



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

The trials and tribulations of engaging the powerful employee - a flexible working day at home or chit-chat with the colleagues by the coffee machine at the office?

- A study of subordinates and HR-managers experiences of employee engagement while working from home during the pandemic

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Abstract

Title: The trials and tribulations of engaging the powerful employee - a flexible working day at home or chit-chat with the colleagues by the coffee machine at the office?

Study level: Master of Science in Business Administration, Lund University School of Economics and Management

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Purpose: The purpose of this study has been to examine how subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home during the pandemic. Moreover, we have aimed to investigate how subordinates and HR-managers interplay in the engagement creation process.

Research Question: How do subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home?

Theoretical Background: The literature of this study draws upon the theory of the Social exchange process in order to illustrate how engagement is created between two parties. Beside, we introduce the concept of interactive motivation to clarify the connection to norms, reciprocity and identity for creating engagement. Also, we explain how engagement can be directed to the job role and organisational role, we characterise an engaged and disengaged employee as well as discussing positive and negative conditions of working from home.

Methodology: This study has a qualitative character, consisting of ten semi-structured interviews. The study is conducted from an interpretative and abductive research approach.

Findings: Our findings indicate a high level of engagement amongst the subordinates despite a tiny decline from before the pandemics start. Also, our findings indicated how the subordinate is on center stage where HR-management constantly strives to act upon the subordinates' needs in order to remain a high level of engagement. Consequently, this has raised questions about who is responsible for engagement creation.

Contributions: We contribute to the literature by giving a deeper understanding of conditions affecting engagement and how subordinates as well as HR-managers can work with engagement creation processes in the future. By adding a new dimension to our study, we introduce the concept of interactive engagement.

Keywords: Employee engagement, working from home, HR-managers, subordinates, social exchange theory

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1. Introduction

As a result of the drastic and radical changes the world has faced during the last year due to the pandemic, working from home has become a new standard for the majority of employees around the world. As a crucial phenomena of organisational performance, especially during uncertain times such as when a pandemic breaks out, it is of high relevance to dig deeper into the field of employee engagement and examine how subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home. The introductory chapter will lay out the foundation for the thesis through a presentation of the background, problem statement and rationale, purpose, research question and the study object. To conclude this section, an outline of the thesis will be presented to guide the reader throughout the following chapters.

1.1 Background

Never, one has seen such a rapidly changing and unpredictable world as the one today. Whether it concerns pandemics, economic forces, new digital innovations or overall changing customer demands, external conditions and times of uncertainty forces companies to adapt to new organisational models to survive. This in turn, has put extra pressure on enterprises to succeed in terms of maintaining a high level of engagement amongst employees to secure high performance (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). The phenomena of an engaged and motivated employee dates back several centuries, with engagement presenting a motivational variable directed towards organisational performance (Shuck, Reio & Rocco, 2011). Employee engagement is grounded in the philosophy of Human Resources Management, a key concept in management literature with a central view on the employees as an organisation's greatest asset. Human Resources Management concerns management of employees in order to secure organisational performance, effectiveness and long-term success. HR-work is thus conducted by an HR-manager in an organisation and relates to activities aiming to recruit and develop employees such as inform, negotiate, train, reward, attract, retain as well as engage in which this thesis will focus on (Rennstam, 2019).

The concept of *employee engagement* was formally introduced by Kahn (1990) as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). The level of engagement is affected to what extent the individual sees

her job as meaningful as well as what organisational benefits that are offered. Employee engagement also depends on the individual's emotional and mental state and whether the individual feels allowed to express her opinions without fear of negative consequences (Kahn, 1990). Moreover, what characterises an engaged employee is her feeling of affection and desire to do more than what the work task requires in order to fulfil the organisational vision (Turner, 2020). As described in the field of psychology, if the individual views the work through a positive lens, considers the work manageable as well as sees the future as bright the employee can be characterised as engaged (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). Engagement will be this thesis's primary focus but as Karimi and Sotoodeh (2019) explains, motivation is a closely connected concept that will be elaborated for later in the thesis. As they argue, engagement concerns a profound and positive mental state which is characteristic of a high level of enthusiasm and energy, rather than a temporary motivational state. Motivation results in a profound engagement and functions as a prerequisite and important element in order to achieve a mental state of engagement. Literature within the field has also pointed to the strong connection between engagement and performance, from which the choice of the phenomena of employee engagement has been based on.

The relationship between employee engagement and organisational performance has been acknowledged in previous literature. Turner (2020) argues that "A narrative that has emerged is that if an individual is engaged at work, then that person will be more motivated and achieve a higher level of well-being; in turn this will have a positive effect on personal, team and departmental business or service performance" (p.85). A study by Schneider, Yost, Kropp, Kind and Lam (2017) argues how an organisation with engaged employees will perform better than their competitors, not only financially but also by obtaining more satisfied customers, leading to engagement becoming a competitive advantage. A study by the analytics and advisory firm Gallup, found that engaged employees resulted in high organisational performance, where one could identify an increasing productivity as well as greater shareholder results (Sorenson, 2013).

