expected to increase in the future (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Baker, 2020), this study provides an interesting starting point in order to understand one aspect of this phenomenon we are facing. However, while preliminary investigating remote working and its effects on relationships, we noticed how previous studies mainly focused on pros and cons of remote working in “normal” situations, where employees had more of a choice in working from home (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Harker & MacDonnell, 2012). We found that, in a situation where remote workers are prohibited from social activity outside their homes, there is still much to be explored in regard to this lack of

social interaction within this working group amid the present global emergency (Kelly, 2020). Technology is new to pandemics versus those of the past, so very few have analyzed the impact on social interaction after the spread of Covid-19 (Slack, 2020; Place, 2020). Furthermore, little research has been done about trust and control in relationships among and between managers and employees who suddenly find themselves transitioning to work from home for the first time. This is the very situation in which our interviewees found themselves. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) argue that remote work does not have any determinant negative effect on social relationships. This is where our interest began, but we introduce the global pandemic into the big picture. It is interesting to study social interactions when working remotely, and those involved in social science studies, for example, mention how trust is lacking when face-to-face contact is reduced (Handy, 1995); basically, building trust is more difficult in a virtual world (Short, 2014). However, trust not being the only aspect of social relationships we are interested in, our study also focuses on motivation and productivity, which is usually positively impacted in normal remote working conditions (Baruch, 2000; Golden & Veiga, 2008), typically increasing in teleworkers (Harker & MacDonnell, 2012). Still, both motivation and productivity are perceived differently under this pandemic circumstance.

## **1.2 Research Purpose and Research Questions**

Inevitably, both positive and negative aspects of working from home emerged in the study, but as the goal of our research is not to analyze the two faces of this phenomena, we will not focus on what is best for increasing productivity or obtaining higher profits. Instead, we aim to take aspects of remote working and analyze how they affect social interactions among colleagues. In this study, we will focus on employees who work from home largely for the first time, or on individuals whose organizations do not typically support remote working capabilities. We aim to understand how they experience working remotely when being forced to do so. Moreover, the interviewees can all be classified as millennials, meaning they were all born between the 1980s and the early 2000s (Diesing, 2016). Experts say individuals in this generation tend to communicate differently and to be naturally predisposed to technology (Diesing, 2016; Raines, 2002). This happens to be an important aspect of this research, as a different target would have potentially influenced our findings.

Our goal is to understand what happens to social interactions within a working team or broader organization, when individuals are forced to work from home. Based on this goal, we formulated the following research questions:

- *In organizations which do not typically support telecommuting, how do employees experience social interactions while working remotely during a global pandemic?*
- *As organizations are forced to work remotely during a global pandemic, how did the experience influence the mentality around remote working?*

The purpose of the first question is to gain insights into the relationships among co-workers and between managers and employees during a time when working remotely is new for most involved. In this process, we study the phenomena of remote working in general first, then the role trust plays in it, and finally how individuals' motivation and productivity are affected. Our goal is to understand how these dynamics are changing under the circumstances of strict social restriction imposed by the pandemic. The second question's purpose is to understand how their mindset around remote work has changed as a result of this work from home experience. As our respondents had little experience working remotely before the pandemic, they are able to provide insights into the differences they experience.

To address these questions, we will engage in a discussion with the existing literature around remote working and our empirical findings. Before doing so, we see the necessity of understanding remote workers' needs in seeking social contact in such a situation as explained above. We believe our study is a starting point for future research to better meet organizational and employee needs when telecommuting, and to understand if through technology, it is possible and desirable to recreate in person social interactions. Finally, this analysis can provide interesting insights for further analysis around how or why someone may be better suited for remote work than others.

### **1.3 Relevance**

We believe our study is particularly relevant for a general audience that is interested in gaining a better understanding of working from home. As styles of working become more dependent on new technologies, any individual could benefit from a deeper understanding of the dynamics that these new technologies give rise to. At one point in the career, most individuals

will likely be involved in remote working or work with remote workers, and it takes the effort of everyone to make that function. A deeper understanding of these concepts of trust, control, identity, motivation, and social interactions in relation to remote working is therefore likely to be of interest to a broad audience.

## 1.4 Structure of the Study

This study is divided in six chapters: *Introduction*, *Theoretical Background*, *Methodology*, *Analysis of Empirical Data*, *Discussion* and *Conclusion*. **Chapter 1** developed an overview of the study and contextualized the problem by outlining our aim and research questions. **Chapter 2** outlines prior research conducted around our topic of interest. We first explore the broader concept of remote work; then we move on to the relationship aspect of remote working, with a specific focus on trust, control and identity; and conclude with an outline of the concept of motivation and productivity in the context of remote work. The third chapter (**Chapter 3**) of the study describes and defends the methodological underpinnings for our research. We present our research process, describing who we interviewed and how those interviews took place, and conclude with a description of the coding and data analysis process. The paper continues, presenting the empirical material in **Chapter 4**. This chapter is divided into three main sections where our main findings will have their first mention: the general understanding our respondents gained of the possibility of working from home, the challenges that became clear through this experience, and a description of how the lack of social interactions was compensated for during the pandemic. Two main findings are particularly interesting: trust figures a non-issue in remote workplaces during a pandemic emergency, while, surprisingly, motivation and productivity are seen as relevant challenges. **Chapter 5** is the link between our data and the literature on remote work. As anticipated in chapter 4, trust found a new form. Literature shows how trust is usually hard to build in remote working conditions, but that was not a point experienced among our respondents. Therefore, we here introduce a new term to describe the type of trust analyzed in our cases: *carryover trust*. Moreover, we discuss a new way of respect that our respondents' organizations gained, stemming from a deeper understanding of remote work. We fill some gaps in existing literature around social interactions in virtual organizations by explaining how our respondents enjoyed social interactions when the connections were natural and genuine, while forced extroversion may in fact deter individuals from the goal of socialization. Finally, in **Chapter 6**, we reiterate our key empirical findings and defend our contributions to theory. We argue how *carryover trust*

contributes to the literature on remote work and conclude by explaining how this pandemic has encouraged a more open mentality around remote work by forcing organizations to try it. However, we question if it should be broadly employed, as our analysis shows that motivation and productivity suffer in long-term remote working conditions. We conclude the chapter with a description of the limitations of the study and an overview of the practical implications for organizations.

# CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

---

In this chapter, we present a literature review highlighting previous studies that are relevant and helpful in establishing a background to better understand our study. This chapter is divided into three main sections: *Remote Work*, *Working Relationships in Virtual Teams*, and *Motivation and Productivity*. In the first section, we explore the topic of remote working; from its definition to what is involved within the concept of telecommuting, including the associated benefits and challenges. The second section is dedicated to concepts around workplace relationships in the context of remote organizations or virtual teams, such as trust and control, as well as organizational identity. In the final section of the chapter, we discuss motivation, its correlation with productivity, and how they are affected when working remotely.

## 2.1 Remote Work

In order to fully understand each concept that unfolds in this research study, a foundational knowledge of remote work is necessary, including what it means and what it involves. In fact, the entire study takes place in the context of remote working, also called e-working, teleworking or telecommuting (Morgan, 2004). Olson (1983, p. 182) defined remote work as “organizational work that is performed outside the normal organizational confines of space and time.” A more recent explanation of the concept does not differentiate much from the one given decades ago; Morgan (2004) describes remote working as a way of working using telecommunication devices. A few years later, Nilles (2007, p. 1, cited in Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013) presents the concept in a figurative way, saying that “an e-worker involves technologies that move work to the workers instead of moving workers to the work”. In other words, now more than before, the technology that most businesses can benefit from allows workers to more easily do their job remotely with only a computer and varying levels of communication support.

Despite this, not every aspect of remote working benefits companies and employees, nor can they be organized in the same way. Different scopes, locations and structures require diversified arrangements, where others, such as a sort of work-at-home option, can be easily implemented on an individual basis depending on the circumstances (Olson, 1983). For this

reason, in order to narrow our scope to the telework category, we focus on one group, *home-based telecommuters*, as our interviewees for the study all fit into this category. *Home-based telecommuters* are defined by Kurland and Bailey (1999, p. 54) as:

employees who work at home on a regular basis. A person can be said to be a telecommuter if her telecommunications link to the office is as simple as a telephone; however, telecommuters often use other communications media such as electronic mail, personal computer links to office servers, and fax machines. Either the firm or the employee purchases the home-based equipment.

In the early 1980's, Olson (1983) was already studying how technology developments were encouraging the trend for remote work and, as years passed, most companies have developed and prepared enough to a point where they can fully function even when all the employees are away from the office. After decades, experts studied how this flexible working option can lead to significant savings for businesses (Lewis & Cooper, 2005), from lunch vouchers and reduced need for office space, to lower electricity and air conditioning bills. While reducing costs, remote working is often also seen as a way for corporations to offer flexibility and consider the well-being of their workforces, including work-life balance (Lewis & Cooper 2005). However, Wheatley (2012) studied how the "extra" time that this flexibility gives to individuals, is often filled with other paid activities, especially for women. It can be argued then, that working from home does not necessarily leave space for leisure activities, which may include anything from reading a book to spending time with family. Instead, the flexibility may cause employees to devote more time to work that they may otherwise use for commuting or family (Wheatley, 2012). This could be because, since the first studies focused on remote work, it is shown how individuals who work from home tend to be highly self-motivated and self-disciplined (Olson, 1983). Such a statement may still hold true, but to a certain extent, it could be negated if taking into consideration the historical moment during which our study takes place, as many companies have been forced to send their entire workforce home to work remotely.

Theoretically, individuals working from home can perform their professional tasks where and when they choose (Olson, 1983) and working from home can be seen as an option that allows

for particular or permanent needs to be accommodated. In any case, a key element to ensure that staff is ready to work remotely is preparation - not only mental, but also technological - by providing proper tools (Basile & Beauregard, 2016). If this preparation is done well, the possibility of teleworkers working longer hours is likely (Basile & Beauregard, 2016). This is significant, because when it comes to boundaries - defined as mental confines between actions (Basile & Beauregard, 2016) - individuals may have differing preferences. Some employees would rather keep work and personal life separated (*segmentation*), while others would let them overlap (*integration*) (Clark, 2000). Those choosing *segmentation* will build stronger boundaries and will not easily let external influences interrupt them from what they are doing (Clark, 2000). Contrarily, employees who prioritize *integration* will most likely find themselves mixing the two categories more (Clark, 2000). For companies and managers, this is relevant in understanding how to supervise remote workers from a business perspective (Clark, 2000). From an employee's perspective, despite the approach taken, in order to manage and overcome those boundaries, experts emphasize the importance of separating the workspace to achieve successful results while working remotely (Basile & Beauregard, 2016).

That said, one of the challenges of working from home is that not everyone has the possibility to devote a room to a home-office. However, even just having one proper tool to work with may make a difference in an individual's attitude towards work (Basile & Beauregard, 2016). Remote work's success is heavily dependent on the e-worker's self-discipline to actually complete the job required, meaning that a proper space to encourage this to happen is in the interest of everyone (Pearlson, Saunders, & Galletta, 2015). Social interactions are also highly correlated to work success (Semuels, 2020b) and are still very central even in remote working. Communication and relationships affect managerial control, synergy with colleagues, and performance monitoring (Kurland & Bailey, 1999), which are all related to the relationship between managers and colleagues. Working remotely alters how leaders and managers experience trust and manage control (Lewis & Cooper, 2005). Those relationships further affect team dynamics and are crucial to creating a supportive working environment, which is beneficial for e-workers (Lautsch, Kossek & Eaton, 2009). As these relationships are relevant and important to our research context, the next section will explore these aspects of workplace relationships in virtual settings.

## **2.2. Working Relationships in Virtual Teams**

While remote working can be beneficial to an organization and its employees for the reasons we outlined in the previous section (Morgan, 2004; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013), due to the geographical dispersion of remote and virtual teams, a principal challenge is the nature of relationship building and collaboration (Gerke, 2006; Solomon, 2001; Semuels, 2020a). This section outlines and highlights literature that contributes to the discussion around relationships in remote teams. More specifically, three aspects of workplace relationships that are more relevant to this particular study are addressed: *Trust*, *Control*, and *Identity*.

### **2.2.1 Trust in Virtual Teams**

Trust has been widely studied in an organizational context, as it affects the success of cooperation and collaboration of individuals who may or may not have deeply developed relationships (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995, p. 712) define trust in the organizational context as:

the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.

This definition is relevant as it emphasizes the potential inability for monitoring or controlling, which can be the case in virtual teams and remote working situations because managers and employees are not necessarily in the same physical space. There is ample research outlining and qualifying different types of trust that are present in organizations, as Kramer (1999) outlines. Beyond a general organizational context, trust is further considered a key factor affecting a virtual team (Bosch-Sijtsema, Ruohomäki & Vartiainen, 2009; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Handy, 1995; Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). That said, in order to maintain the scope of this research project, we will consider trust within the virtual organizational context.

Even in 1995, when the internet's capabilities were not as sophisticated as they are today, Handy (1995) recognized the potential virtual organizations had to impact our future in terms

of how people get work done. He emphasized the important role trust would play as these remote working scenarios began to unfold, stressing that technology itself would not be enough to sustain virtual organizations (Handy, 1995). Thus, an emphasis on the soft side is relevant. Järvenpää, Knoll, and Leidner (1998) found that the precursors to trust in organizations identified by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) – *ability, integrity, benevolence, and propensity to trust* – were also the precursors to trust in remote teams. Of these factors, integrity is more relevant at the beginning of a relationship, as it takes more time to see benevolent qualities (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Henttonen and Blomqvist (2005) continued this discussion, revealing that virtual teams, in a sense, can be considered similar to traditional teams in how they develop trust among team members. However, trust is an *even* more important and crucial concept in virtual teams, along with communication and commitment, because there are limited opportunities for face-to-face communication (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). Grant, Wallace and Spurgeon (2013) also found that trust is a key factor in job effectiveness of e-workers. They revealed that respecting time commitments and upholding quality expectations as a result of well communicated and consistent goals are critical aspects of trust in virtual environments (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013). The ability to adapt to different psychological contracts between employees and managers becomes a key skill here (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013). Further, both Handy (1995) and Henttonen and Blomqvist (2005) indicate that organizations must be flexible in how they manage relationships to allow for more nuanced ways of trust development to take place.

As trust is seemingly more challenging to develop in a virtual setting, this section will focus on that development process (Short, 2014). Handy (1995) outlines seven principle rules of trust and how they relate specifically to virtual organizations. The point more related to the idea of trust as something that needs to be developed in virtual organizations is *trust needs touch* (Handy, 1995, n.p.) This principle emphasizes the idea that while virtual tools, such as videoconferences, can in some ways compensate for less face-to-face interactions among teams, those types of meetings easily become more transactional and task focused, with less space available for getting to know each other (Handy, 1995). This means that the more geographically disperse a team is, the more important face-to-face meetings become (Handy, 1995). Järvenpää, Knoll and Leidner's (1998) research agrees and extends upon this idea, stressing that trust is built in virtual teams through team building exercises and activities. These activities help employees connect and interact socially to strengthen their relationships, which

Järvenpää and Leidner (1999) argue is key to developing trust. These activities that require time may help employees see benevolence in each other, which, as previously mentioned, is an antecedent to trust (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). While time seems to be an important aspect of trust development (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; Jones & George, 1998). Henttonen and Blomqvist (2005) find that trust can be developed quickly - what Meyerson, Weick and Kramer (1996) call *swift trust* - from an employee's initial contact with a colleague. Thus, while time is a key element, first impressions are also important to the development of swift trust in virtual teams. This subsection has explored the concept of trust in a virtual organization. The following subsection discusses how control is experienced in the virtual setting.

### ***2.2.2 Control in Virtual Organizations***

While trust has been discussed as a crucial aspect and integral player in the success of virtual teams and organizations (Bosch-Sijtsema, Ruohomäki & Vartiainen, 2009; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Handy, 1995; Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005), some argue that trust does not play such a key role, but instead control is the more dominant factor (Gallivan, 2001). Gallivan (2001) discusses two possible reasons for this finding. First, perhaps trust is implicit and therefore it is not always on one's mind when acknowledging reasons for success in a virtual team (Gallivan, 2001). Second, Gallivan (2001) proposes that trust is potentially avoided as managers may not always "trust" their own categorizations of trustworthy employees, and instead they rely on explicit control. In any case, Gallivan (2001) found that a mix of control methods is beneficial to an organization in a virtual context, as many others have emphasized in a traditional organizational context (Limburg & Jackson, 2007; Ouchi & Maguire, 1975; Snell, 1992; Ouchi, 1979).