According to Turner (2020), society is characterised by unstable social and technological conditions, affecting the way work is conducted in organisations. As a consequence, questions regarding how to engage employees have been particularly raised and made essential because of its strong connection to organisational performance. This notion is reinforced by Ahlowalia, Tiwary and Jha (2014) who argues that engaged employees are

crucial to secure profitability, especially since organisations nowadays are forced to deal with uncertainties in society causing radical organisational changes. The current pandemic is such an uncertainty that has forced organisations to adapt new ways of working (Karabag, 2020).

The 31:st of December 2019 the World Health Organisation was made aware of a virus outbreak in China that was later labelled as a coronavirus and the disease caused by it was named COVID-19. During March 2020, COVID-19 was called out to be a pandemic that would later affect the whole world (WHO, 2021). The current pandemic has encouraged companies to be organised in a way that does not endanger employees of becoming infected by the disease. Therefore, working remotely has become a standard working practice for a majority of employees (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). A report from McKinsey shows how working remotely has increased significantly and is perceived to last after the pandemic (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, Smit, Ellingrud, Meaney & Robinson, 2021).

Kurland and Bailey (1999) refers to different kinds of remote work, such as satellite offices, mobile workers and home-based work. This thesis focuses on home-based work which is characterised by an employee working from home regularly while using various communication media to stay in contact with the other employees within the organisation (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Being able to choose oneself, whether to work from home or from the office, can have a positive impact on the level of engagement since an employee allowed to work from is feeling trusted to handle such a flexible way of working (Anderson & Keillher, 2009). However, we wonder what happens with employee engagement in an organisation where the employee has been forced to conduct their work from home. Therefore, we are interested in subordinates as well as HR-managers experiences and perceptions of employee engagement and how this is managed while working from home.

1.2 Problem statement and rationale

Employee engagement is a trendy topic widely discussed lately. Attention directed to employee engagement has grown remarkably during the last years and the attention is anticipated to endure (Kunte & Rungruang, 2018). Quantitative research methods have so far steered the way for studies on employee engagement where the use of surveys has been utilised (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009; Schaufeli, 2012). Even though an overall understanding for employee engagement has been accounted for, there are areas in this field

that have not received substantial scholar attention yet (Shantz, 2017). A lot of research on employee engagement has excluded the context of where work is conducted. Furthermore, previous studies have not investigated both subordinates and HR-managers' perceptions and thus, gained an understanding of their interplay in the process of creating engagement (Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2007). Therefore, future studies on employee engagement lies in the use of a qualitative research method that will contribute to an understanding for how and why the context affects engagement (Kunte & Rungruang, 2018) as well as a more thorough understanding for how subordinates and HR-managers manage employee engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009).

Previous studies regarding employee engagement have focused on factors correlating positively with employee engagement by examining how this can be facilitated for by HR-managers (Saks & Gruman, 2014). These studies have condensed the material and pointed to relations and causality between two conditions mainly to answer the question on what management can do in order to increase engagement. However, how these conditions of engagement are interpreted is connected to the organisational culture since individuals use the culture to make sense of what is happening in an organisation. Therefore, it affects their way of behaving and engaging in a particular organisational context (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). This has also been evident during the pandemic where a lot of new virtual practices have been implemented in organisations with focus on what HR-managers can do in order to engage the subordinates while working from home (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). Perhaps, not surprising since engaging employees is stated to be one of HR-managers primary working tasks (Luthans & Peterson, 2002; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011; Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Therefore, the role of the subordinate is important to acknowledge in the search for practices that will close the gap between engagement and disengagement (Gebauer & Lowman, 2008). Previous studies have investigated subordinates' experiences regarding being engaged at work, reporting important implications for how HR-managers can work to enhance employee engagement (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011; Shenoy & Uchil, 2018). This is to our knowledge without taking the perspective of both subordinates and HR-managers into consideration regarding employee engagement in a home working context.

Having this in mind, we believe there has been insufficient research in the field of employee engagement. Essentially in terms of adapting a qualitative approach while investigating the phenomenon as well as discovering both subordinates and HR-managers views, and thus their

interplay in the process of creating engagement. We will conduct a qualitative study focusing on how subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage engagement in a new working situation. Our aim is to provide an increased understanding regarding how employee engagement is created when the work situation radically has been changed. Also, our purpose is to create an understanding for how various conditions are connected and effect engagement creation. Furthermore, this thesis's purpose is to provide knowledge within the field by recontextualization, thus putting engagement in an organisational context and more specifically a home-working context. This is to depict and provide insights to engagement work in a complex environment where culture, identity and individuals are prominent (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2019).

1.3 Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of subordinates as well as HR-managers perceptions and experiences regarding employee engagement while working from home. In addition, the aim is to investigate how subordinates and HR-managers handle employee engagement during the new constellation of working. Therefore, the study aims at contributing with insights and knowledge of the interplay between subordinates and HR-managers in the process of creating engagement. Based on this purpose, the following research question have been formulated:

How do subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home?

1.4 Studyobject

This study will take place in one of the world's greatest financial technology companies. The company provides financial services to companies around the world and the name of the company will, with respect to the company and its employees, remain anonymous. The choice of company has been based on three main grounds. Firstly, the company states their employees as their greatest assets in which the choice of organisation becomes highly relevant for investigating employee engagement more specifically. Secondly, the employees within the company have been strictly directed to work from home during the pandemic. Thirdly, the company is known for having a strong company culture with a high level of

engagement amongst the employees, in which the relevance of doing a study in this company is of high pertinence. Since the employees within the company have got such an important role, engagement would appear to be essential in order to provide and develop their financial services and especially when the employees are working from home. The company has grown significantly since the start and is a global company with offices located worldwide. However, the interviews will be conducted with subordinates and HR-managers that used to work from the Stockholm office, but as a consequence of the pandemic work from home. With respect to the virus spread, the interviews have been conducted over digital communication platforms. The subordinates in this study are in focus while investigating the phenomena of employee engagement and therefore, we refer to the engagement of the subordinate throughout the thesis. Worth mentioning however, is how the HR-managers interviewed, are working directly towards the subordinates in terms of developing and engaging but also, through the employees managers within the organisation. Therefore, we want to distinguish between the organisation's subordinates, HR-managers and managers in which are working directly to the subordinate, to make it easier for the reader to understand our study.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

By describing the layout of the thesis chapters, an outline will follow. After this introductory chapter, **chapter 2** will follow where the methodology is presented and philosophical grounding discussed. That is, a qualitative research design, abductive inference, constructivist ontology and interpretative epistemology. The data collection is presented followed by an explanation of how the data has been analysed. The chapter concludes with a note on trustworthiness and authenticity followed by a reflexive approach. **Chapter 3** will provide a literature review of the theoretical concepts relevant for the study. First the social exchange theory will be described and accordingly interactive motivation, then the characteristics of an engaged and disengaged employee followed by a description of job engagement and organisational engagement. Lastly, positive and negative conditions of working from home will be presented. In **chapter 4** the empirical data that has been collected through semi-structured interviews is analysed by four identified themes, namely communication, relationships, work-life balance and shared liability. **Chapter 5** consists of a discussion regarding the mixed feelings of working from home, the increasing focus on the subordinate which seems to be on centre stage as well as the complexity of the engagement creation

process. The final chapter, **Chapter 6** presents a conclusion of the main findings in the thesis followed by an introduction of interactive engagement. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research within the field of employee engagement.

2. Methodology

In this chapter we will describe how the research question has been approached. Our aim is to provide the reader with a detailed description of the philosophical groundings the thesis is based upon and how it has steered the way for the conducted research. This is followed by an insight to how the data has been collected and further analysed, thus how the empirical material has been interpreted. Furthermore, a discussion regarding trustworthiness and authenticity is presented with a concluding insight towards how a reflexive approach has been taken into concern while writing the thesis.

2.1 Philosophical grounding

Researchers tend to make a difference between adopting quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative methods focus on presenting numbers rather than make accounts for a phenomena using words (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Qualitative research methods are used to gain a deeper understanding of an identified social phenomena and how this is interpreted by individuals in the studied setting. This is not something numbers can provide a description of (Rennstamn & Wästerfors, 2018). The purpose of this study has been to gain an understanding for how subordinates experience and manage employee engagement while working from home. Therefore a qualitative research method has been adopted since this method aims towards capturing interpretations of individuals in regards to a defined situation (Kvale, 1996). Furthermore, this shows a specific phenomenon that will be studied, counteracting the potential problem that qualitative studies can be unspecific (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Interviews are the most common research design used in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this study, interviews have been conducted with the intention to gain an understanding for the complexity of the engagement creation process. According to Kvale (1996) the interview can be seen as a conversation, and even though the researcher sets the agenda for the dialogue, the respondent communicates her perceptions. We have aimed to achieve an accurate understanding of subordinates and HR-managers' perceptions and experiences of employee engagement, as well as how employee engagement is managed while working from home.

The relationship between theory and practice can be seen from different inferences, namely induction and deduction. Induction indicates the theory as the outcome of the research while deduction means the opposite. Thus, how the theory confirms the research findings (Bryman

& Bell, 2013). However, there is a third inference advocated referred to as abduction (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction is built upon parts of induction and deduction and by using this method, empirical and theoretical material is developed in course of time during the writing process (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). An abductive approach has been applied in this study since previous knowledge about employee engagement has been accounted for. After the empirical data was collected the literature review was revised in order to account for the findings. This follows Alvesson and Sköldbbergs (2018) statement that “The research process, therefore, alternates between (previous) theory and empirical facts (or clues) whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other” (p.5). In the abductive method it is of importance to find patterns in the data that cannot directly be seen, and therefore understanding the data is critical (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). An active role has been taken to interpret the respondents answers during the interviews. Therefore, an abductive approach has been chosen, to be knowledgeable about the topic while conducting interviews and to enable the search for underlying meanings. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018), the collected data and analysis of this, is a construction which indicates how the researchers have an active role when presenting the data since they make sense of the material. This can be connected to constructivism, the ontology chosen for this thesis.

Ontology is a paradigm concerning questions about what the perceived reality is (Scotland, 2012). With the purpose to study how subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement, the interviews revealed how these individuals in relation with each other defined reality. For example, our study showed how the HR-managers implemented initiatives such as virtual events. The subordinates perceived this as something that affected their engagement positively, resulting in the view of themselves as engaged. This follows the idea of constructivism that according to Bryman and Bell (2013), is an ontological position asserting that all social phenomena and their meanings are continuously created, thus with a viewpoint of how a social phenomena is not static. Constructivism notes that there are different constructions of reality depending on the individual who socially constructs meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This ontological position also acknowledges the active part taken by the researchers when presenting one view of the social phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1994) write how constructivism aims toward gaining an understanding of the constructions individuals make of a situation, which goes in line with the purpose of this study. In order to gain an understanding for individual perceptions regarding employee engagement, an active role has been taken when choosing to present the

social exchange theory to explain what is going on in the organisation based on the empirical findings. Important however is to recognise that researchers can present different results since social actors can construct various meanings to a social phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2013). However, this study can be viewed as a contribution to research in the field of employee engagement while working from home, a field where further research can be conducted to increase an deeper understanding of the phenomena.