Ouchi and Maguire (1975) found two overarching types of control for managers to employ: *behavioral control* and *output control*. The first, behavioral control, refers to a hierarchical attempt to achieve desired results through controlling the behaviors of individuals (Ouchi & Maguire, 1975). It is important in this context to know *how* the desired results are achieved in order to successfully control said results (Ouchi, 1977). The latter form of control mentioned by Ouchi and Macguire (1975) is output control, which is more related to performance measurements in an attempt for managers to control results. In this context, less needs to be

known about *how* results are achieved, but rather the ability to define and measure performance and outcomes is important (Ouchi, 1977). Ouchi (1979) later explored the effects of *clan control* - also known as horizontal or peer control (Limburg & Jackson, 2007) - and found that clan control can be subtle but very powerful, driven by tradition and ceremonies. He calls attention to the fact that these more horizontal forms of control are often overlooked, and their influence is underestimated (Ouchi, 1979). Snell (1992) further expands on forms of managerial control by adding *input control* as a way that managers and organizations attempt to influence desired outcomes. Input control is the attempt by an organization, more specifically the human resources managers, to hire employees whose goals and skills align with the needs of the organization (Snell, 1992; Jaeger & Baliga, 1985). Some organizations also implement management programs centered around mentoring and coaching activities, which Rosenthal (2004) argues are just another attempt to control employee behavior to achieve desired business results. This type of control is actually more indirect, as essentially managers are molding and shaping employees to control themselves (Rosenthal, 2004). Rosenthal (2004) goes on to say that employees can also use managerial control as a way to achieve their individual goals and desires in the organization.

As many organizations are now employing remote working strategies due to the current pandemic situation (Semuels, 2020a), it is necessary to narrow the focus of the control theme to control in virtual or remote organizations and teams. There seems to be an overwhelming discussion around the idea that more control does not necessarily equal better results when it comes to virtual and remote teams (Piccoli, Powell & Ives, 2004; Kurland & Cooper, 2002; Dimitrova, 2003; Ahuja, Chudoba, George, Kacmar & McKnight, 2002). For example, Dimitrova's (2003) research on supervision and flexibility of teleworkers led to questions of whether heavy investments in control procedures and strategies are actually necessary, as teleworking was found to be more similar to traditional workplaces than one might think. In fact, when given more autonomy, virtual employees put in more hours of work than when confined to traditional workplace time barriers (Dimitrova, 2003). This is consistent with Wheatley's (2012) findings that remote workers tend to work more hours and do not always use the flexibility for personal tasks. On that note, instead of stricter controls, strengthening communication and time management skills may be more important for teleworkers (Dimitrova, 2003). Further, studies by Ahuja et al. (2002) and Piccoli, Powell and Ives (2004)

both found that stricter control of virtual workers led to lower job satisfaction and did not necessarily ensure better results for the organization.

All this said, others found evidence that control does have an impact on virtual teams (Gallivan, 2001; Staples, Hulland & Higgins, 1999; Limburg & Jackson, 2007). As previously mentioned, Gallivan (2001) found that control measures can improve performance of virtual workers, more so than trust. Gallivan (2001) discusses how a balance of implicit and explicit control methods should be employed to ensure that a range of needs is met in a virtual organization. Limburg and Jackson (2007) explore Workflow Management Systems and Information Systems and their ability to assist managers in the management and practical side of implementing control measures in a teleworking context. They found that these systems can support many types of control, including behavioral, output control, peer control (Adami, 1999, cited in Limburg & Jackson 2007), and self-control (Limburg & Jackson, 2007). Further, their study encourages managers to rely on various types of control in a virtual organization in order to account for different activities and needs of its employees (Limburg & Jackson, 2007). To this point, Limburg and Jackson (2007) agree with Gallivan (2001) that various control forms and strategies should be used to improve outcomes. Finally, Staples, Hulland and Higgins (1999) emphasize the importance of self-efficacy as a tool that managers can use to indirectly control employees. Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1978, p. 240, cited in Staples, Hulland & Higgins, 1999) as “a judgement of one’s ability to execute a particular behavior pattern.” The antecedents of self-efficacy were found to be similar to those linked to successful remote working, suggesting that if managers can encourage the development of self-efficacy in their employees, they can indirectly control output to meet their desired goals (Staples, Hulland & Higgins, 1999).

### ***2.2.3 Identity in the Virtual Context***

As we transition from the topic of control, we can consider one more form of organizational control: normative control. Normative control is the attempt by an organization to encourage employees to “develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 619). Normative control is relevant to our next topic of identity in the virtual context and how such identities are created and affected throughout virtual organizations or teams, as it may help us understand how

organizations attempt to control and shape the identity of its employees. Collinson (2003) further emphasizes how this control, often in the form of surveillance, can lead to different constructions of self, which can be paradoxical and troubling for organizations and lead to resistance. Organizational identity is explained by Albert and Whetten (1985) as shared beliefs that an organizations' members consider to be central or unique to the organization. Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994, p. 239), expand this definition, placing more consideration on the individual, by describing organizational identification as "the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he/she believes define the organization". These concepts of organizational identity and organizational identification are important to consider in a virtual organization, as they can be a factor that holds together an organization that is geographically dispersed (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 1999). Because the concept of identity itself is a very broad one, we will narrow our literature review of the topic to identity as it pertains to the virtual context.

Literature suggests that identity work and consideration is a crucial aspect to building and maintaining virtual teams and organizations (Hsu, Hwang, Huang & Liu, 2011; Tietze & Musson, 2010; Mattarelli, Tagliaventi, Carli & Gupta, 2017; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrześniewski, 2019; Schmidt, 2018). Schmidt (2018) simply calls on leaders of virtual organizations to consider the sense of identification that non-traditional workers have, as it is a central source of the communication and development of identity for these workers. Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrześniewski (2019) go further to suggest that lack of identity to one's profession or organization can lead to anxiety and stress. This sense of organizational identity creates a "holding environment" which helps independent workers feel a sense of connection to their larger organization and purpose in their work (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrześniewski, 2019). This connection to the virtual organization can encourage employees to be more helpful team members and result in employees who are more satisfied in their roles (Hsu et al. 2011; Mattarelli et. al 2017). Some individuals may experience a shift in identity when moving from a traditional office setting to working from home, and they experience those transitions uniquely depending on their circumstances and motivations for work (Tietze & Musson, 2010). Individual employees have different reasons for possibly keeping professional identities and personal identities separated or intertwined, and when a shift in working style or location happens, there is potential for those identities to become blurred (Tietze & Musson, 2010). This relates back to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theories-

individuals tend to show one side of themselves in certain situations that they may not show in others, in order to present themselves in a more favorable light. It makes sense how in a virtual setting, it might be possible for an unwanted side of an individual to become visible, as employees are less able to separate their work and personal lives. For this reason, considering remote work from an identity perspective becomes key, as these individual experiences can affect both the likelihood of an employee considering work from home as something they would be willing to continue and their overall satisfaction with their jobs (Tietze & Musson, 2010).

There is a rather developed discussion around how to build and manage identity in non-traditional teams, including in virtual and remote working groups. Some consider more the physical or technical piece of building identity, such as providing adequate electronic communication to ensure organizational identification (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 1999). For others, this connection to the virtual organization comes from having values that are aligned with the values of the organization (Mattarelli et al. 2017) or feeling a sense of organizational belonging (Belle, Burley & Long, 2015). Many authors seem to emphasize the importance of building a virtual team in a way that allows for organizational identity to develop (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006; Webster & Wong, 2008; Belle, Burley & Long, 2015). For example, Webster and Wong (2008) advise against creating mixed virtual and non-virtual teams, as it may negatively affect efforts to have a unified organizational identity and lead to less sense of belonging among co-workers. This idea of organizational belonging is one that Belle, Burley and Long (2015, p. 90) say develops as a result of “experiencing an acknowledgement of one’s talents, interests, and experiences, and finding whole acceptance of one’s self expression of these.” In high-intensity teleworkers, there are three ways in which organizational belonging can develop according to Belle, Burley and Long (2015): through choosing to work remotely, negotiating to balance organizational and personal needs, and knowing how to achieve the level of organizational belonging needed to be successful in one’s role. *Knowing* here is a reflection of power and confidence to act and influence in an organization (Belle, Burley & Long, 2015). The notion that freedom of choice is a factor in whether individuals will connect with an organization through organizational identification is one that Thatcher and Zhu (2006) suggest as well. When working remotely is mandatory, there may be negative side-effects to organizational identity, as perhaps employees would not have chosen to work in this way (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). These findings insinuate that identity work is not always easily

influenced by physical or technical initiatives by an organization, but perhaps it is more about the appropriate formation of teams and the placement of people in roles and organizations that align with their individual identities (Mattarelli et al. 2017). In any case, identity work is difficult and is influenced both by the employee and the organization (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Individual identity narratives are so deeply personal to one person that they have the power to cause fragmentation and conflict in an organization (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Perhaps this is why in some ways, organizations employ normative control in an attempt to manage identities to meet their goals (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

This section has outlined the literature which is relevant to our study with respect to relationships between managers and employees, employees with co-workers, and the organization as a whole and its employees. We presented aspects of trust, control, and identity which have been developed considering many organizational contexts, focusing on virtual organizations in order to provide a background in this specific area which is more relevant to our particular research. The next section will explore motivation and productivity of remote workers and the factors affecting them.

## **2.3 Motivation and Productivity**

Two final and relevant aspects of a work life are motivation and productivity. While motivation refers to the determination of reaching organizational ambitions and objects (Chang & Teng, 2017), productivity is about the way the resources are used to obtain a certain level of output (OECD, 2001). These two aspects are relevant for business as it has been studied that success for organizations thrives through employee motivation, which is closely correlated to productivity (Sarwar & Abugre, 2013). When working remotely, the connection between success and motivation still exists, and in this different way of working there are some factors mainly affecting motivation and productivity: surveillance, personal life, and social interactions are a large part of these factors that we discuss here.

Strongly related to managerial control is managerial surveillance, which affects workers' motivation (Allen, Walker, Coopman and Halt, 2007). Workplace surveillance is described by Allen et al. (2007) as a tool controlling all the movements of employees. Such strict supervision can influence one's performance in a negative way if the system is not properly implemented

and handled, especially in remote working conditions (Moussa, 2015) and often because most of the time, it is installed and implemented without the employee's input (Rosenblat, Kneese & Danah, 2014). This affects employees' motivation, leading them to become dissatisfied with their job and therefore disengaged (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014). In his study Moussa (2015) shows how disengagement comes also from teleworkers' feelings when they perceive their rights are being taken away.

In addition, personal life is particularly relevant. Most studies done on motivation in remote work claim that teleworkers are more productive as they can complete their tasks in their own most productive hours (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019). In contrast, the challenge of balancing work and personal life, which was analyzed in section 2.1, might also have an overall negative influence on productivity (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019). In fact, while an ideal candidate for productive teleworking may seem to be a single person living alone, it must be said that this candidate is potentially extremely affected by missing social connections at work, and the few distractions and responsibilities at home are not enough for motivating such an employee (Olson, 1983). The same argument could be made for women with family and children. In this situation, women are more motivated by flexibility, increased autonomy, and the desire to work from home in order to manage work and family more effectively (Lewis & Cooper, 2005). However, this may in turn inhibit them from working to their fullest potential (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019).

The third aspect for this study influencing remote workers in motivation and productivity is the lack of social interactions. Social interactions play a relevant role in motivating people in what they do (Ariani, 2017). The employee who is not part of organizational events and development may start losing contact with colleagues and feels more and more excluded (Wojcak et al. 2016). The teleworker may miss some necessary information or perspectives shared during office meetings which in turn might affect their ability to perform adequately and in a productive way (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). What's more, an opportunity to ask for help via facial expression or to congratulate a colleague in-person with a handshake becomes impossible, therefore motivation can be affected (Wojcak et al. 2016). Communication is also a large part of daily social interaction that is lost when working remotely; nowadays, technology unconditionally supports our generation in this process, but it does not substitute real face-to-face contact (Wojcak et al. 2016).

To conclude, a deeper question is how motivation and productivity are affected when employees work from home. The two concepts are highly correlated and influence one another. As previously stated, multiple studies indicate that excessive surveillance in an office environment has a negative impact on motivation (Desrochers & Roussos, 2001; Shahzadi, Javed, Pirzada, Nasreen, & Khanam, 2014; Tsvangirai & Chinyamurindi, 2018). This could explain why working from home may have an overall positive effect on motivation and productivity (Harker & MacDonnell, 2012). Others claim that teleworkers' motivation is not only positively affected, but they are also often more satisfied and productive while working than traditional office workers (Baruch, 2000; Golden & Veiga, 2008). It can be concluded that with limited surveillance and greater flexibility, remote work can positively affect motivation and productivity.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the research we deem relevant in order to give the reader a base for what follows. We began the chapter with an overview of literature around working from home: what it means, who it affects, and what is important for virtual teams and organizations to consider. Moreover, we outlined and explored how the idea of working remotely has evolved from a theoretical perspective. Further, we argued that the themes which underpin the challenges and benefits of working remotely are trust, organizational control, identity, motivation and productivity. Generally, among the literature we see a consensus that while remote working provides benefits to organizations and their employees such as increased autonomy and flexibility, it also presents many challenges. These challenges range from technological infrastructure to more soft issues like developing trust and employing managerial control. Creating unified organizational identity and belonging becomes difficult in distanced teams as well but remains a crucial factor. Trust is also seen to be a main contributing factor to the success of remote working teams, but few argue that control is the greater influence. Finally, we see that authors argue how motivation and productivity are positively affected as long as remote workers have autonomy and are not over monitored, and as long as the lack of social interaction does not extend for too long, as social connections are a crucial influence on motivation and therefore productivity. To close, we would like to reiterate that these themes are in and of themselves very expansive fields of research and for that reason, we chose in our literature review to focus on these fields in the context of virtual organizations or remote

working. In the next chapter, we move on describing and explaining how we went about designing our research based on grounded methods to ensure the best results possible.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

---

In this chapter, we describe our research process and analyze the method. We open with a description of the qualitative research approach, continuing with the description of the exploratory study, illustrating how and why we selected a certain audience for the interviews. Next, we introduce our interviewees in detail and describe the general flow of the interviews we conducted. Finally, we describe how we interpreted the data, more specifically, how the processes of coding, sorting and reducing occurred.

### 3.1 A Qualitative Research Approach

Among the research traditions presented by Prasad (2005), some have been more relevant for our study. Symbolic Interaction (SI) was an inspiration for our research as it was mainly done through interviews with people from different cultures, positions and backgrounds. One of SI's assumptions is *role-taking* (Prasad, 2005); this assumption describes the human tendency to act in a certain way based on where one is, or who is present. Understanding the circumstances of our study clarifies why such an assumption becomes relevant, as our interviewees most likely changed their behavior once removed from an office setting. This should be remembered to fully understand the analysis. SI also takes into consideration that some meanings are never entirely pre-set, but they are continually shaped by individual interpretations (Prasad, 2005), which helped remind us that this situation is entirely new to most of the individuals interviewed and it is in continuous transformation as the state of the world evolves in response to the spread of Covid-19.

Continuing with Prasad's (2005) explanations of methodology traditions, another tradition, Dramaturgy, interestingly describes the connection between Goffman's (1963) theory of *frontstage* and *backstage*, and the new scenario our interviewees found themselves working in. Working in an office or having video calls in one's own kitchen puts a person in two very different situations, potentially exposing various aspects of the same worker's life. Prasad (2005), drawing on Goffman (1963), describes the *frontstage* as something like a masquerade, where an individual presents themselves in the most suitable light depending on the occasion. On the other hand, the *backstage* hides facets of the individual that might be considered

embarrassing if revealed. The individuals we interviewed found themselves in a situation where hiding a part of their personality usually unseen by work colleagues became more difficult, as their *frontstage* and *backstage* overlapped for this period of time studied, meaning that the office happened to be in the same place where they usually hid.