This study focuses on perceptions as well as experiences regarding employee engagement. Consequently, the aim has been to investigate how HR-managers and subordinates, who all are working from home, make sense of employee engagement. Therefore, this study adheres to the interpretative epistemology. Founded on the premise is the difference between how business researchers and scientific researchers conduct studies since business researchers aim towards capturing the underlying, moreover subjective meaning (Bryman & Bell, 2013). This interpretative research tradition asserts that the world is socially constructed and puts emphasis on the importance of gaining an understanding for how individuals make sense of an event (Scotland, 2012; Prasad, 2018). As identified throughout the interviews, subordinates felt less engaged because of lack of social interaction with colleagues. This follows the statement from Scotland (2012), stating how adopting an interpretative tradition provides knowledge about the actions taken by individuals. It is also an explanation for why individuals act the way they are currently doing. By conducting interviews in one organisation our purpose was to identify how HR-managers and subordinates made sense of their new work situation. The interviews clarified how a majority of the subordinates got engaged by the freedom they were given while working from home, but also how making an appointment and following an agenda to interact with one's colleagues had a negative effect on their engagement. Also, the interviews illustrated how some subordinates wanted to continue work from home after the pandemic. Thus, working from home has withheld different meanings for the individuals that in turn has affected their level of engagement. This goes in line with symbolic interactionism, since it “posits that all social phenomena are symbolic—that is, objects, events, and actions always hold meanings for different individuals” (Prasad, 2018, p. 21). Below the philosophical groundings of this study will be summarized.

Philosophical groundings	Adopted philosophical groundings
Research Design	Qualitative
Inference	Abductive
Ontology	Constructivism
Epistemology	Interpretative

Table 1. Philosophical groundings of the study.

2.2 Data collection

In the following section, we aim to describe how the data has been collected. As Styhre (2013) argues, it is highly relevant to present the collected data correctly, since subjective beliefs from the researchers of this study can influence the raw data given from the interviews.

2.2.1 Sample

As already mentioned, this qualitative study aims to investigate how subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home. Therefore, semi-structured interviews have been adapted. Since a qualitative study focuses on gaining a deep understanding of a phenomenon it was of relevance to interview subordinates and HR-managers within the same organisational context. Not only to get an understanding of both parts' view of the subject, but also to investigate the similarities and differences regarding their interpretation of employee engagement. Thereby, gain knowledge of their interplay in the engagement creating process. To get in touch with a company with the constellation of five subordinates and five HR-managers, a question was sent to an acquaintance of one of the researchers of this study who currently works as an HR-manager in one of the worlds greatest financial technology companies. The HR-manager responded gladly that she was willing to help.

Since confidentiality is of great relevance while conducting interviews, the name of the acquaintance has been changed to Sarah. In turn, Sarah sent out emails to her team in Stockholm and received responses from four additional HR-managers and five subordinates willing to voluntarily participate in an interview with us. The choice of organisation was based on two important requirements. Firstly, we aimed to gain access to an organisation

where we knew the employees had worked from home during the pandemic. Secondly, an organisation that could offer five HR-managers and five subordinates within the same organisation were of high relevance for our studies purpose. Sarah's way of questioning her colleagues of who was willing to participate in our study can be described as what Bryman and Bell (2013) refer to as snowball sampling. In order to avoid Sarah choosing the respondents, she sent an email to the whole office in Stockholm where nine people gave responses and these individuals became our respondents.

2.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

For the qualitative nature of our study, semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Bryman and Bell (2013) characterises semi-structured interviews as structured to a certain degree. For instance, the interview can be structured to certain themes in which the researchers can investigate a phenomena closer and therefore, our interviews were structured to cover questions about the phenomena employee engagement. Simultaneously, the researchers can stay open to other insights outside of the themes that might be brought up during the interviews, allowing for the interview to take a different direction (Bryman & Bell, 2013). We aimed to have an open mindset while conducting the interviews. To exemplify, we could identify the importance of the company culture even though questions regarding culture were not directly asked. But just like Bryman and Bell (2013) points out, this way of structuring the interview contributes to a flexible conversation between the researchers of the study and the respondents, where the respondents had possibilities to talk about different aspects of working from home and how this has affected their engagement. Since the study aims to investigate subordinates as well as HR-managers point of view, we conducted two interview guides which were mostly similar except for minor changes within a few questions. The two different interview guides can be found in the appendix. Both entailed a similar amount of questions and all of the interviews lasted for around one hour. All the interviews were conducted in the Swedish language in order for the interviewees to make sense of their realities to the greatest extent. The researchers of this study have therefore translated the given material into english as accurately as possible and together reviewed the transcripts to ensure that the translations provided have been in accordance with the taped interviews.