## **3.2 An Exploratory Study**

In order to have a new perspective through which to study the topic of remote working, we created our own exploratory study, getting in contact with people to whom we asked questions. This study had two main phases: first, the collection of the empirical material, followed by the coding, sorting, reducing and analysis of the collected data. Here we describe these two phases, explaining the steps that allowed us to have solid material as a basis for constructing our findings and writing this thesis.

### ***3.2.1 Collection of the Empirical Material***

The development of our study occurred in three main phases. Initially, we discussed the aim and research questions to understand the point we wanted to reach with our study and our interviews. Once the aim of understanding the dynamics of social interactions among co-workers in a pandemic situation was finalized, we prepared a guide to follow during our semi-structured interviews, which can be found in Appendix A, and continued on with the data collection itself. To better understand the format and how we created it, we describe the process in the next paragraph.

During the interviews, our focus was on four main areas. At the beginning of each conversation, if not done previously, we briefly described the project to give each interviewee an understanding of what we were doing and how the interview would proceed. After this clarification and gaining permission to record the interview, the guiding-questions were categorized as follows: transitioning to remote working, relationships between managers-employee, relationships among co-workers, and work-life balance and motivation, with a final question to conclude and summarize the interview. In understanding the dynamics between managers and employees during this new situation, we focused on trust and control. In order to study individuals' experiences around their relationships with colleagues, we mainly asked about collaboration and communication. We had some questions prepared in case the

respondent did not have anything more to add to a previous question, but generally, we let them talk, only occasionally guiding them toward our topic of interest.

The respondents were chosen randomly, with the only intention of collecting opinions of people who had not worked from home on a long-term basis before the global emergency, or who were working from home for companies or organizations who do not typically support remote work. At this point, it must be emphasized that employees answered from varying perspectives coming from their very different working experience; each one of the interviewees had a diverse position in very unlike companies, which of course made some situations unique. However, we argue that this allowed us to have a broader perspective and understanding from which to base our exploratory study. It is important to note that in order to ensure anonymity for both the respondents and their organizations, we have changed both their personal names and the names of their organizations, as is noted in the summary in *Table 1* below.

<i><b>NAME</b></i>	<i><b>AGE</b></i>	<i><b>NATIONALITY</b></i>	<i><b>POSITION</b></i>	<i><b>ORGANIZATION</b></i>
Mila	25	Spain	Research & Development Engineer	EasyPak
Rachel	27	USA	Procurement Agent	City Government
Eric	29	USA	Marketing Organization	US Express
Lucia	30	Italy	Brand Manager	Lightottix
Margot	30	USA	Human Resources	Oyns
Adrian	27	USA	Human Resources Temp	Snake Bite Tequila
Robert	32	USA	Remote Recruiting Assistant Director	University of Johnson City

Alison	24	Italy	Customer Care & Operation Team	TravelEasy
Carolina	24	Italy	Junior Manager	Flybus
Natalie	32	Germany	Administrative Assistant & Office Manager	Utilize

*Table 1: Respondents' Name, Age, Position and Organization*

In order to enhance the experience for our readers, we feel it is valuable to bring the respondents of our study to life beyond a simple table with their basic categorizations. To identify the individuals we interviewed, we began by reaching out to a few individuals we knew that fit into our target, and later asked for more contacts with whom to talk. Our respondents can all be categorized as millennials, and while some do have direct reports, all are in the early to mid-stages of their careers and are in mid-level positions in their respective companies.

**Mila** is originally from Spain, but she recently started a job at EasyPak in Sweden where she performs quality control experiments on new packaging products to enhance sustainability. Because of the nature of her role, she is often in the lab conducting tests, and for that reason, working from home was new and unusual for her.

**Rachel** works as a purchasing agent for the city government where she lives in Florida, buying things like police cars, road signs, and contracting out labor for city construction projects. Her role, or any role at city government for that matter, has never been able to be done from anywhere but the office, as the city does not have the infrastructure or technology set up for remote working and the nature of the city's work is confidential and sensitive.

**Eric** is a project manager at US Express, handling marketing initiatives specifically. His team ensures that all of the resources are available for processes to take place in a timely manner with a goal to complete projects on time. Eric emphasized how he has never worked remotely before, and how in general, US Express frowns upon the idea, but he has a picture of what it looks like because his wife works from home full-time.

**Lucia** is a brand manager for a high fashion brand of sunglasses at Lightottix in Milan. She is responsible for ensuring marketing activities in storefronts are carried out according to plan. Though she has some experience working with virtual teams because her manager is located in Paris, she herself has never worked remotely for an extended period of time.

**Margot** comes from the United States but works in Sweden for a technology company called Onys, where she specializes in Human Resources. Her current projects include managing communications to teams and building an intranet that houses information regarding HR policies. She stressed that while technically parts of her job could be done from home, Onys does not necessarily encourage working remotely, as they value the in-person collaboration that takes place in the office.

**Adrian** is temporarily in charge of all Human Resource activities and initiatives at a small-batch specialty tequila company based in Mexico, with offices in the United States as well. He had worked from home in previous roles with other companies, but Snake Bite Tequila does not support this function, seemingly because leadership fears a loss of control over their employees. When he transitioned to working remotely, he not only had to leave the office, but also return to the US from Mexico due to travel restrictions and the fact that his role at the time was temporary.

**Robert** was one of our more senior respondents, as he is an assistant director of a remote working team, but for a university in Tennessee, which does not normally support working from home as a principle. He manages a team of ten other remote employees who are dispersed across the country. His insights provided a different perspective as he was able to see clearly how the organization had changed with respect to his remote team during this time. Robert was also our only respondent who has a small child, but his son is out of the house at daycare during his working hours.

**Alison** works in Milan as a travel agent for an online travel agency, TravelEasy, and deals exclusively with client relations and service. In general, the company does not allow working remotely as they work on a shift rotation and have to account for their hours in the office. During this crisis, her hours have been cut to 70% of her normal working day, and she currently lives in Piacenza with her parents.

**Carolina** is a junior manager for a German bus travel company called FlyBus. She is from Italy but is now based in Munich, Germany. She primarily coordinates the logistics of medium-length trips, negotiates the contracts with the bus drivers and deals with customer sales as well.

Her team does not work remotely because they need to be in the office to collaborate between the sales and sourcing team to negotiate prices and contract terms. Her workload has been reduced to 30% of its original load due to the coronavirus.

**Natalie** is an administrative assistant and office manager for a German startup called Utilize, which aims to improve the functionality of new apps, software and websites. She needs to be in the office as her job mainly consists of managing the office itself, and she often needs to make paper copies and answer phone calls, which requires her to physically be present. She now works from home, only going to the office when it is necessary to copy or print.

We aimed to interview enough people to reach a balance between the time we had to conclude our study with the quality of answers we were looking for from our respondents. It can be argued that after many more interviews, something new and interesting could have emerged, and we know the research could have gone on with many other interviews. However, this was just not feasible in the amount of time we had to complete this project. That said, we would like to note that we concluded our interviews after 10 interviews, as the responses we were getting were very similar. However, we acknowledge that we can hardly call this a *saturation point* as one can always discover something new. The interviews consisted of semi-structured conversations and they undoubtedly varied in length, from about thirty minutes to a full hour. We asked questions with the aim of uncovering the *whats* and *hows* of our interviewees' experiences working remotely for the first time, in no specific company, only based on experience. These *whats* and *hows* are what Gubrium and Holstein (1997, cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) emphasize as an important tool to explain one's research and get the desired answers. In order to achieve a balance between discovering the *whats* and *hows* they highlighted, we switched focus between what our interviewees were observing, and how those things made them feel or affected their work. This focus aligns with the characteristics of an interpretative tradition, as it seeks to understand how people assign meaning and perceive intended meanings. All the interviews were conducted online through Zoom video calls. Before any conversation, permission to record was granted by the respondents.

### ***3.2.2 Analysis (Coding, Sorting, and Reducing)***

Once the interviews were completed, we transcribed, coded and sorted them to extract common themes in the conversations (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The transcriptions were

completed with the help of some online tools. However, after the transcriptions were completed, we read and edited them a second time, as the text was not perfect. After reading through all of the transcriptions both individually and together, we spent time brainstorming themes that were apparent in our conversations. With our research questions in mind, we defined themes which most respondents had in common, as we have listed below in *Table 2*.

Building Trust
Preparedness/Structure
In-Person Communication and Collaboration
Work-Life Balance
Resources/Technology
Challenges
Social Interaction/Relationships
Recognition
Motivation
Flexibility
Appearance and Identity
Conflicts
Control
Efficiency
Change of responsibility

*Table 2: List of Themes used for Coding and Sorting Respondent Quotes*

With the themes we wanted to extrapolate from the interviews, the third round of reading was a starting point for the *sorting* process. While reading each interview, we highlighted different quotes with a different color, referring to the different concepts. Then, we collected all the quotes from each topic together in one document, so that we could have an overview of the amount and quality of information we had about each theme. Subsequently, after sorting the

quotes in categories relevant for this thesis, we analyzed which of those could be consolidated into more significant, all-encompassing themes, as some seemed redundant or overlapped with other themes.

To conduct a credible interpretive study, we continuously challenged each other to think behind just what was explicitly said, in order to see similarities, differences, and repetitions, an approach suggested by Alvesson (2003). This to say that our material was discussed and internally reflected upon, to make the most out of it. This was quite important in order to come to new conclusions which do not already exist in literature.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an explanation for the grounding of our project in established research methods: symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy. We explained how we designed our exploratory study around these traditions. We began our research by reading and analyzing existing studies to get an understanding of the theoretical background in order to formulate our interview questions in an effective way. Then, we identified our respondents and the empirical material was collected through interviews with each respondent. We used a system of coding, sorting and reducing to analyze our interview transcriptions and extract the main themes we intended to explore in our study. These themes were later refined as we began to develop our core findings and contributions. The next chapter presents the empirical material we collected through the interviews. It is divided into three main sections in order to explore three main aspects of the interviews we found to be most significant.

# CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

---

In this chapter, we present and analyze the data that was collected over the course of our study. Both the insights from the qualitative interviews and the description of the background of our research offer valuable material to answer our research question. The context of our study is relevant as it makes our particular research around remote working interesting. With this empirical data, we aim to focus on this moment with no precedent in history, in which the interviewees in our study, voluntarily or not, found themselves working from home due to pandemic restrictions against movement. All this considered, we present this empirical material to show our respondents' experiences with social interaction during this time, highlighting how they missed in-person social interaction but looked for opportunities to fill the void while remote working.

The presentation and analysis of the empirical material are divided into three sections. The first outlines our findings with respect to the newly acknowledged possibility of working remotely for our interviewees, in contrast to previous mentalities. In the second section, we present the challenges that our interviewees encountered as a result of working remotely for the first time in organizations that do not typically support this function. To conclude the chapter, we analyze the ways our interviewees are recreating and compensating for missed social workplace interactions in the context of working remotely during a pandemic.

## 4.1 Remote Working Can Be Done

Throughout our discussions with interviewees, there seemed to be an overwhelming mentality and agreement that working from home was discovered to be something that is possible. The comments around the possibility of remote working being a more permanent or long-term option for employees came across in a hopeful way. The general consensus was that it would be a positive thing for organizations to change their mentalities, allowing employees to work from home. For example, Adrian discussed his feelings and hope for leaders to have more open minds:

*I really hope [the mindset changes]. I really do. I'm optimistic. I think across the board, even beyond Snake Bite Tequila, at other companies, it's*

*going to be hard for leaders to not recognize that 'Okay, of course our business was impacted while everyone's forced to work from home for long periods of time, but we were still able to contact people and have meetings, we were able to get deliverables and see results and move projects along while people were working from home.' It's not like the entire business has come to a halt. People are getting up and working [...] I think the leaders are definitely slowly but surely changing their perspective and recognizing that it's okay. I think at the end of this, things will change, at least I'm optimistic that they will.*

Alison also had the feeling that remote working is possible, although challenging. She commented:

*We can do it as well on our chats or by phone, yes, but it is still different. [...] So in the long term I think it might be harder, but not impossible.*

However, she was a bit more hesitant with her words. She alluded to the fact that though it could be possible, remote working long-term could come with challenges for many organizations. We will further discuss the challenges and concerns our interviewees anticipated in the next section. This section focuses on the positive side, discussing how our interviewees see the possibility of remote working solutions benefiting their organizations long-term through three main ideas: respect and understanding, this pandemic being a test for longer-term remote working, and how trusting your employees becomes a given.

#### ***4.1.1 A Newfound Respect and Understanding Thanks to Covid-19***

The first idea that became visible regarding the possibility of remote working being a more long-term option for organizations was that organizations developed a general understanding of what it is like to work from home and more respect for people who work from home full-time. Eric, when asked about his main takeaway from this period of remote working, commented:

*I think it gives me respect for the people that I know in our company that work remotely. [...] And I feel for them, the lack of connection they get.*

To illustrate this, he gave an example to provide some context:

*I can remember meetings where the video conference wasn't working. It was like someone just held their phone in the room and you know, they're getting bits and pieces, and it's kind of taboo to, you know, yell up in a meeting of 30 or 40 people, 'Hey, I can't hear, can you get any closer?' so they just kind of [had to] deal with what they had. And information gets lost that way. I think all that being said, working from home is at least partially the way of the future.*

Here we see how challenges that remote employees face every day are being brought to light in this circumstance. This provides visibility not only to leadership but also to colleagues and allows them to consider what their remote employees might need in terms of support. Eric also illustrated this consideration in thinking about his wife, who works from home full-time. He said that now he stops to think, “*Well, what else does she need?*” and he says this experience has made him more “*compassionate [towards] her.*”

Moreover, Alison described how she had been thinking about a new co-worker, who joined her team during the quarantine. He was forced to begin his time with the travel agency remotely. She elaborated:

*Well, I think that learning from home is not so easy. I mean, working from home, yes. But starting from level zero is not so easy. Because, yes, maybe I can call you and I can explain how to do things, but if I have some questions, I can ask it, but it's different. I started from the office and it was completely different [...] so I think it's not so easy, but he's doing it!*

She seemed to have a bit of empathy in her voice when she thought about her new colleague. She had respect for him as he began his career remotely without all of the support she had in her experience within an office setting.

Robert had a different perspective from this pandemic situation; as he works from home full-time, but for a university, where most employees do not ever have the opportunity to work remotely. He was able to see the changes in his colleagues' mentalities towards his remote team. He described his appreciation for this opportunity to change the general mentality of those working in a traditional office:

*[It is] sort of a blessing in disguise at the moment. We've been doing this for years and [our leadership has] never worked from home, and they're being kind of thrust into it. There are always those stereotypes of working from home like I said. Like, some people think we just wear pajamas and watch Netflix all day. And sometimes we do. But that's not the true mentality. I think they're understanding the technological challenges; if your internet goes out at home, you don't have an IT person to go to, you don't have another computer you can run to. If Zoom is not working, or your dogs barking in the background...all these things, like kids running around the house. Our directors are [saying], 'I don't know how they (the remote team members) do this all day.'*

During this period of widespread remote working, his colleagues are “truly getting an understanding of what it's like in [their] shoes” (Robert), and this seems to bring him a sense of relief. He also recalled how his directors had explicitly expressed appreciation and gratitude for the work of his remote team in their recent calls:

*He immediately said in probably three or four straight meetings, how much of a newfound respect he had for our regional team or remote base. [He said] '[I] had no idea what it was like for you guys.'*

A deeper sense of mutual respect seemed to arise during this time with the pandemic. Robert described the tensions between his team and their onsite office counterparts:

*We think they have it easier because they are more connected to what's going on and they think again, we're just hanging out at home.*

However, he further commented that these feelings have somewhat subsided and a “balance between the campus teams and regional teams” has emerged through this experience (Robert).

This subsection highlighted how respect and mutual understanding for the challenges remote workers face day to day may be emerging during this pandemic. The quarantine orders that have been placed have brought to light the issues that need more consideration if organizations seek to make remote working possible long term. The next subsection will discuss how our interviewees saw this situation as an opportunity to test that possibility.

#### **4.1.2 A Trial Run: What Does Remote Working Look Like in My Organization?**

The second theme that emerged from our conversations was the idea that this period of working from home was a trial, in a sense, for how organizations that did not previously allow remote working could operate in this way. This was the situation for most of our interviewees. This time gave employers the opportunity to test this option for their employees and to see what challenges they might face, what support their employees would need, and how the business might be impacted. Adrian mentioned this as he explained his thoughts to request to work from home long term as he moves into a more permanent position with Snake Bite Tequila:

*I think it's something that I could consider long-term, because I've thought about asking if I can work from New York instead, because my job doesn't require me to be in person, it can be done remotely. We can do video conferences instead of in-person, and that might become more comfortable and acceptable. Of course, it's not the same but it's something that people have been forced to do during this time, so people are going to be more accustomed to it.*

He seemed to think that this period would give leadership an example to think back on when considering whether he could be a full-time remote employee instead of uprooting his life to New York to work with them full-time. This gives him the chance to prove that his work can be accomplished from home and offers his colleagues and leaders the chance to see what is possible. Eric called this period of time a “*crash course*” in what he thinks might be the future of business:

*I've seen a lot of articles that have become more popular - of course now as people are thinking about it - about remote working and how that's the way of the future...and I think it is. I think this is sort of my takeaway; this sort of crash course for most of the world, and especially the business, will show how this could work moving forward. What do we need to think about if we're going to send massive amounts of our workforce to work from home? [...] So I think now [the questions are]: What are the tools that best equip our workforce [...]? and What do we miss out on? I think they're still learning that, but this will probably tell a lot more because like I said, it's*

*kind of the crash course of 'we have no choice'. So, what are the needs?  
What do they (employees) miss?*

He seemed to think this was a unique experience that is not always available to organizations. This serves as a chance to better understand what a more remote future could look like. He also mentioned the importance of considering the tools that might be necessary for remote employees to be successful. Robert commented on the opportunity for changed mindsets:

*The idea of the office, like that work has to be done in a collective office is proving to be not necessarily the case. People can be trusted to do their job in a variety of locations [...] I think it's just opening up the minds of what can and can't be done in house. As long as the technology is available and people have a project to do, whether they do that at home or not, it doesn't really matter. I think a lot more people are realizing that you can do things in a different environment now and still accomplish all the same tasks.*

His use of the phrase “*proving to not necessarily be the case*” illustrates that this is in some way a test - to *prove* that work done from remote locations can be done effectively. Employers may now be considering alternatives to traditional working spaces. These comments show that through this experience, organizational leaders have had a “free trial” for possible remote work without stepping out on their own, as the majority of organizations across the globe were faced with the same restrictions. Margot summed it up well when she said “[*Managers*] *kind of choose to see the glasses half empty or that people shouldn't be trusted and that they need to be held accountable and so on. So, I think it's a good test for people to learn that this is doable.*” She implies here that without this opportunity, maybe managers would not have entertained the mindset of trusting their employees to work from home. Our findings regarding the role that trust played in this “trial period” will be shared in the following subsection.

#### **4.1.3 Trust Was a Given**

Finally, the theme of trust was explored in our conversations. Because of the unique circumstances our interviewees found themselves in, trust seemed to be a given. Their managers did not have time or space to devote to initiating new robust control mechanisms or extra protocols, as they were more or less forced into this situation overnight. As a result, organizations generally had no choice but to trust their employees to continue working up to their standards. Going back to Alison’s colleague, who joined the team after the work from

home regulations were put into place as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19, we see how her team had no choice but to trust. She explained:

*We have a colleague who started working with us by working from home. So, we actually never met him, because he started one month ago, a little bit more. And also, in this way, I think that we can see that someone can be trusted, even without knowing him, even without seeing him working at the office, because we never saw him.*

Her comment insinuates that sometimes there are situations when someone must be trusted by default. Robert also discussed this idea of trusting someone without necessarily having worked together in an office. He emphasized the importance of hiring the right people who can be trusted from a distance by explaining the main things his remote team looks for in a potential new hire:

*Number one is experience, but number two is just the type of personality and if I can trust this person to do their job like this. Is this somebody that needs somebody over their shoulder micromanaging them all day or this is self-starter? We asked people in interviews 'How do you motivate yourself every day?' That is part of our interview process. 'Can we get an understanding of your background and your motivation and your passion for this field?' Because if we can truly understand that and know why you're in this [and] why you want to do this job, then we know we can trust that person to actually follow through.*

For Robert, trust could be given quickly, as long as the person was fit for the work they would be doing. Further, Robert seemed to think that the same behavior and levels of trust you would give colleagues in an office setting should be given when working remotely. “*If we were all in the same office, I'm not going to walk around to the cubicles every day, every hour and say 'Hey, are you answering that email?', if that's not how it works in office, that's not how it should work remotely either*” (Robert). He went on to talk about time constraints as a manager. He implied that managers simply do not have time to distrust their employees in this situation:

*As long as you're available to students, if they email you, or they call you during the day, as long as I know, you're picking up the phone, and I'm not getting complaints from counselors that you're not available...We have a 24- 48-hour return policy essentially on emails and stuff like that and it's*

*going great. Other than that, it's just a lot easier for me to implicitly trust people than to worry about following through with them every day.*

Micromanagement requires a great deal of time that many employers do not have. If distrust is an issue, managers will be forced to spend their time checking on baseline expectations that should be followed as a standard. This seems to be relevant to the historical context we are in now. During this unanticipated global pandemic, companies had little time to transition their employees to working from home. Perhaps they had no choice but to trust their employees to fulfil their responsibilities as outlined in a job description. The baseline for this trust seemed to be the continuation of proven results and availability. As long as the interviewees were available when needed or called upon by colleagues and/or management, integrity and trust could be maintained. Eric described how this is manifested in US Express:

*We trust that if you make a meeting with somebody, that they're going to show up, and that if they're not there within five to ten minutes of you scheduling it, that they're going to text you or chat you or something and say, 'Hey, something came up', or 'I can't connect' or whatever. [...] But, yeah, other than one instance [where a co-worker was not available and we had to subtly mention it to a manager], I haven't seen any glaring things. I think there's a lot of trust among us that we're all doing our job to a certain extent.*

Not only does he allude to the importance of availability, other than one incident, he had not experienced any breaches of trust. Availability is perhaps *the* way to show trustworthiness in this situation. Adrian also implies that a key factor for maintaining trust while working remotely is being available and receptive to team members reaching out. He explained this expectation:

*I guess a piece of it is trust, but it's more just like a requirement, a baseline expectation that, if someone messages you, you respond quickly. And that you're attentive, you're watching your emails on your phone, and that you're not just off doing whatever personally at home, but you're focused on work.*

Adrian mentions it may not necessarily be solely trust, but also a requirement for commitment. Beyond availability, continuing to show results was an important aspect of maintaining trust between the organization and its employees. Adrian emphasized:

*I mean it's been explicitly communicated, especially in the time of crisis where money is tight and businesses are being affected, our leaders have told employees directly, 'You need to be adding value, everyone's job is on the line', [and], 'While you're working from home, keep in mind that everything you're doing needs to be productive and adding value'*

This quote shows how maintaining the business standards was a baseline expectation for employees during this remote working period. Rachel expanded on this idea of expectations:

*As long as we perform the same way we perform in the office and do things for [our manager], I don't think he really cares.*

As long as the business carried on as normally as possible, trust seemed to be apparent in remote working conditions.

This subsection has explored the idea that for our interviewees, distrusting employees was not an option in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. They did not have the time or resources to implement stricter controls. As long as employees were available and providing results, trust was a given. This concludes the broader finding that working from home was seen as a possibility for many individuals and organizations who had not previously considered remote work. By taking advantage of this period of time to try remote working, leaders had the opportunity to learn how this could accommodate their business and possibly open up the opportunity for more flexibility in the future. What's more, by trusting employees to keep the business running, individuals gained a newfound respect and more profound understanding of remote worker's needs.

## **4.2 But There Are Challenges**

As anticipated, our study fits into a critical historical moment, where working from home slightly differs from other remote work situations. Globally, in the spring of 2020, employees everywhere found themselves forced to stay and work from home, full-time, for an indefinite period of time. This restriction, imposed upon employees by those in higher positions, caused new challenges to surface. It was clearly noted by some respondents how no aspect of this situation was chosen by them. Eric for example, said:

*I think that's the hard part is the unknown of how long you're going to be doing this, because most of us didn't sign up to work from home. So being forced into it is a different thing than people like my wife who chose to work from home herself.*

He continued:

*I think there is therefore a small lack of motivation in it. It kind of ebbs and flows day by day, there are days where I wake up and it's like 'I just don't want to do anything today'.*

As we have seen through the literature, working from home has many advantages. However, these advantages may be overshadowed and quickly disappear for someone who never wanted to work outside of the office long-term and is now forced to do so. The pressure from being forced into something may inhibit a positive attitude, or at least make it more difficult for the employee to see all the good things in the long-term. Eric explained that even though this was not his choice, in the beginning he could appreciate why some people liked remote working, however:

*It started to hit me about week two or three, when you start to see on the news they're talking about, you know, June and July and that's when I started to kind of freak out.*

This involuntary nature of this restriction had consequences that became apparent to the employee. Work efficiency and setting boundaries between personal and work life clearly presented challenges, mainly affecting motivation and productivity. These needs will be addressed in the following subsection.

#### ***4.2.1 The Difficulty of Setting Boundaries and Routines***

When working from home, balancing work and personal life is a real challenge. Individuals vary in their approaches to achieve this balance. When work and home activities happen in the same physical space, mental boundaries between the two become blurred (Basile & Beauregard, 2016). When a person decides voluntarily to stay home for work, perhaps a balance is already thought out and tested. However, in our respondent's situation, finding this balance was a work in progress. A physical space to separate work from leisure may not be a luxury everyone has available, and this may also contribute to the dilemma. For instance, Oyns

is a company described by Margot as a one that has been open to work from home when absolutely necessary, however Margot did not choose to not take advantage of this opportunity. She explained:

*It's tricky because you're constantly blending the two worlds [...] It's a little bit challenging because sometimes I just want to be able to have another physical space to go to. Usually, I am able to bike to work so I use that time to sort of disconnect or to get ready to work. There you get that natural separation. It's something I didn't know I missed until it was gone.*

At home, it is often difficult, or impossible, to create separate physical spaces for work and for home. Respondents mentioned how setting specific times devoted to work and personal life helped create this distinction. Mila explained:

*I have two phones, the personal one and the work phone [...]. I'm trying to keep the one for work a little bit aside and think 'check it tomorrow' [...] As we are at home all day, it's really easy to go back and check some emails, so at night I'm just keeping my work stuff in one place and opening it again in the morning.*

She continued:

*Something else I'm keeping quite strict is that when it's five or six in the afternoon, after eight hours of work, I close the computer.*

Setting those boundaries allows individuals to build, as Lucia said, routines for the whole working day:

*I create my daily routine. I always wake up, have breakfast, do some exercise, then I work in the morning. I have also subscribed to Duolingo to improve my French, so I do a little bit of that. I then start again to work, and I try at 7 pm sharp to close my computer and do some sports. I think that I reached a good balance now.*

Especially in this overwhelming situation, setting these kinds of boundaries make the balance easier. In a normal context, if any kind of appointment or social outing after work was scheduled, finishing work at a certain time would become more necessary and appealing. However, because everyone is in quarantine, everyone's social lives have significantly

diminished, and these planned activities that may have once marked the end of a working day do not necessarily exist anymore. In this case, a routine becomes even more important as to not lose yourself in work, and for some this may be easier than for others. Lucia revealed that it has not always been simple since the beginning of the period at home:

*The first week was a bit messier and I worked too much. Sometimes I could really forget to have lunch at a proper time and I could work until 3 or 4 pm, then I grabbed a yogurt from the fridge and that's it. Maybe for me, it's a little bit harder the contrary (to being distracted by being home): my attention is so focused on working and not on doing other things. But now I feel it's better.*

The responsibility of setting balanced boundaries does not only depend on the employee, but we will see in this section that being in quarantine sometimes leads to higher expectations from the managers, and that for others, the pandemic has caused less work to be available. Both of these conditions make it harder to set distinctions between personal and working life.

It can be demanding for people to set those desired boundaries, and sometimes it is a struggle to find time for personal activities because work becomes integrated into the home itself. Further, shutting off devices and deciding that a working day has ended is a good strategy, but also quite demanding when the kitchen also functions as an office for over a month. Unfortunately, organizations may take advantage of that and can expect too much from their employees. Adrian, for example, feels the pressure of always being ready to answer any call that comes through, even after typical working hours:

*What many people have told me, and I experienced this too, is that leaders and bosses are texting people at 8 pm or on weekends, so the line between work and home life is very blurred and doesn't fully exist. There's a mentality that's like: 'Well, what else are you doing? Everyone is quarantined, everyone's staying at home.' You're not going anywhere, so you don't have an excuse to not be working.*

Another aspect to consider is that not all employees and/or their organizations are lucky enough to have significant amounts of work to complete during this time. Because the economy has taken a severe hit as a result of the pandemic, organizations have lost their clients, they are not able to attend events they were planning, or simply, there is just less work to be done due to

the circumstances. Rachel, for example, works for the City Government of her state, and she commented:

*It's hard to establish a routine when you're not busy either. I feel that maybe if I was busy, I might have another [perspective], but because I'm not so busy, it feels I have to sit here and stare at the computer for eight hours [...] That's really hard. If working from home was something you've always done, you could roam your house freely and do whatever, and I guess I could, but I think it's a personal thing: I feel I have to sit here all day.*

The same feeling was mentioned by Carolina who said:

*I am struggling to keep my personal life separated because there is less work to do. Even if we work fewer hours to compress all the work, I don't have that much, so I may end up chatting or doing something else while working.*

The last two are examples of employees who would rather be in the office because their workloads do not fit the working from home profile. They mentioned how this global crisis has affected their job motivation in a negative way. The necessity of requiring employees to work from home longer than everyone was expecting does create a challenge in finding a way to balance home and office. Eric, for example, mentioned that the reality of working from home longer than expected was a reason to find that balance:

*My brain is typically in a million different places at the same time, so it's a challenge for me to balance work and life, especially at home and I get distracted very easily [...] However, I would say now I've settled in better than I thought maybe because I think 'look, we're not going anywhere, we're going to be doing this for a while.' So, I've got to figure it out. Again, I've been better at prioritizing what I'm doing, trying to be organized about what I have coming up, but it is hard.*

As we can see, multiple factors contribute to the difficulty in finding a balance between home, work, and social lives. As we continue to consider the challenges our respondents faced, we will reveal our findings around motivation and efficiency. We will consider how the lack of social interaction has affected our respondents' motivation to work in the following subsection.

#### **4.2.2 Becoming Demotivated Due to Lack of Social Interaction**

The lack of face-to-face communication with colleagues is an important source of social interaction, and so of motivation. Margot, for example, does not mind working from home, but what is hard, she said, it is not having the connection with colleagues:

*It is tough in that way, I think, to stay motivated. That's what you get from being in the office and you get from being around your colleagues. It's tricky not having that.*

The same connection is also mentioned by Alison, who called it “*spirit of the company*”:

*Yes, my motivation has changed a little bit [...] But when you are at the office, you have your colleagues in front of you, you have the order departments, you feel more part of the company. You can feel part of the company also from home. Like we have groups where we send pictures or something funny, but it's not the same thing. So, it's like yes, I'm working, but I prefer it when I go to the office and you feel the spirit of the company.*

Moreover, personality types can influence the outcome of this balance as well. When talking to Mila, who described herself as very social, she described how she looks for ways to cope:

*This all is affecting my motivation a little bit, but I think it depends a lot on each person. As I'm very social, for me it's very strange [...] I think something that really helped me is to check on other colleagues.*

Lucia also expressed how the need for social interaction can affect individuals' motivation in different ways:

*Yes, my motivation has changed, I haven't chosen to work this way every day, but I think that depends on the person. My colleague, for example, hates to work from home because she says that she doesn't like to be in comfortable clothes all day, nor to work alone. She values going to the office with the other colleagues.*

Personal preferences, as well as balance of social interaction, influence attitudes regarding workplace satisfaction. When employees are forced to work in their own less-than-ideal workplace, negative attitudes may emerge. Another aspect that Margot mentioned regarding social interaction is well summarized with the question: “*What is the purpose of determination and motivation in finishing something if no one is around?*” She explained the concept well

with a yoga metaphor where having an audience becomes the source of one's motivation. She said:

*It's like going to the yoga studio versus doing yoga at home. When I'm surrounded by 15 other people, I'm more likely to hold that plank for a few extra seconds, right? Because this person next to me is doing it for pretty long. As if I'm doing it at home, no one's watching me, I can cheat. It's the same thing. It's like you just have to really hold yourself accountable. You have to have a really strong will and determination to not fall prey to drops in motivation.*

She clarified later it is not always about control from superiors, but also about the motivation coming from co-workers in the workplace.