Due to restrictions of minimising physical contact, as a result of the pandemic, the interviews have been conducted through online communication platforms. Since we were highly aware of the technical errors that could occur while recording the interviews, we used two phones

and one computer while recording. To secure a common interpretation of the conducted interviews the researchers have listened through the material several times. Since confidentiality is of great relevance while conducting interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2013), the researchers of this study had to change the original names of the respondents. This was expressed before the interviews started as something that likely have made all of the respondents able to speak out honestly about their experiences and interpretations of working from home. However, the respondents' work titles will not be presented in order to ensure their anonymity. Instead a division will be made between HR-managers and subordinates.

Name	HR-manager/Subordinate	Date of interview
Mary	HR-manager	7/4-2021
Patricia	Subordinate	7/4-2021
Jennifer	Subordinate	8/4-2021
Linda	HR-manager	8/4-2021
Elisabeth	Subordinate	9/4-2021
Karen	Subordinate	12/4-2021
Barbara	HR-manager	12/4-2021
Susan	Subordinate	12/4-2021
Jessica	HR-manager	12/4-2021
Sarah	HR-manager	14/4-2021

Table 2. Table of respondents.

2.3 Data analysis

Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018) refers to the analytical part of the thesis as a moment when the data is given meaning. Based on recommendations from Gubrium & Holstein (1997), the researchers of this study have aimed to understand *what* is being communicated regarding employee engagement amongst the subordinates and HR-managers and also *how* these parties make sense of their realities. The idea of switching between what and how illustrate the idea of Analytical bracketing. To analyse the material, inspiration has been taken from Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018) three steps; sort, reduce and argue. Drawing upon the first step, sort, the empirical material was collected by outlined quotes which came to present different themes

found from the interviews. By doing highlights in the material we could differentiate amongst quotes which is essential in order to see couplings and details in the material. This can be related to what is called to “get to know” the material even better. This is an essential part in order to avoid the chaos-problem which tends to occur when the researcher's material has not been sorted yet and can rather be similar to a great badly arranged mess. To avoid this, we carefully looked for similarities and different aspects amongst the two groups of subordinates and HR-managers, that could be of interest to analyse further. Since there should be a challenge to present everything said during the interviews, it is of relevance to reduce the material. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) refers to this as the representation-problem. But by reducing the material, the most important and significant findings will be expressed. While reducing the material, focus has been on excluding quotes that have not been related to the subject we aim to investigate.

The last step, arguing, was done to tackle “the problem of authority.” Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) describes this process as an argumentation for the material found as well as an argumentation for previous literature and knowledge within the field. In combination, an Excerpt-commentary-unit model by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) has been applied. During this analysing technique, our purpose has been to create an analytical point (E.g to be able to coordinate the day as one like creates engagement while working from home) followed by an orientation (E.g the freedom ones are given while working from home can be illustrated below). The orientation represents the bridge to the quote (E.g “I really like to coordinate my days as I like, that makes me engaged”) followed by a final comment (E.g identified is how the freedom of coordinating the working day at home has a positive impact on the subordinates level of engagement) (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011: Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

2.4 Trustworthiness and authenticity

To ensure the quality of a study, reliability and validity are two criteria used to gain an understanding for how high or low the quality can be assumed to be. These criteria are commonly used in quantitative studies and even though researchers have tried to apply them to qualitative studies, these are argued to be less relevant (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The reason is that reliability and credibility is based on the notion that an accurate view of the world can be presented, something that qualitative researchers should not strive towards. Instead,

trustworthiness and authenticity are two criterias worth taking into concern to ensure the quality of a qualitative research like ours (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Trustworthiness consists of the four following variables: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Credibility means that results presented in the study are plausible for the receivers. For a study to be credible, it is important that the social reality presented is accurate with the view of the respondents who are the ones sharing their perceived reality (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The respondents were not given the interview questions in advance of the scheduled interview. Consequently, they were able to talk openly about the questions without presenting practiced answers. In order to make the results credible to all readers, the data has been analysed individually from both of us before sharing our perceptions with each other.

Transferability concerns the results of the study being applicable in a context different from where the study took place (Bryman & Bell, 2013). To make thorough descriptions is essential to ensure transferability of a study since this allows other individuals to replicate the steps that have been taken to end up with the presented results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the methodology chapter, the way the study has been constructed is presented in order to increase the transferability. In this study the purpose has been to investigate employee engagement in an organisation where the employees work from home. However, the purpose is that the implications of this study can be used to increase engagement in various organisations in the future. Worth mentioning however, is how the conditions affecting our respondents' engagement, will not necessarily be the same in another organisation.

When there is an account taken for all parts of the study, the dependability is positively affected. Dependability refers to transparency in regards to the choices made when conducting all parts of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2013). To ensure the transparency of this study we have presented a detailed methodological chapter. Moreover, in the literature review, a detailed description of the concepts and models used in our discussion are presented. The interview guides used are also presented as attachments in the appendix.