To conclude and express how lack of motivation influenced our respondents, Carolina's thought is significant. She elaborated on this topic:

*From this period, I think that mainly I noticed how motivation changes. It's not only about working remotely but also about the length of it, the time. This is the fourth week of being home for me. Now, in this situation, you really understand if you like what you do. I am not so motivated not only because I don't have a specific project and people to do it with, but also because I can't take care of customers because there are no customers right now.*

Customer interaction can also offer some employees motivation in the workspace. Working with or helping customers on a daily basis is often rewarding to some employees. Perhaps this very aspect of the role could have been a driving factor in applying for the position at the time Carolina did, and now that is no longer available to motivate her. As we have seen, our respondents' motivations were impacted to varying degrees due to the lack of socialization and colleague accountability. In the following subsection, we explore how being home to work can influence efficiency in similar ways.

### **4.2.3 Decreased Motivation Leading to Decreased Efficiency**

From a lack of motivation, a lack of efficiency may also emerge. In such a long-term situation, especially where remote work was the only option offered, productivity may be compromised. Mila offered an example of how her highly productive nature and strong work were confronted by the challenge of a new work environment.

*After one week, I was feeling like, 'Wow, I'm the worst person, I don't deliver as before, I am not as productive', but then you check on people and they are like, 'I'm exactly the same'. And then even your manager is like, 'Yeah, I was at home for three days and it was very difficult to understand this new way of working' [...] But sometimes it gets frustrating.*

Rachel was also adapting to the slower pace of the workload. She mentioned:

*I am just adjusting to waiting for others to respond and things like that. [...] So yes, the only thing that has really changed is the slow down because no one can't purchase things; but the manager knows that time is restricted and vendors aren't responding, so we can't go and do things.*

She insinuates here how perhaps she could have been more productive under normal circumstances, but now she finds herself wasting time by waiting for others to get back to her on things. The lack of efficiency came not only from the physical adjustment of the new workplace, but also to the changes in work pace, time management, and the lack of social interaction. Personal preferences and flexibility may predispose motivation and productivity. Rachel, for example, experienced a drastic shift in her feelings of productivity being home, as she simply did not have much work to do because of a lack of resources. This led to feelings of stress, which she explained:

*I'm not so busy and that's part of my panic. I'm not being productive, and I need to be, but I don't have all the resources and I just don't have the work. So that's been hard.*

She seemed to think that this slow time would lead to more work later, saying that she needed to be productive during this time. These shifts in efficiency were experienced by many during this time, perhaps because their particular roles just were not suited for a remote setting. This idea of preparedness will be explored in the following subsection.

#### **4.2.4 My Organization Wasn't Ready**

As we have seen, it is already a complex shift to adjust to working from home for an individual. On that note, when the organization's preparedness for remote work is not adequate, the situation becomes even more challenging. With the lack of office resources and technology assistance, working from home might seem daunting. The following examples of struggles show how even the small details of the workspace (i.e. desk, office chair, and storage) prove to be very important to individual employees. Carolina expressed her concerns:

*I found myself working from home without proper tools for doing that. I don't have a double screen and don't have my mouse.*

We can infer that tools like extra monitors and external mice can make employees' work easier, and when they don't have these tools, they notice the difference. Rachel also expressed her dependency on having proper equipment. She told us she had to purchase some things herself in order to make working remotely more comfortable, as the City Government did not provide these resources. She explained:

*I bought an office chair and that helped me. I tried for about three days not to have that, but I realized 'I can't do this, I'm actually falling asleep. This is not okay'*

We see, again, how the little things can make a huge impact on work satisfaction and ability. Unpreparedness, due to the pandemic crisis, placed a real burden on leadership. The key here may be just that: considering the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, leadership roles may have taken a big hit and did not have time to prepare for such a drastic shift in work style. Companies not offering work from home opportunities previously, now had to scramble to initiate a smooth transition for employees and reexamine possible changes in company policy. If not for the crisis, remote working may have looked quite different from the respondents. For some it may simply be new, as Lucia noted:

*Even if Lightottix is a big company, international and famous or popular, the company introduced smart working just a few months ago.*

She seemed to be a bit surprised, that even though her company is quite large and developed to modern global standards, they still struggled to make this transition seamless, as the concept of remote working was fairly new to them. For others, a lack of basic resources created real problems. Rachel found this to be a particularly limiting factor:

*We are 400 employees, but we only have 50 licenses for the computers, so they declared 50 people essential (meaning they would continue working during the crisis). We're still not completely digital. There's some paperwork that I have in the office, but I don't feel too comfortable bringing some of that home because it is a public record.*

At this point, disappointment was audible in her voice as she continued:

*The IT department just wasn't prepared for this. This is not something that we were used to, but it is 2020; we should be going towards this, we should have gone digital five years ago, 10 years ago, but we have not. It's kind of forcing them to change really quickly.*

She illustrated how if the company would have been more digital before the pandemic, this transition would not have been so difficult. We can see this also if we compare Rachel's situation to Robert's, for example, whose organization made sure to take the time to prepare before sending employees home. He explained a delay in initiating remote work at the university:

*I don't think there was pushback from the [university], I just think it took a few weeks for everybody to figure out 'How are we going to do this?' Before we send everybody home, let's make sure that we know that we have a plan in place for what this is going to look like.*

Perhaps if more had been able to take this time to consider the needs of their employees in transitioning to a home office, the switch to remote working would not have been as difficult for some. While this is considered a potential limitation to our study, as we will discuss in Chapter 6, we can see how the different levels of preparedness could have affected the outcome of the transition for our respondents. Their work situations varied in numerous ways. Work environments, backgrounds, organization types, skills, and job descriptions complicate the overall picture. That said, a common issue noted was the transition from an office to a remote workplace without the proper preparation and support needed for a smooth operation.

In summary, we see how overall, the transition to working from home for the respondents proved to be challenging, especially as the weeks passed. Boundary setting, motivation, efficiency were impacted by this change in work style, and the organizations preparation or lack thereof only contributed to the effects. In the following section, we will go back to perhaps

a more positive picture, by illustrating the creativity our respondents showed in their attempts to recreate the in-office experience. However, those attempts may not have proven to be totally successful.

### **4.3 Recreating and Compensating for Missed Social Interactions**

To close this chapter, we present a final and significant set of findings. In our conversations with the interviewees, a sense of creativity became apparent as individuals attempted to fill the void that many were experiencing by not being physically present in the office, and further, not physically present anywhere but in the confines of their own homes. Though sometimes subtle, these attempts were in and of themselves interesting and noteworthy, as the employees coped with the situation they faced where working and virtual interactions are the extent of social interaction they receive. As mentioned, our interviewees were millennial age, almost exclusively single, young professionals living with a partner or alone. As they generally enjoy going to spend time with friends, having drinks, being outside, and leading fairly social lives, this quarantine period put them in quite a different setting. In this final presentation of findings, we see how they discovered new ways to make working from home more enjoyable and social.

#### ***4.3.1 Checking in, Getting Personal***

One thing we noticed in several conversations with the interviewees was the mentioning of the time taken to check in with colleagues and bosses personally. This may seem like something normal and insignificant, but, as we will elaborate on in the following chapter, virtual interactions can sometimes feel transactional. For these employees, finding ways to reach out and get personal with their colleagues was important during this time of limited social contact. Eric stated this:

*We have a lot of meetings. So, there's a constant back and forth of what's getting done. One thing that hasn't changed, but I think it is maybe more important now than it was before, are the weekly staff meetings [...] It's been a lot of 'How are things going?, How are you coping with this?' a little bit of general chat for probably half of that call, and then the rest is 'Okay, what do you need me for?, What do you need help with?' Whereas the staff meetings [before], were sort of a roundtable of 'What is everybody working*

*on? What did you do this week?' [...] But I do think it has become more important now.*

Here we see that teams are spending a significant amount of time devoted to checking in with one another. Eric emphasizes the importance of this in his comment, saying that it has become even more critical now than before the quarantine situation. Alison also discussed how these check-ins and ‘*how are you’s*’ are happening frequently, and she appreciates them because ‘*[she] can see [her] colleagues*’. She continued:

*We write to each other the whole day, like chatting, but then when we finally see each other [...] we are alive! I think it's nice, and also that we share the experience of staying home.*

For Alison, going beyond working conversations is important, and she values the more personal connection she gets from a non-work-related call. She uses the words “*we are alive!*” and “*share the experience*” to illustrate how this is an experience that is bringing her co-workers “together”, in a sense, and it is important to build a personal connection around this. Alison also told us about her company’s chat tool, Slack, and how they have created groups in Slack related to different personal interests, like a group for cat-lovers. Employees at TravelEasy are finding ways to connect on a deeper level than just shared work experiences. Rachel also mentioned how these personal connections are helping her cope with the unusual situations she finds herself in:

*I have one other co-worker in my department, we talk every day. So that's kind of been good. We've also been able to have personal conversations and that's helped to keep me kind of sane; knowing that she's in the same boat as I am.*

Rachel goes so far as to say these personal conversations are keeping her “*sane*”, an indication that this situation and lack of social interaction is taking quite a toll on her mental health. She seems to look forward to these conversations as a way to seek out these relationships that she misses.

#### ***4.3.2 Managing Expectations and Adjusting Routines***

Many interviewees found themselves managing their own expectations of working from home in order to more easily navigate and make sense of their feelings. An aspect of this expectation

management manifested through adjusting routines to better suit the employee's new working situation was evident in Mila's conversation:

*Now I'm trying to say this message because two hours ago, I was a little bit frustrated. It's more like you have to adapt yourself and, and you will learn that you can work in a different way.*

She indicates here that she had to manage and set realistic expectations of herself and what her work would look like during this period of working from home. This also seemed to be a constant struggle for her, as she alluded to just having negative feelings about her output a few hours before. New remote workers must adapt themselves and see their potential to work in a new way. Robert goes further in saying that it is about changing the entire mentality about what the future of working and workspaces looks like. For him, more flexible and non-traditional schedules are something we should get used to. He explained:

*What makes an office day, or a workday [is changing]. It's just less significant that it be done in, quote unquote, business hours. That's probably my big takeaway that I've heard that we're seeing from people who don't work from home on a regular basis.*

He went on to describe how expectations should be managed around working hours while working remotely. He emphasized how, depending on individual circumstances, working at home will undoubtedly require an adjustment to working schedules. Robert explained what this might look like, hypothetically:

*If we [have] kids at home, I work really early in the morning and really late at night and stay with the kids in the middle of the day. Or, I'm working during their nap time or work after dinnertime, it doesn't matter. As long as the job is still being accomplished.*

This idea of adjusting one's schedule to their new reality was a common topic of conversation during our interviews. Eric also described his new normal:

*I'm extremely extroverted. So, I'm lucky that I have my wife and my dogs, that helps, I realize that, but [...] I've got to get out. I mean, I've been getting out and running or walking or doing something pretty much every single day that I can.*

For him, and for others, the quarantine is a nightmare as he is a very social person, and the lack of that interaction requires him to adjust his remote working schedule to give himself breaks from sitting at the computer, much like one would need when going for a coffee or for a walk around the building with a co-worker in the office. These small adjustments and additions to a daily routine are a way our interviewees coped and adjusted to their new work realities.

### ***4.3.3 The Importance of Transparent Communication***

The importance of communication during the pandemic was emphasized in each conversation we had with interviewees. Creative and non-traditional ways of conversing have been used in order to circumvent the lack of person to person communication our interviewees have faced while working remotely. For example, at Snake Bite Tequila, Adrian's co-workers have had to adjust to a new communication system called Blue Jeans, in order for employees to mimic face-to-face conversations as much as possible. He explained:

*We've been trying to utilize Blue Jeans, which is a video conferencing system similar to Zoom. We've been doing that for team meetings, for individual meetings, encouraging people to use video whenever possible to kind of emulate the in-person experience so you can see someone, you're not just on a conference call on the phone.*

Many of our interviewees, like Adrian, stressed the importance of emulating in-person communication, as they felt it was more valuable in most circumstances. For some employees like Mila, it has become necessary to develop creative ways to ensure clear messaging to other colleagues. Mila's job required her to be in the EasyPak facility at some points during quarantine, as she performs research and development tests on new products. She explained how this creates a bit of stress for her as she has to communicate exactly what she has done to ensure that the next person who comes in to continue the test will do so with consistency. She described it this way:

*I'm not allowed to go to the lab if someone is there. [The company is] really restricting people; everything goes by email and by phone. For example, last Thursday, I had to do a test. So, I put all my samples in a table which is outside of the lab and then I called the person that was the one taking the samples. And I [said], 'Okay, you will see that these numbers go with these samples.' If it was face-to-face, it's really quick, like 'Yeah, do this, take this*

*piece and do that.' Now it's more about a really good setup, putting a lot of labels: labelling and double checking all the time that the person performing the test is on the same page as you are. Then you have to really find a balance of trusting these people; they are really good at what they do, but you are not there, you really have to align the test. I think that's challenging and that takes time. If you are planning on doing a test and before it was one hour, now maybe it's three emails, plus one clarity call. So, it's different steps.*

We see here how Mila has had to be innovative with labelling and triple checking how she leaves information for the next person to continue testing. She admitted that this adds some stress to her work, as she is not always sure that the person will interpret her notes correctly. Sometimes this stress leads to conflict, which Eric told us has been another area in which transparent communication has become critical to conflict resolution. He explained how he had to deal with a situation after switching to remote working:

*I had to do what I would consider damage control, where there was a bunch of kind of vigorous chatting, going back and forth. And I [thought], 'man, this is starting to get heated. I needed to bring this back, because it's going to affect the work we have coming up,' and there was a lot of it [...] I knew that one person needed to just be heard and kind of understand that we were going to help [them] through this, but that we understood that this isn't exactly the way [they] would want to do it [...] [I said] 'We're not connecting on this message, let's get on a video call.'*

He mentioned how in the absence physical contact, it is easier for conflict to escalate to a level which requires intervention. In his own words:

*I think you get to that boiling point a lot faster than you would in person. Because there's something about being in front of somebody where you say, 'I'm not going to say that' or 'I'm not going to look that way', because it's unprofessional. And when you're behind a chat board more than you normally are, all day long, all week long, it's a little bit easier to get there really fast.*

He indicates here that sometimes intervention is necessary to avoid a more extreme conflict from happening due to the ease of hiding behind a chat board. We see that it became necessary

to utilize technology to emulate a face-to-face conversation to clear up confusion and resolve issues. As a final note, we would like to mention how this communication was not always explicit or verbal. Robert communicated through modelling behavior of how his team could maintain motivation with a mentality to keep going despite the unusual circumstances. As we have seen, the situation can be very unstable and can depend on many factors, therefore when working from home it is important that everyone, as Robert said, finds and learns their own ways of motivating themselves. He also told us his own way:

*I've been in this 'lead by example' mentality for a few years. I'm motivated to do my job well, so that other people can sort of see what the expectations are.*

He indicated to us that if he does his job well, keeps his motivation and spirits up, his remote team will be able to feel that energy and in turn, find their own motivation for working, even when they are not in their normal working comfort zones.

#### ***4.3.4 Being Positive and Finding Humor in an Uncomfortable Situation***

Another way the interviewees seemed to adapt was to maintain a positive attitude and seek out ways to add humor or joy in their new “workspaces.” This was manifested in various ways, but it was first brought to our attention when we conducted our interview with Eric. When we opened the video to start our Zoom call, we immediately smiled and laughed, as Eric opened up his camera and had a funny Zoom background of the popular Netflix show, *Tiger King* (Gajanan, 2020), behind him. He quickly apologized and said he does that sometimes to make his daily meetings more interesting and fun. This was something we found interesting and noteworthy, and it happened again when we spoke with Robert. The element of surprise here added a bit of joy to the beginning of the interview, and it is understandable how when meetings seem mundane and lonely, people enjoy an element of humor and surprise to cheer them up during this remote working period. For Adrian, positivity is demonstrated in a different way at Snake Bite Tequila. He mentioned the lack of social interaction in the office as being something he missed, but that his organization tried to create those interactions virtually, as many others are also doing now. He explained:

*When you're in office, you have opportunities for more 'How was your weekend' or just more informal casual conversation, so that definitely doesn't happen. Like for someone's birthday we go out on the patio and have*

*a toast. So those kinds of team bonding or small moments where you feel more connected to your co-workers [don't happen]. We're trying to be creative with how to replicate that. We've done a couple of birthday toasts on Zoom or on Blue Jeans, where everyone has a drink and we sing Happy Birthday.*

Here we see that birthdays are something special to celebrate at Snake Bite Tequila, and since they cannot be celebrated in the usual way, they attempt to recreate those moments for their employees in a virtual setting. Beyond birthday celebrations, other teams are implementing virtual coffee breaks, breakfasts, and happy hours to give colleagues the chance to talk in a more social context. Mila expressed her excitement for one they would have later that day:

*Today for example, we set up a coffee break. We are going to meet with a coffee you know, like, 'How are you guys?' to make, let's say, the quick talks and small talks something that can be done even remotely.*

Margot shared two similar examples:

*The head of HR at the office, she has instituted these daily HR breakfast meetings. So, from 8.30 to about 8.50, we just sign on and we just chit chat and [see] how everyone is doing. 'What's going on today?', 'Anything interesting?' and 'What are you working on?' or it can [even] be, 'How was your weekend?'*

She went on to explain how another manager had set up a virtual game night:

*Because of the Covid-19 situation, a manager put on the schedule a weekly trivia night / happy hour thing. So, yeah, we get on once a week for about 45 minutes and one person from the team is charged with preparing a trivia quiz.*

Her use of the word “charged” here is interesting to us, as it makes this seem like more of a chore. We will discuss this more in the following section. From what we can see, teams are getting creative with the types of events they host in an attempt to compensate for the missed social activities that usually occur in an office setting.

For others, maintaining positivity among teams has manifested in other ways. Robert mentioned individual recognitions as something his team is trying. He described how employee recognition takes place in weekly staff meetings:

*Maybe [recognition is] something we kind of take for granted, but it's something that people really desire [...] wanting to know that what you're doing is both valued and appreciated, and that you're doing things well. So, we have 'shout outs' that we do [...] Anytime somebody gets some sort of award, whether it's from an external organization or internal [...] we try to recognize that, even with something done outside of our office. Then anything in particular we may have noticed from the week before, [like if] somebody stepped up to help somebody else.*

He also emphasized the importance of taking time out of meetings to recognize people in this situation, and not falling into the easy trap of just sending another email. He went on to describe the more significant impact of these shout outs when done in person, or in this case, via videoconference:

*I think there's an emotional connection. You see reactions of people, they're all on mute, but people are still clapping or giving a thumbs up[...] They just really value and know that even though I'm isolated, I'm working from home, and I'm not around people, that what I do matters and people are recognizing that what I'm doing is impactful.*

This can be seen as a way to spread positivity during a time when many seem to seek social connection and miss the more personal aspects of being in an office. Others have simply found ways to view the situation in a more positive light individually. Just as colleagues can be very helpful in motivating someone, they can also be a huge source of unproductiveness: interrupting others, even when not necessary. Lucia found herself in such a case and her new way of being efficient is working without being stopped for every little question:

*I feel really good when I work at home. Because I have more time to work without anyone interrupting me.*

A very similar take away was mentioned by Mila who said:

*I mean, maybe one takeaway is that you can be more efficient in the way that you don't have Fika (coffee breaks) every five seconds.*

They have interpreted this aspect of working from home to be a positive one, helping them see the bigger picture through a positive lens. This mentality shift to viewing things more positively and trying to radiate that to others was a common theme. Eric's director does this well also, as he explained that on each director call with the organization, he asks for the team

to “give [him] some good news” in an attempt to help his team see the bigger, perhaps more optimistic, picture.

#### ***4.3.5 But ... Do These New Ways of Social Interaction Actually Work?***

Although there have been many attempts during this time to maintain positivity and develop new ways to fill the social gaps people are feeling, some of the feedback we received leads us to question whether those attempts are actually working as intended. If we think back to Margot’s use of the word “*charged*” in the context of setting up what is supposed to be a fun team event, we can see how perhaps, there is an aspect of these virtual events that feels like simply more work. As a reminder, Margot said:

*Because of the Covid-19 situation, a manager put on the schedule a weekly trivia night / happy hour thing. So, yeah, we get on once a week for about 45 minutes and one person from the team is charged with preparing a trivia quiz.*

The word “*charged*” may indicate that setting up the team happy hour is not so fun, but more of an extra task one has to complete as an extension of their working day. Adrian also revealed something similar when talking about Snake Bite Tequila’s virtual birthday celebrations:

*I think some of those things are fine, and we're still trying to figure out the best way to do that and the frequency - not doing it for every single person's birthday, but do we do it on a weekly or monthly basis? What makes the most sense? What do people actually feel excited and connected about? But those (social events) things are definitely missed when being remote.*

It becomes clear that companies are putting in the effort to evaluate what their employees need during this time and what makes them feel more comfortable and connected in this situation, while ensuring these activities are still enjoyable without becoming too much. He illustrates the idea that there may be a balance between providing social interactions just for the sake of continuing normalcy as much as possible, and those same interactions becoming a chore. He continued:

*It was hard to schedule the meetings as well. One of the birthday chats happened at 7pm Eastern time, because it was 5pm in Mexico. That was one I didn't join, because I was like, ‘I don't want to do this right now.’*

We can see that this particular birthday celebration extended past his normal working hours. In this case, he was not so keen to participate. Perhaps these social activities lose their appeal when they are not seen as an opportunity to get up from the desk and do something different when employees are in an office for eight hours a day. Lucia also hinted at this:

*Of course, my director always brings food to the desk. So, we are full of candies or chocolates, or even sometimes croissants in the morning. So, this is a really nice start of the day instead of being at home and drinking your coffee by yourself.*

We see that the actual act of drinking the coffee here is not what is appealing, but rather enjoying the coffee or pastry with colleagues in the office setting that makes this event more fun. She went on:

*You don't have any time to ask about the personal life of your colleagues. Instead of going to the office every day and asking 'How are you? How was your evening yesterday', or 'Tell me more about your son, or your boyfriend' [...] These days I feel that everyone is super concentrated on the professional task and just ask, 'Okay, how are you? I hope you're fine and you are okay' but there is not a real connection. I miss it a bit.*

Here we understand that despite the attempts by organizations to implement social activities, there is something about being in the office that cannot quite be replicated virtually. It could be that these measures just seem somewhat unnatural or forced. Mila made this a point to mention:

*My team is quite a big [one]. So, it's good when you are on site and you are at a table, one can add a spontaneous comment [...] I think that the bandwidth is really saturated. So, it's not that you can say, 'Ah yeah, I know this!' You have to unmute, [or] you'd have to raise your hand or whatever. So, it's not as smooth as before.*

She seems to think that the spontaneity is important here in making these conversations and interactions natural and smooth. This problem of unmuting and interjecting in Zoom calls was also raised by several others. Overall, our respondents felt that there was still something lacking in regard to social interactions while working remotely. Margot summed it up nicely:

*I definitely underestimated the value of social interaction for your mental health. I would consider myself an extrovert. So, I thrive off of being around*

*other humans and just having a conversation and getting that interaction in. So, you start to realize after a few weeks of not having that, you really crave that.*

For many of our respondents who considered themselves to be very social by nature, this time proved to be a challenging one for them mentally and emotionally. Despite attempts from their organizations to compensate for this lack due to social isolation, something was not quite right. Though no one had the perfect solution, as this is new for everyone, we can confidently say that while our interviewees seemed to appreciate the attempts, they did not completely fill the void they were experiencing.

## **Chapter Summary**

Throughout this chapter, we have presented the most notable findings and organized them in a way which aims to help our readers get a holistic picture of what our respondents were facing during this period of working from home. Our interviewees had developed an understanding of remote working, which allowed them to see it as more of a possibility in the future. We would like to highlight that trust did not seem to be a significant challenge; while it was a frequent topic of conversation (because we asked about it) our respondents did not find it to be much of a difficulty during this period of remote working. This finding is something we unfold further in the next chapter. While employees saw the possibility of remote working, most are also now hyper aware of the challenges that this might present on a more long-term basis. Our findings about the decrease in motivation and productivity while working remote were a surprise; contrary to what we gathered from our literature review, they appeared to be challenges when being away from the office for so long. Finally, we laid out the findings around social interactions in a broader sense, questioning if those connections organizations built actually functioned as intended. While appreciated, they did not appear to be entirely effective. The following chapter considers our most significant findings and crafts a dialogue between the existing literature we outlined in Chapter 2 and those empirical findings.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

---

The empirical findings presented in the previous chapter answer our research questions illustrating what working from home looks like to employees during the pandemic. In this chapter, we present a discussion between the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2 and our most significant empirical findings, in order to clarify how our findings contribute and fill the gaps in literature. As we discussed in Chapter 2, the topic of trust is heavily researched in the virtual context. Trust is emphasized as being a crucial success factor in remote working (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Handy, 1995; Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). Interestingly, we found that trust appeared to be a non-issue among respondents. Because of this, we introduce a new form of trust which we call *carryover trust*. What we instead found to take more of a center stage in our discussions was the mentality shift around remote work, the need for social interaction during this global crisis and the creative ways our respondents attempted to fill that void, as well as how motivation was negatively affected through this forced work-from-home experience. The following discussion elaborates on these findings, finally questioning the success of these attempts at social interaction.

### 5.1 Introducing a New Form of Trust: Carryover Trust

We begin by elaborating on our impression of the style of trust our respondents experienced while moving to a work from home setting, emphasizing how it differs from the explanations and emphasis of trust in remote working contexts presented in existing literature. As we described in the previous chapter, we found that trust was a quality that had to be assumed and so was granted in this transition to remote working because organizations did not have an option. Trust is not an issue in this setting because there is no other option but to work remote, and since no one is in the office, being in the same working circumstance brought more awareness and less skepticism that those at home are doing something else apart from working. This could be seen as a form of *swift trust*, which becomes relevant in temporary teams (Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996). Those teams are composed of employees who have been assigned a project or task with a clear end date, have new tasks to accomplish that may not be related to their usual ones, and who are working with new teammates (Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996). By contrast, the current pandemic situation does not place our participants' teams neatly into this category for three main reasons. In the pandemic context, there is no

known end date, typically employees had to continue doing the same tasks in a new location, and most of our respondents have a history of working with their current colleagues (Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996). That said, there is an aspect of this pandemic time period that is nonroutine and nontraditional, which *is* a characteristic of temporary teams (Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996). So, we can say that our respondents' teams met some of the qualifications of temporary teams, but not all. Because of this, the trust they experienced doesn't fit precisely into an existing form, thus, we prefer to categorize this trust as *carryover trust*.

It is our impression that the trust organizations had in their employees carried over from previous working environments, in a time we can call the pre-pandemic. This *carryover trust* embodies elements of *categorical trust* (Brewer, 1981), as our interviewees were all previous members of their current organization pre-pandemic. Membership in the ingroup - in this case the prior workplace - can initiate an automatically assigned trust, regardless of whether or not the trustor knows the trustee personally (Brewer, 1981). While we acknowledge that the type of trust that our interviewees experienced from their managers and organizations is related to other styles - like swift or categorical trust - it does not quite fit any one of them, because there were no notable changes before and after the transition. We introduce this idea of *carryover trust*, not because the theme of trust took the front stage in our study, but rather the opposite. We can say that because of *carryover trust*, the whole concept of trust seemed to go unnoticed by our respondents, as there were no notable changes in the way trust was perceived or given in the transition to remote working.

This notion we got from the respondents' conversations about trust being a non-issue in the context of transitioning to working remotely is quite an interesting and different idea versus what the literature we explored expresses. Trust is a crucial factor to the success of remote workers (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Handy, 1995), but despite trust being hard to develop in normal remote working conditions (Short, 2014), our respondents did not perceive nor mention that. This finding is more in line with Gallivan's (2001) findings that trust might not be on the forefront of individuals' minds, but his research emphasizes more the impact control has on remote working teams. This was also not the case in our respondents' situations. While they indicated and acknowledged that they needed to be trusted in order to do their work from home, it is our impression that there were no extra controls or protocols put into place to specifically compensate for a change in trust. Perhaps this is because there was no time or

resources to prepare a before and after evaluation. For this reason, we believe the concept of *carryover trust* explains what we observed taking place during this global pandemic as many companies instructed their employees to work remotely. Organizations had no option but to trust their employees, therefore the employees did not feel or take on any added stress in needing to prove their trustworthiness.

## **5.2 A More Respected Remote Worker**

Moving on, we discuss what we did find to take more presence in our study: the newfound respect our respondents experienced through this period from both the organization as a separate entity and in themselves as a part of the organization. Our interviewees emphasized that now having experienced working remotely, they developed a new appreciation for other remote workers. However, we would like to emphasize that this respect and understanding seemed to come from the organization as a whole, leaders and employees alike. Through our conversations, we learned that our respondents were able to dismiss the stereotypes of working from home as an opportunity to lounge around and wiggle the mouse as to appear to be “busy”. Eric alluded to this directly when he discussed how this experience made him more aware of his wife’s struggles in working from home, and in turn develop a new understanding and consideration for his co-workers on conferences and video calls. It seems to us that Eric and the majority of the other respondents, when the time comes, will now make more of an effort to accommodate those members of their teams who are remote because of what they learned through this experience.

It is also our impression that the organization as a whole, through the new lens provided by this pandemic, developed a more profound appreciation for the work remote employees do and the challenges they might face on a daily basis. Robert, for example, provided many stories of how his organization admitted to neglecting the remote team pre-pandemic, emphasizing how this new awareness would benefit his remote team in the future. Others showed optimism that their organizations might be more open to considering remote work options as a long-term possibility, having had this time to disprove stereotypes and preconceived notions. A quick search in any internet search engine yields numerous results highlighting the stereotypes surrounding remote workers: their typical profile of being young working mothers, their ability and desire to work in pajamas, lack of productivity, and exposure to constant distractions just to name a few (Crossan & Burton, 1993; Yeates, 2019; Clime, 2019; Chekin, 2018; Hering,

2018). These stereotypes may be rooted in fear of potential loss of organizational control (Gerke, 2006; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Crossan & Burton, 1993). More likely, from our impressions, they come from a simple misunderstanding and lack of experience in virtual leadership (Schmidt, 2018; Gerke, 2006).

Without the knowledge of how these stereotypes originated, a core finding of our study is that they were, at least in some way, diluted through the experience of widespread remote work. This finding has noteworthy practical applications related to team dynamics and organizational identity. For example, Webster and Wong (2008) caution against the mixing of virtual and non-virtual employees in teams, as this could lead to tensions among members and weaken team identity. However, we argue that after this pandemic period passes, this may not be the case, as team members will have developed a deeper understanding of and respect for their remote colleagues. Through the development of the theoretical background chapter, we have seen how identity is especially important when the teams are geographically dispersed (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 1999), which includes all the virtual teams that have been created in the past months during the pandemic. We want to remind the reader that identity is defined as “the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he/she believes define the organization” (Dukerich and Harquail, 1994, p. 239). In other words, employees should then be able to identify themselves closely with the rest of the team and the organization in general if they do feel this sense of organizational identity. In our findings, we noticed that perhaps this newfound respect has in some ways contributed to a deeper sense of organizational identification or belonging (Belle, Burley & Long, 2015). For example, Eric mentioned how now he feels the respect and connection with those who normally work remotely. We argue that perhaps this helps him identify with them on a deeper level, as he is now in a remote position himself. If the overall mentality of remote work is a more positive one through this experience, it may be easier to create a sense of belonging among teams that include remote workers, and this should improve the overall sense of organizational belonging and identification as tensions may have been eased. Many of our respondents expressed hope that organizations as a whole would be more open and flexible to remote working as a choice for employees, leading us to believe that mixed teams may in fact be more successful in the future (Webster & Wong, 2008).