The final criterion of trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability concerns the researchers acting in good faith as well as ensuring that personal values do not affect the outcome of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Therefore, we have aimed to act with

objectivity by having an open mindset when conducting interviews and not lead the respondents to answer in a way that we would have wanted them to. Both researchers of this study have taken part in conducting and transcribing the interviews to make sure a correct view of the respondent's reality is presented. Moreover, we have discussed the material together after individually analysing it, to secure confirmability. The study has also been read by our supervisor whom we have discussed the content with and thereby, we have received a second opinion on how we present the data.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) also proposed the use of authenticity to ensure the quality of a study. This criterion is about providing an accurate view of the studied phenomena to ensure that the respondent's views are correctly accounted for (Bryman & Bell, 2013). We have aimed to present an accurate view of employee engagement in the organisation by interviewing both subordinates and HR-managers. As recognised from the interviews, the level of engagement has on the one hand been negatively affected by working from home, but on the other remained relatively high since the employees' days are of a flexible character and since their needs are taken into consideration to a wider extent. Another part of achieving authenticity is to provide results aiming to increase the understanding of the social reality the respondents are part of (Bryman & Bell, 2013). By investigating engagement while working from home, the purpose is to provide corporations with knowledge of how employee engagement can be created. Furthermore, if the respondents by participating and taking part of the study, get an increased understanding for how other colleagues perceive the phenomena, the authenticity is further raised (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Both the subordinates and HR-managers will be able to read the thesis once completed. Thus, they are given the opportunity to identify how those interviewed perceive engagement while working from home.

2.5 Reflexivity

By inspiration taken from Alvesson and Sköldböck (2018), the researchers of this study have interpretation as a core element of research work. Interpretation in this sense consists of two main characteristics named careful interpretation and reflection. Careful interpretation reflects the idea that empirical material are results of interpretation important to be aware of. Careful reflection illustrates the idea of being critical of one's interpretation of the given data. The reflexive individual, as Alvesson, Blom and Svenningsson (2017) characterise it further,

is defined as “the ambition to carefully and systematically take critical view of one's assumption, ideas and favoured vocabulary and to consider if alternative one make sense” (p. 25). In order to do this, the researchers of this study have constantly tried to challenge each other's way of thinking to avoid pre-assumptions. Thanks to swedish as a native language for both the researchers, the possibilities to challenge each other's way of thinking and resonating has become even greater.

3. Literature review

Year 2020, is a year of remembrance. The world has depicted illness and deaths, organisational shutdowns and financial losses as well as delayed salaries and financial rewards left out. According to Kumar (2021) this has created a trepidation amongst employees in terms of bonuses, job security, performance appraisals among others which consequently, has affected employee engagement negatively. Besides, the current Corona pandemic has forced companies to adopt necessary interventions to avoid the drastic spread of COVID-19, where one of the main changes has been to work from home (Vnockova, 2020). According to interviews conducted in March 2020 with 800 HR executives, 88% suggested their employees work from home in order to minimise the spread of the virus (Caliguiri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020). Moreover, the traditional way of physically being at work drastically changed to the constellation of a home office for thousands of employees around the world. To work from home has directed employees into the digital sphere, where communication and collaboration platforms have become a daily basis tool for many organisations (Vnockova, 2020). According to Carnevale and Hatak (2020), the newly altered working environment has contributed to radical challenges that HR-managers have been forced to tackle in terms of managing employees. Beardwell and Thompson (2017) further explain how an HR-manager has a crucial role within the field of managing employees and thereby, all organisational activities related to it. The phenomenon of employee engagement is one of them in which this study aims to investigate.

3.1 Social exchange theory

The idea of engagement is illustrated by the Social exchange theory. The roots of Social exchange theory dates back to the 1920's when Malinowski (1922) in the anthropological field, conducted a study on the exchange process among a native population where he identified how individuals created relationships with each other based on reciprocal obligations. The study indicated how receiving a gift triggered a feeling of obligation to return this to the other individual, a phenomenon that thus created a relationship between the two parties. Social exchange theory is regarded as a highly influential theory in organisational studies aiming to increase knowledge about employee's way of behaving in a reciprocal relationship (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The theory describes how obligations and reciprocal interdependence occur between two parties as their relation develops over time (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Reciprocal dependence is the foundation of social

exchanges where one part provides the other with something highly valued and that only the one part obtains to give (Molm, 1994). However, there are other rules of exchange that are also of essence such as when two parties negotiate agreements (Cook, Emerson & Gilmore, 1983). At the same time, reciprocity is the most eminent rule of exchange in which management studies have focused on (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

As stated by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) “Social exchange comprises actions contingent on the rewarding reactions of others, which over time provide for mutually and rewarding transactions and relationships” (p. 890). Relationships are essential as they advance to create mutual commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This mutual commitment draws upon Mauss (2002) theory that no gift is ever free, thus making the parties committed to return something to the other individual. The relationships created between two parties can be between two individuals within the organisation or an individual and the organisation itself (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange relationships are founded in the belief of a manager who strives to acknowledge the subordinates needs, which in turn will result in a satisfied subordinate who is willing to engage and contribute to the organisational success (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Important though, is to acknowledge the subordinates capacity to decide whether what is exchanged is enough to be repaid with engagement (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Also, trust and loyalty evolves to mutual commitment where unexpressed rules of exchange appear (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Engagement however, is one obvious way to repay the organisation (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

Social exchange is not about monetary offers because as Blau (1964) argues, “only social exchange tends to engender feelings of personal obligations, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not” (p.94). Concurrently, Beardwell and Thompson (2017) argue how social exchange can withhold economic or social emotional resources that in turn, will lead to an obligated feeling of repayment. However, social exchange will create reciprocity that will endure in the future, something economic exchange will not result in (Blau, 1964). To exemplify, Oluwaseyi, Fawehinim and Yusliza (2021) describe that if HR-management provides the subordinate with resources such as performance feedback, job autonomy and social support amongst others, the subordinate in turn is prepared to repay for this in terms of being engaged. However, Beardwell and Thompson (2017) argue that if these resources are not exchanged, the same level of engagement can not be expected. In exchange relationships both parties have expectations on what to receive from the other party and if

these expectations are not lived up to the outcome can be distrustful (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson & Wayne, 2008).