### **5.3 Attempting to Connect with the Rest of the Organization**

Finally, perhaps our most significant finding relates to social interactions among remote workers and their organizations. While some studies analyze the effect remote work has on relationships among team members (Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Solomon, 2001; Gerke, 2006), none are adequately developed around social interactions specifically. Existing literature scratches the surface of the effects on relationships, mostly listing this as a challenge managers should pay attention to when implementing teleworking options in their organizations (Gerke, 2006; Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Kurland and Cooper's (2001) study around manager control and employee isolation explores the effects these themes have on professional identity but focuses mainly on professional development and recognition. What these studies do not explore so much is the need individuals have to feel connected to co-workers in a more social way, especially when these employees are accustomed to that interaction in the form of casual office chats or celebrations. Some journalists have begun to have conversations around this topic because of its current societal relevance and are finding that the decrease in social outlets available during this pandemic is affecting the mental health of many new remote workers (Semuels, 2020a). However, the topic lacks academic research. We argue that our study opens this topic up to more discussion, calling for further research in this camp. Our findings contribute by beginning to understand the importance of social interactions among colleagues in a remote setting, while emphasizing the balance between forced interactions and those that feel more natural and genuine.

During this time, individuals found themselves rather isolated both in their personal and working social life. The most significant impact we noticed this having on respondents' experiences working remotely was in their motivation for work in general. They expressed how the long-term plan of remote working decreased their motivation because the social interactions were missing for so long. This reinforces what Lautsch, Kossek and Eaton (2009) found to be true: that workplace relationships affect the dynamics of a team and are key in creating a supportive working environment. This may explain why our respondents and their organizations are striving to find that social piece. Take Margot, for example: her motivation comes from the energy she gets from being around her co-workers, as she is a self-proclaimed extrovert. Many of our respondents felt the same, and they seemed to become demotivated because of this lack of social workplace interactions. This is contradictory to what literature

has generally presented: motivation and productivity typically increase when working from home (Harker & MacDonnell, 2012). Perhaps this is because our respondents did not necessarily choose to work remotely in this circumstance (Belle, Burley & Long, 2015). In any case, as these connections and social interactions are rather important to work success (Semuels, 2020b; Kurland & Bailey, 1999), we can see why organizations rushed to find a solution by implementing new virtual events to emulate the in-office experience. The virtual coffee meetups, breakfast talks, happy hours and birthday celebrations gave colleagues a reason to talk about something other than work. They felt a need to connect with colleagues beyond the transactional nature of the interactions taking place for work specific tasks, a notion Handy (1995) mentions. However, these attempts may not suffice.

Though helpful, these tools do not exactly give employees the full experience of the workplace social interactions they have been accustomed to before the pandemic. To provide a visual, it is like looking into a two-way mirror: it is apparent that there is movement on the other side, but it is difficult to make out exactly what is happening on the other side. Metaphorically, individuals know the organization is out there, but they cannot fully connect with it. It is our impression that while our respondents generally appreciated the intent behind these social interactions, as soon as the event was over, suddenly the feelings of isolation returned, and the energy was just not the same as in the office. To use the two-way mirror metaphor again, this is similar to the moment when you briefly see an image moving on the other side, then you lose it, and you have to move around or focus really intently to catch it again. This point about isolation is very interesting as usually employees decide to work from home to have a break from the office or to temporarily attend to matters at home, but under a pandemic circumstance, the choice was not given. We noticed that then there is a need for socialization, which resulted in our respondents looking for re-connection with other colleagues. Despite the attempts at communication and social interaction through virtual meetings, it is difficult to emulate those in-person interactions (Handy, 1995). We gathered that our respondents missed the genuine spontaneity of interactions in the office; like Mila pointed out, things get lost or missed when communication is not in person and the connections are not so natural. This leads us to question the necessity for organizations to try to force these interactions which might not happen in the same way in-person. For example, Adrian discussed finding a balance of what is actually enjoyable for employees and what is just turning something meant to be fun into a chore. This could even be seen as an attempt at normative control to influence and encourage employees

to maintain their identities with the organization despite these uncertain times (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Looking at it this way, we can see how Adrian's decision to skip the birthday celebration (as it took place outside of his "work from home" hours) and Margot's use of the word "charged" (to describe the "opportunity" the organization provided to do something social) could be considered forms of employee resistance to normative control (Collinson, 2003). For these reasons, if these interactions do not feel natural, we argue it makes more sense to just skip them. Instead, organizations should accept the notion of remote working simply being a completely different style of working.

## **5.4 Should Remote Working Become the Standard?**

It should be re-emphasized that this pandemic allowed individuals in organizations to better understand what it means to be a remote worker. As a matter of fact, we gathered from our interviews that none of the respondents would be comfortable making judgements about how easy it is to work from home now, after having this experience. They all seemed to learn through this experience that working from home does not necessarily lead to more time and less stress as they previously thought it might (Wheatley, 2012). None escaped the daily challenges like technical problems, effective communication struggles, and lack of in-person socialization. Nonetheless, most found their way through this troubling and challenging time by leaning on their creativity and flexibility to attempt to connect with co-workers. Some realized they were more predisposed to work remotely, enjoying the flexibility it granted. Others learned that remote work is not something they would like to do long term and were anxiously awaiting a return to the office.

This notion that remote work is not for everyone is not new. As we discussed in Chapter 2, identity is a contributing factor to job satisfaction and desire to work outside of an office setting (Tietze & Musson, 2010; Mattarelli et al. 2017; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Schmidt, 2018). Perhaps what our respondents were experiencing was an identity misalignment versus an identity more appropriate for remote work (Mattarelli et al. 2017). We agree with Thatcher and Zhu (2006) that organizational identity, and further, belonging (Belle, Burley & Long, 2015) are affected when individuals are not given the opportunity to choose working from home. In our respondents' cases, this path was not chosen, neither by them as individuals nor by the organization; it was forced because of the circumstances. On one hand, this could have effects on the extent to which they identify with the organization as a whole

(Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). On the other hand, this could give them new lived experiences to connect through, building new and more deeply connected identities. After all, in our respondents' cases, the whole organization was in this shift towards a virtual workplace together as teams were not mixed - virtual and nonvirtual - during this time, which could have led to a stronger identification to the team and sense of belonging (Webster & Wong, 2008). In any case, these matters of identity lead us to question, along with many others, whether full-time remote working *should* or *could* be adapted to suit everyone.

We can now better understand things that are not so clear regarding working from home. Connections are missed and identities are blurred, and although individuals have attempted to emulate the in-person office experience while working remotely, we can see that it is difficult and not so straightforward. The remote working model may not, and maybe should not, fit so nicely into the same box as office work. Perhaps organizations should not try to force employees into remote working, as it may negatively impact both individuals and the organization.

## **Chapter Summary**

Through our discussion, we formulated a conversation and dialogue between existing literature and our study's key findings. We have seen how this situation has provided different viewpoints on a perhaps previously misunderstood style of working. On one side, this pandemic has provided invaluable insights into the world of remote workers. Perhaps most relevant: how trust can be a non-issue when everyone is in the same remote working condition. For this reason, we found it necessary to introduce the concept of *carryover trust*, in which trust is not altered, but still remains an important part of team dynamics. The pandemic has definitely given organizations a front row seat to see what work looks like if the future moves in this direction, but on the other side, it brought to light widespread uncertainty for workers. Now, employees are not so sure if working from home is something they would like to continue long-term, despite preconceived notions and stereotypes which make it seem quite fun and relaxed. Due to the nature of our exploratory study, this discussion has led to many new questions such as: 'Is it possible to recreate in-person communication virtually?' and 'To what extent?'. In chapter 6, we reiterate how our study answers these and our research questions before coming to our conclusions and provide a detailed summary of our study.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

---

Through this exploratory research, we have aimed to understand how the novel coronavirus has impacted social relationships in organizations as they are forced to work remotely. Further, our goal was to contribute to the body of literature around remote working. This is what this chapter describes, together with explicitly answering our research questions. We summarize our empirical findings, offer our theoretical contributions, outline and acknowledge the limitations of our specific study, and indicate a basis for future research. Lastly, we discuss the practical implications of our findings.

## 6.1 Empirical Findings

In designing this exploratory study, we had the aim of answering two specific research questions. This section summarizes our findings which answer each of these questions. To refresh the readers' mind, our first question was:

- *In organizations which do not typically support telecommuting, how do employees experience social interactions while working remotely during a global pandemic?*

Our main finding which answers this question is that employees of organizations which do not typically support telecommuting experience a longing for social interaction when they are forced into a remote working situation. This global pandemic has created a deeper need for individuals to connect socially, and for many of our respondents, their work relationships served as a source of that social interaction they craved. Individuals have been taking advantage of work meetings to add some opportunities for personal connection. As social activities have been severely restricted, organizations had to get creative in the opportunities they provided, initiating virtual happy hours, breakfast meetups, and birthday celebrations. This gave employees the chance to feel more connected to the rest of the organization, as they understand one another's struggles during this time.

However, even though these opportunities were given, a common feeling was that it is hard to feel excited about an interaction when its re-creation is forced, meaning it does not usually happen in a normal office circumstance or it does not seem natural and enjoyable for

participants. We found employees enjoyed having a talk with the team they usually interact with, maintaining some moments for personal conversations beyond work. Contrarily, a company-wide Zoom call to wish Happy Birthday to someone in a different department of the company felt rather unmotivating. Respondents expressed, in fact, how some of these interactions just seemed out of place.

Our conclusion is that it is not impossible to recreate some similar office social interactions but finding a way of doing so that is positively accepted and genuinely appreciated by employees is difficult. Respondents expressed their doubts about organizations' success in recreating effective social interactions. Nonetheless, they continued searching for possible connections with their co-workers, demonstrating the necessity of working social interactions and experiencing them as one of the few, if not only, connections with the outside world during this time.

The second question we aimed to answer was:

- *As organizations are forced to work remotely during a global pandemic, how did the experience influence the mentality around remote working?*

We argue that among organizations which do not typically work remotely, the mentality around such working styles has shifted towards more openness and acceptance. We saw through our findings discussion how this pandemic has provided the opportunity for organizations to more broadly discover what it is actually like to work remotely. This has led to more empathy and consideration for more full-time remote workers. The preconceived notions around remote working have been somewhat dismantled, opening minds to the challenges remote workers face on a daily basis. The deeper understanding gives individuals in various levels of an organization reason to respect remote workers, where they may have previously thought of them as lazy or unmotivated employees.

Moreover, we have also seen a mentality shift, in the consideration to work from home on a more long-term basis. Overall, many of our respondents were ready to return to the office, as the novelty of working remotely had worn off after some time. Perhaps due to the stereotypes of remote workers, our respondents may have been quick to volunteer or sign up for remote

work opportunities. Now, however, they are more in tune to what it actually means to do so, and, for this reason, many would not choose this style of working over a traditional office setting. That said, we argue that a more realistic and considerate mentality around remote work has emerged from this situation.

## **6.2 Theoretical Contribution**

As we elaborated on in Chapter 2, there is ample research in the camp of remote work and the implications it has on organizations. More specifically, we discussed some major factors influencing the relationships among employees and organizations: trust, control, identity, motivation, and productivity. While these research fields are quite profound and developed, we argue that our study offers two main theoretical contributions.

First, a contribution of our study is how motivation and efficiency are affected in the circumstances we analyzed. Various studies (Baruch, 2000; Golden & Veiga, 2008) claim that typically, the motivation in remote workers is positively affected when they work from home. Moreover, they appear to be also more efficient those days they voluntarily decide or they are allowed to work from home (Harker & MacDonnell, 2012). However, it should be mentioned how such conclusions likely reflected a situation under certain circumstances possibly very different from the one our respondents found themselves in. Our respondents experienced quite drastic changes to their existing social lives both within and outside of the organizational context, as they were forced to remain mostly indoors to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This is a relevant difference between our study and others we have read, and therefore, the lack of social interaction and the long-term nature of this remote working situation had a negative impact on motivation and efficiency. Our respondents overwhelmingly felt that this experience of working remotely had a negative influence on their motivation, and most experienced the same impact on their efficiency. There are, of course, exceptions, like Lucia for example, who mentioned an increase of the two, due to flexibility and lack of distractions in the office. Our suggestion is that in future studies of remote working, it is necessary to consider the whole background of the worker, as it can change the outcome completely.

A second contribution to remote work theory is more specific to the literature around organizational trust. While there is abundant research around this theme, there does not seem

to be such a type of trust as *carryover trust*, which we introduced in our discussion in the previous chapter. Kramer (1999) outlines and explains various bases of trust, but none that we have found quite defined the trust our respondents experienced. The distinction is in the way our respondents' trustworthiness seemed to transition seamlessly to the virtual context. For this reason, we argue that the type of trust our respondents experienced is better described as *carryover trust*. This trust contributed to the overall experience of social relationships for our interviewees, allowing them to continue their work to the best of their ability under these new circumstances. Instead of stressing to prove their trustworthiness to others, they were able to focus their energy on attempting to maintain their existing social relationships with colleagues through these creative, virtual, social endeavors. This is not to say that trust improved, we only argue that whatever the quality or extent of the trust our interviewees experienced in their pre-pandemic workplaces, it went more or less unchanged in the transition. While this concept should undoubtedly be studied in a broader context, we do believe it is a noteworthy and interesting contribution to the existing literature on trust.

### **6.3 Limitations**

While we stand by the findings and contributions of this study, we also must acknowledge the limitations that were present during the course of our research. To start, the significantly diverse backgrounds of the individuals interviewed in this study should be considered a key limitation. We defend this limitation by emphasizing that because of the state of the world during the time our research took place, we struggled to identify one specific company which was willing to commit a considerable amount of time and resources (employees) to us to participate in our project. Therefore, we had to get creative and consider a wider population of interviewees. For this reason, our respondents come from unique backgrounds and organizations.

Second, as previously mentioned, due to such a unique context of a global pandemic, some situations surfaced which are specific to that context. For example, the existing social lives of our employees practically disappeared overnight, and because of this, they found themselves socializing in ways they would not normally, which was a key finding of our study. We realize that for future studies, these situations may be considered too specific to this context. However, we used it as a strength of our study to hone in and consider remote working from a rather uncharted angle.

Another limitation may be of the restricted number of interviews completed and the age range of those interviewed. Interviewing only millennials definitely restricts the findings of this study to a relatively small group of employees, as gaining insights from older individuals would have caused different intricacies of remote working to surface. For example, most of our interviewees did not find technology to be a challenge during this time, while perhaps for older individuals, this could pose problems.

A final limitation is the timeframe during which our research was done - in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time of the interviews, some countries had just started the lock down, while others were about to come out of it. With that, we want to highlight that it is possible that the various phases of the pandemic were experienced differently. Some may have been working from home for more time than others at the time of our conversation, which could have altered their experiences and feelings.

## **6.4 Future Research**

Keeping in mind the limitations we mentioned in the previous section, we would like to offer suggestions for further research related to our study. First, it would be very interesting to study social interactions in this pandemic situation in specific organizations. The pandemic context itself is an interesting one, and while we acknowledge the tragic effects it has had on the world as a whole, we also acknowledge the unique opportunity it provides to conduct interesting research. That said, every workplace has its own characteristics and needs, and it would be interesting to classify businesses into smaller categories and understand specific dynamics that repeat themselves in order to provide better remote working conditions to employees in those unique situations.

We would also be intrigued to understand more about *carryover trust*, testing its presence in a broader context. We wonder if the trust our respondents experienced is unique to this situation, or if it could be found in other situations in which organizations experience widespread transitions. Further, does *carryover trust* hold true regardless of seniority level in the organization, proven results or when organizations have more time to implement control measures to prepare for a big transition?

Finally, it would be interesting to understand if the innovative ways to recreate social interaction our respondents' organizations initiated would still hold outside of the pandemic situation. Are these new types of workplace social interactions, which are more inclusive for remote workers, simply a factor of this current situation, or might they be carried over post pandemic? Would organizations still sing Happy Birthday on Zoom? To what extent is it possible to recreate a new normal? These are questions to which we would be interested in finding out more answers.

## **6.5 Practical Implications for Organizations**

To conclude our study, we would like to highlight some key implications which might affect organizations in a more practical way. First, our study brings to light the complications that remote workers face and illustrates the need for serious consideration before sending large waves of employees to work remotely. It was evident through our analysis that though some see the benefits, and are quite suited to work remotely, for others this is not the case. Therefore, we challenge the tendency for organizations to accommodate their practices to be more suited for remote work. Perhaps this should not be the move, and organizations should take into consideration the individual personalities and preferences of the employees which they encourage to work remotely.

A second and more significant implication is that working remotely should perhaps be considered a working style all on its own, and organizations should steer away from trying to make it look like an extension of traditional office work. We argue that it is not so natural to force remote working into our preconceived notions of what work looks like, and instead, organizations should view it as something entirely different, with its own intricacies and challenges. Moreover, organizations should keep in mind that maybe not everyone is an appropriate fit for remote working. Perhaps managers should not try to force employees into remote working, as it may harm both individuals and the organization.

## REFERENCE LIST

---

- Ahuja, M., Chudoba, K. M., George, J. F., Kacmar, C., & McKnight, H. (2002). Overworked and Isolated? Predicting the effect of work-family conflict, autonomy, and workload on organizational commitment and turnover of virtual workers, in *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2002
- Albert, S., & Whetten, D. A. (1985). Organizational Identity, in Cummings, L.L. & Straw, B. M. (eds), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, pp. 263-295
- Allen, M. W., Walker, L. K., Coopman, S. J., & Hart, J. L. (2007). Workplace Surveillance and Managing Privacy Boundaries, *Management Communication Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 172–200
- Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond Neo Positivists, Romantics and Localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research, *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 13-33
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the appropriate individual, *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 619–644
- Ariani, W. D. (2017). Do Social Relationships Affect Motivation?, *Advances in Management & Applied Economics*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 63-91
- Baker, M. (2020). Gartner HR Survey Reveals 41% of Employees Likely to Work Remotely at Least Some of the Time Post Coronavirus Pandemic, Gartner, Available online: <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2020-04-14-gartner-hr-survey-reveals-41--of-employees-likely-to->[Accessed 2 May 2020]
- Baruch, Y. (2000), Teleworking: benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, vol. 15 no. 1, pp. 34-49
- Basile, K. A., & Beauregard, T. A. (2016). Strategies for Successful Telework: How effective employees manage work/home boundaries, *Strategic HR Review*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 106-111

- Belle, S. M., Burley, D. L., & Long, S. D. (2015). Where Do I Belong? High-intensity teleworkers' experience of organizational belonging, *Human Resource Development International*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 76–96
- Bosch-Sijtsema, P. M., Ruohomäki, V., & Vartiainen, M. (2009). Knowledge Work Productivity in Distributed Teams, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 533-546
- Brewer, M. B. (1981). Ethnocentrism and Its Role in Interpersonal Trust, in M. B. Brewer & B.E. Collins (eds), *Scientific Inquiry and the Social Sciences*, New York: Jossey-Bass, pp. 345–359
- Chang, J., & Teng, C. (2017). Intrinsic or Extrinsic Motivations for Hospitality Employees' Creativity: The moderating role of organisation-level regulatory focus, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, vol. 60, no.7, pp. 133–141
- Chekin, D. (2018). Shut Down Your Office: 6 stereotypes about remote work you should get out of your head, Codeburst.IO, web blog post, Available at: <https://www.remoter.co/these-stereotypes-about-remote-work-are-totally-false/> [Accessed 10 May 2020]
- Clark, S.C. (2000). Work/Family Border Theory: A new theory of work/family balance, *Human Relations*, vol. 53, no. 6, pp. 747-770
- Clime, K. (2019). These Stereotypes About Remote Work Are Totally False, Remoter, web blog post, Available at: <https://www.remoter.co/these-stereotypes-about-remote-work-are-totally-false/> [Accessed 10 May 2020]
- Collinson, D. L. (2003). Identities and Insecurities: Selves at work, *Organization*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 527–547
- Crossan, G., & Burton, P. F. (1993). Teleworking Stereotypes: A case study, *Journal of Information Science*, vol. 19, no. 5, pp. 349–362
- Desrochers, S., & Roussos, A. (2001). The Jurisprudence of Surveillance: A critical look at the laws of intimacy, *Lex Electronica*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 23–43
- Diesing, G. (2016). Millennials: Who they are, what they want & why you need them, *Hospitals & Health Networks*, vol. 90, no. 11, pp. 22-27
- Dimitrova, D. (2003). Controlling Teleworkers: Supervision and flexibility revisited, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 181–195

- Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational Images and Member Identification, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 239–263
- Gajanan, M. (2020). The Wild Story Behind Netflix’s New Docuseries Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness, *Time.com*, Available online: <https://time.com/5807284/tiger-king-netflix-true-story/> [Accessed 1 May 2020]
- Gajendran R. S., & Harrison D. (2007). The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown About Telecommuting: Meta- analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 92, no. 6, pp. 1524-1541
- Gallivan, M. J. (2001). Striking a Balance Between Trust and Control in a Virtual Organization: A content analysis of open source software case studies, *Information Systems Journal*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 277–304
- Gerke, S. K. (2006). If I Cannot See Them, How Can I Lead Them?, *Industrial and Commercial Training*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 102-105
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the social organization of gatherings*, New York: Free Press
- Golden, T.D., & Veiga, J.F. (2008). The Impact of Superior-Subordinate Relationships on the Commitment, Job Satisfaction, and Performance of Virtual Workers, *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 19 no. 1, pp. 77-88
- Grant, C. A., Wallace, L. M., & Spurgeon, P. C. (2013). An Exploration of the Psychological Factors Affecting Remote E-Worker’s Job Effectiveness, Well-Being, and Work Life Balance, *Employee Relations*, vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 527-546
- Handy, C. (1995). Trust and the Virtual Organization, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 73, no. 3, pp. 40–50
- Harker, B. M., & MacDonnell, R. (2012). Is Telework Effective for Organizations? A meta-analysis of empirical research on perceptions of telework and organizational outcomes, *Management Research Review*, vol. 35, no. 7, pp. 602-616
- Henttonen, K., & Blomqvist, K. (2005). Managing Distance in a Global Virtual Team: The evolution of trust through technology-mediated relational communication, *Strategic Change*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 107–119

- Hering, B.B. (2018). 6 Common Remote Work Myths, Remote.Co, web blog post, Available at: <https://remote.co/common-remote-work-myths/> [Accessed 10 May 2020]
- Hsu, J. L., Hwang, W. Y., Huang, Y. M., & Liu, J. J. (2011). Online Behaviour in Virtual Space: An empirical study on helping, *Educational Technology and Society*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 146–157
- Jaeger, A. M., & Baliga, B. R. (1985). Control Systems and Strategic Adaptation: Lessons from the Japanese experience, *Strategic Management Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 115–134
- Järvenpää, S. L., & Leidner, D. E. (1999). Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams, *Organization Science*, vol. 10, no. 6, pp.791–815
- Järvenpää, S. L., Knoll, K., & Leidner, D. E. (1998). Is Anybody Out There? Antecedents of trust in global virtual teams, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 29–64
- Jones, G. R., & George, J. M. (1998). The Experience and Evolution of Trust: Implications for cooperation and teamwork, *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 531–546
- Karabag S. F. (2020). An Unprecedented Global Crisis! The global, regional, national, political, economic and commercial impact of the coronavirus pandemic, *Journal of Applied Economics and Business Research*, vol. 10, no.1, pp. 1-6
- Kelly, B.D. (2020). Plagues, Pandemics and Epidemics in Irish History Prior to Covid-19 (Coronavirus): What can we learn?, *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, pp. n.p.
- Kramer, R. M. (1999). Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions, *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 569–598
- Kurland, N. B., & Bailey, D. E. (1999). Telework: The advantages and challenges of working here, there, anywhere, anytime, *Organizational Dynamics*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 53-67
- Kurland, N. B., & Cooper, C. D. (2002). Manager Control and Employee Isolation in Telecommuting Environments, *Journal of High Technology Management Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 107–126
- Lautsch, B.A., Kossek, E.E., & Eaton, S.C. (2009). Supervisory Approaches and Paradoxes in Managing Telecommunication Implementation, *Human Relations*, vol. 62, no. 6, pp. 795-827

- Lewicki, R. J., & Bunker, B. B. (1996). Developing and Maintaining Trust in Work Relationships, in R.M. Kramer & T.R. Tyler (Eds), *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of theory and research*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 114-139
- Lewis, S., & Cooper, C.L. (2005). *Work-Life Integration: Case studies of organizational change*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd
- Limburg, D., & Jackson, P. J. (2007). Teleworkflow: Supporting remote control, *New Technology Work and Employment*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 146-167
- Mafini, C., & Dlodlo, N. (2014). The Relationship Between Extrinsic Motivation, Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction Amongst Employees in a Public Organisation, *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 1–13
- Mattarelli, E., Tagliaventi, M. R., Carli, G., & Gupta, A. (2017). The Role of Brokers and Social Identities in the Development of Capabilities in Global Virtual Teams, *Journal of International Management*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 382–398
- Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust, *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 709–734
- McKnight, D. H., Cummings, L. L., & Chervany, N. L. (1998). Initial Trust Formation in New Organizational Relationships, *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 23, no. 3
- Meyerson, D., Weick, K. E., & Kramer, R. M. (1996). Swift Trust and Temporary Groups, in R.M. Kramer & T.R. Tyler (Eds), *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 166–195
- Morgan, R. E. (2004). Teleworking: an assessment of the benefits and challenges, *European Business Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 344-357
- Moussa, M. (2015). Monitoring Employee Behaviour Through the Use of Technology and Issues of Employee Privacy in America, *SAGE Open*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. n.p.
- Nakrošienė, A., Bučiūnienė, I., & Goštautaitė, B. (2019). Working from home: characteristics and outcomes of telework. *International Journal of Manpower*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 87-101
- OECD. (2001). *Measuring Productivity OECD Manual*, OECD Better Policies for Better Lives, Available online: <http://www.oecd.org/sdd/productivity-stats/2352458.pdf> [Accessed 30 April 2020]

- Olson, M. H. (1983). Remote Office Work: Changing work patterns in space and time, *Communications of the ACM*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 182-187
- Ouchi, W. G. (1977). The Relationship Between Organizational Structure and Organizational Control, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 95–113
- Ouchi, W. G. (1979). A Conceptual Framework for the Design of Organizational Control Mechanisms, *Management Science*, vol. 25, no. 9, pp. 833–848
- Ouchi, W. G., & Maguire, M. A. (1975). Organizational Control: Two functions, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 20, pp. 559–569
- Pearlson, K. E., Saunders, C. S., & Galletta, D. F. (2015). *Managing and Using Information Systems: A strategic approach*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Petriglieri, G., Ashford, S. J., & Wrześniewski, A. (2019). Agony and Ecstasy in the Gig Economy: Cultivating holding environments for precarious and personalized work identities, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 124–170
- Piccoli, G., Powell, A., & Ives, B. (2004). Virtual Teams: Team control structure, work processes, and team effectiveness, *Information Technology & People*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 359–379
- Place, A. (2020). Building a Remote Force in the Age of Coronavirus, *Employee Benefit Adviser*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 30
- Prasad, P. (2005). *Crafting Qualitative Research: Working in the postpositivist traditions*, New York: Routledge
- Raines, C. (2002). Managing Millennials, in C. Raines (eds), *Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook for a New Workplace*, Indio: Crisp Publications, pp. 1-8
- Rennstam, J., & Wästerfors, D. (2018). *Analyze! - Crafting your data in qualitative research*, Lund: Studentlitteratur
- Rosenblat, A., Kneese, T., & Danah, B. (2014). *Workplace Surveillance*, *Data & Society Research Institute*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Rosenthal, P. (2004). Management Control as an Employee Resource: The case of front-line service workers, *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 601–622

- Sarwar, S., & Abugre, J. (2013). The Influence of Rewards and Job Satisfaction on Employees in the Service Industry, *The Business & Management Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 22–32
- Schmidt, G. B. (2018). The Future of Leadership Is Virtual, *Journal of Leadership Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 63–64
- Semuels, A. (2020a). Does Remote Work Actually Work?, *TIME Magazine*, vol. 195, no. 12/13, pp. 42-47
- Semuels, A. (2020b). The Coronavirus Is Making Us See That It's Hard to Make Remote Work Actually Work, *TIME.com*, pp. n.p.
- Shahzadi, I., Javed, A., Pirzada, S. S., Nasreen, S., & Khanam, F. (2014). Impact of Employee Motivation on Employee Performance, *European Journal of Business and Management*, vol. 6, no. 23, pp. 159–166
- Short, H. (2014). A Critical Evaluation of the Contribution of Trust to Effective Technology Enhanced Learning in the Workplace: A literature review, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 45, no. 6, pp. 1014–1022
- Slack (2020). Report: Remote Work in the Age of Covid-19, Slack Blog, web blog post, Available online: <https://slackhq.com/report-remote-work-during-coronavirus> [Accessed 2 May 2020]
- Snell, S. A. (1992). Control Theory in Strategic Human Resource Management: The mediating effect of administrative information, *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 292–327
- Solomon, C. M. (2001). Managing Virtual Teams, *Workforce*, vol. 80, no. 6
- Staples, D. S., Hulland, J. S., & Higgins, C. A. (1999). A Self-Efficacy Theory Explanation for the Management of Remote Workers in Virtual Organizations, *Organization Science*, vol. 10, no. 6, pp. 758-776
- Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing Managerial Identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle, *Human Relations*, vol. 56, no. 10, pp. 1163–1193
- Thatcher, S. M. B., & Zhu, X. (2006). Changing Identities in a Changing Workplace: Identification, identity enactment, self-verification, and telecommuting, *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 1076–1088

- Tietze, S., & Musson, G. (2010). Identity, Identity Work and the Experience of Working from Home, *Journal of Management Development*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 148–156
- Tsvangirai, F. P., & Chinyamurindi, W. T. (2018). The Moderating Effect of Employee Motivation on Workplace Surveillance and Employee Engagement Amongst Employees at the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1-8
- Webster, J., & Wong, W. K. P. (2008). Comparing Traditional and Virtual Group Forms: Identity, communication and trust in naturally occurring project teams, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 41–62
- Wheatley, D. (2012). Good to be Home? Time use and satisfaction levels among home-based teleworkers, *New Technology, Work & Employment*, vol. 27 no. 3, pp. 224-241
- Wiesenfeld, B. M., Raghuram, S., & Garud, R. (1999). Communication Patterns as Determinants of Organizational Identification in a Virtual Organization, *Organization Science*, vol. 10, no. 6, pp. 777–790
- Wojcak, E., Bajzikova, L., Sajgalikova, H., & Polakova, M. (2016). How to Achieve Sustainable Efficiency with Teleworkers: Leadership Model in Telework, *Science Direct*, vol. 229, no. 2016, pp. 33 – 41
- Yeates, W. (2019). Remote Work Stereotypes: 7 Common Myths Debunked, Krisp, web blog post, Available at: <https://krisp.ai/blog/remote-work-stereotype/> [Accessed 10 May 2020]

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

### Pre-Interview Orientation

- Project info and main themes
- Data - anonymous and confidential, you won't be personally identifiable
- Output - Master's Thesis
- Permission to record interview?
- Questions before we begin?

### Personal Background

1. Tell us a bit about yourself as it relates to work experience
2. Tell us about your current role and current company. Daily tasks? Responsibilities? Organizational chart?

### Transitioning to Remote Work

3. Have any of your responsibilities changed now that you are working remotely? How?
4. Discuss your experiences with working from home before and after relative to when you had to make that transition.
5. Is there a specific reason why your company did not support working from home previously? Is there a general feeling towards working remotely in the company before and after?
  - a. Was there push back or resistance present in the organization regarding remote work.
6. What challenges do you foresee arising if remote work is required long term? What benefits?

### Manager/Employee (Trust, control, recognition)

7. Do you usually feel trusted by your supervisor in your normal working days?
  - a. How do you experience it now that you are all working in distance?
8. What challenges do you face on a daily basis when working with other colleagues?
9. How do you show your manager what you've been working on?
  - a. How do they normally respond?

10. How do you typically receive recognition at work? Openly? Solicited?
  - a. Has that changed since transitioning to working from home?
11. Do you have any examples or stories to share regarding relationships with superiors while working remotely?
12. Is there anything else you want to share about trust when working remotely?

**Colleagues** (not seeing colleagues face to face, collaboration)

13. Examples of practicalities regarding shared work and collaboration on a daily basis.
  - a. How has it changed from what you did during a normal day in the office?
14. What challenges do you encounter now that you are not sharing a workspace with co-workers?
15. How do you typically handle conflict between co-workers? Has that process changed?

**Work-Life Balance** (personal life, focus)

16. How do you experience working in your home? Family distractions? Workspace? ability to focus? Offline time?
17. Has your motivation been affected? How?

**Wrap-Up Question**

18. Main take away from this period of working from home?