As described by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), the exchange relationship develops over time and is not something occurring at once. However, Ballinger and Rockman (2010) describes how an anchoring event can change the relationship rapidly and result in the opposite of a reciprocal exchange. They describe an anchoring event as a social exchange where the subordinate is relying on another part to receive something to reach a desired state. However, if the receiver gets something not expected, either positively or negatively, this in turn will affect how the individual will behave in the reciprocal relationship. If the anchoring event is negative the subordinate acts upon own interest but if the anchoring event is positive, the subordinate will act in a way that is of value for the other party. Despite this, Dulac et al. (2008) argue that if the subordinate has a positive attitude towards the other part, even if an anchoring event result in distrust, there is a high possibility this will not be the outcome anyway since there is a strive to stay attached to the managers and the organisation. The exchange relationships can be created with different parties which is important to acknowledge since the one part is the one the subordinate aims to return the exchanged benefit towards (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman & Taylor, 2000).

3.2 Interactive motivation

Even though this study focuses on engagement connected to the subordinate, motivation is a closely connected concept to engagement and will therefore be discussed below. As Beardwell & Thompson (2017) mentions, motivation is related to a behaviour meanwhile engagement to a feeling and thereby, these two concepts interplay. To exemplify, motivation can create engagement when a behaviour results in a feeling of engagement and engagement can create motivation, an action towards a goal e.g. Motivation is described as an important aspect in organisations since it affects engagement and thus, performance of the subordinates and commitment towards the organisation (Mirvis, 2012). However, there are different ways to create motivation in an organisation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Fishbach, Steinmetz and Tu (2016) explain how the social context is one such way. According to Alvesson and Kärreman (2019), the way the organisation works with conditions having a positive impact on engagement can be distinct from how other organisations operate in order to increase the employee willingness to perform. One way to create interactive motivation is through the

interface of an individual and the environmental context. Presented are three different interactive conditions of motivation, namely norms, reciprocity as well as identity (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2019).

The norms presented in an organisation points towards the standards an individual is expected to follow in terms of action and behaviour (Wiener, 1982). For instance, socialisation at the office where it is regarded as important to have short conversations with colleagues and have “a good time” while working (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2019). However, if the norms in the organisation are not salient enough, the employees own driving forces to engage in a certain behavior can be more prominent (Marler, McKee, Cox, Simmering & Allen, 2012). Despite this, Wiener (1982) states how norms are an essential driving force of employee engagement in the organisational context.

The rule of reciprocity, the second factor of interactive motivation, indicates how when one part is given something desirable from another part, the receiver wants to repay this (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2019). However, Falk and Fischbacher (2006) state that it is not only the consequences that matters but also the intentions of the actions taken. According to Raja, Johns and Ntalianis (2004) a mutual relationship between the subordinate and the organisation has a positive effect on the subordinates performance since it results in an implicit psychological contract that will make the subordinate repay the organisation with greater performance. Concurrently, if one part gives something not desirable, the receiver will act in a way not in favour of the giver (Falk & Fischbacher, 2006). Drawing upon the rule of mutuality, an understanding for the processes in an organisation can be gained, since the subordinates behaviour is affected by what they receive from the organisation, and thereby, the HR-managers. Social activities are such a thing increasing the willingness to provide something in return, in this case engagement (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2019).

The final factor of interactive motivation is identity (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2019). Individual identity concerns one's view about oneself which in turn, will affect individual thoughts as well as values. As a result, this will have an effect on how an individual acts in an organisation (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). At the same time, the organisational culture can have an effect on identity and vice versa (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2019). According to Hatch and Schoultz (1997), an individual's identity is deeply affected by the organisational culture and as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) points out, there is an importance to what

extent the individuals within the organisation can identify herself with the organisation since this facilitate for a stronger organisational culture to emerge. As Ashforth and Mael (1989) argues, social identity is the most prominent identity and refers to an individual who identifies herself with a group, such as a company or a team. Alvesson and Kärreman (2019) describes how organisational identification makes it natural to try and reach expectations set in the organisation. Overall, interactive motivation points towards the social interactions that affect the way individuals behave in an organisation.

3.3 Employee engagement and disengagement

A more comprehensive explanation of the notion of employee engagement requires an introduction to the opposite of the engaged employee - the disengaged employee. Indeed, investigations conducted during recent years have shown relatively high numbers of disengagement amongst employees in organisations. According to a study conducted in the UK, only 27 % of the employees were “highly engaged” in their work (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Employee disengagement is considered as a state of not feeling emotionally attached to one's work and can be caused by several reasons, for example, to not know what is expected from one, not being listened to or not having the actual tools or information required to proceed the work (Buckingham, 1999). Altogether, employee disengagement is about distancing oneself cognitively, physically and emotionally from work (Kahn, 1990).

The pandemic has challenged these elements and thus, questioned employees' levels of engagement (Palumbo, 2020: Caliguri et al. 2020: Carnevale & Hatak, 2020: Vnockova, 2020). Because just as Palumbo (2020) explains, working from home, trying to balance work and home-life simultaneously, can be exhausting and stressful and have a negative impact on employee engagement, even for the most engaged one. On the other hand, studies according to Peters, Poutsma, Van der Heijden, Bakker and Bruijn (2014) shows how working from home increases engagement. As Palumbo describes (2020) working from home has resulted in an intensification and extensification in terms of greater focus but extending hours of work. Drawing upon the social exchange theory, this can be the outcome of an employee who wants to give back something to the organisation for their opportunity to work from home and their great flexibility (Palumbo, 2020). Simultaneously, an engaged employee can be unaware of extended working hours and the encroachment of work into private life. However,

it is important to take each individual's context into consideration since every individual acts differently and will be engaged and disengaged depending on different conditions (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

Employee engagement, as the opposite to employee disengagement, explains a condition of satisfaction towards one's job, being emotionally attached to it (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Beardwell and Thompson (2017) refers to employee engagement as the feeling of “willing to go the extra mile” for the organisation combined with a state of feeling that one’s job is valuable and interesting. Maintaining a stable two-way communication with the organisation, having opportunities for personal training and development as well as feeling valuable at work are key conditions that produce feelings of engagement (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004). According to Beardwell and Thompson (2017), an individual can be engaged towards her job but with lack of communication within the organisation and personal development possibilities, the individual will most likely lose emotional connection to the organisation.

Just as Kahn and Heaphy (2014) describes are relations to colleagues and managers within the organisation important for employee engagement and if these are absent, the employee can feel disengaged. Relationships heighten feelings of belonging and are crucial for engagement. An individual feeling meaningfulness with one's work is regarded as having strong positive correlations to engagement. Kahn and Heapy (2014) explains how feelings of being valued as well as contributing to something oneself regard as valuable are essential for being engaged. Furthermore, by allowing the employee to feel independence and freedom while working, employees can feel higher engagement (Veltman, 2016). Chanana and Sangeta (2020) further points to the crucial importance of taking employees' needs into concern during uncertain times in order to secure a high level of engagement.

3.4 Organisational engagement and job engagement

The most salient roles for the employees to adhere to are the job role and the organisational role (Farndale, Beijer, Van Veldhoven & Kelliher, 2014). At the same time Cohen (2003) argues how an employee can be committed towards different roles such as the job role, organisational role, career role, innovator role as well as union role. However, in the field of engagement, a distinction can be made between two closely related concepts namely job

engagement and organisational engagement (Saks, 2006). If job engagement is changed this can impact organisational engagement, indicating a relationship between these different kinds of engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). However, they shall be viewed as two different kinds of engagement (Saks, 2006). Guest (2015) explains how it is unclear why organisations most often aim to direct employee engagement towards the organisation. But as Saks & Gruman (2014) points out, an employee can be engaged in the job but still be disengaged towards the organisation for whom the work is conducted.

Farndale et al. (2014) reinforces this even further, stating that if an employee is engaged in the job, this does not mean the same employee is engaged towards the organisation. Therefore, it is of great relevance for organisations to acknowledge both kinds of engagement in order to secure an employee willing to perform and go the extra mile (Saks, 2006; Farndale et al. 2014). Since a distinction can be drawn between job and organisational engagement, managers can focus to increase engagement towards each specific field (Farndale et al. 2014). But as Saks (2006) argues, if the individual is engaged in general, the relationship to the employer will be affected in a positive way that in turn will have an impact on the engagement towards the job as well as the organisation. Important however, is to recognise how the employee has a choice to engage herself in regards to her job role as well the organisational role (Saks, 2006).

Organisational engagement focuses on the employee's role of being part of an organisation (Saks, 2006). Welch (2011) defines organisational engagement as "a dynamic, changeable psychological state which links employees to their organisations, manifested in organisation member role performances expressed physically, cognitively and emotionally, and influenced by organisation-level internal communication" (p. 341). Accordingly, employees seeing the organisation in which they work through a positive lens are more likely to act as an advocator, illustrating organisational engagement (Farndale et al. 2014). Employees believing procedural justice is present in the organisation are more likely to have organisational engagement (Saks, 2006; Malinen, Wright & Cammock, 2013). Simultaneously, the intention to stay in the organisation increases with the belief in procedural justice (Malinen, Wright & Cammock, 2013). However, Guest (2015) mentions how corporations usually tend to focus on creating organisational engagement to facilitate greater performance and not in favor of the employee. However, organisational engagement not only leads to increased willingness to

stay in the organisation but also job satisfaction. Therefore, organisational engagement tends to nourish feelings rather than behaviour (Farndale, et al. 2014).

If the employee trusts management, she will repay the organisation by being engaged (Malinen, Wright & Cammock, 2013). However, there are difficulties concerning what managers can do in order to create and increase organisational engagement (Guest, 2015). Concurrently, it is acknowledged that with the use of communication, managers can make the employees involved in the organisation by sharing values and future prospects (Welch, 2011). It is further emphasised by George (2010) that when management try to enhance organisational engagement there is a tendency to not focus on the individual employees well being. However, as Saks (2006) states, organisations taking employees' needs into concern, will increase the level of engagement. Malinen, Wright and Cammock (2013) explains how an employee's perception about an organisation can be especially affected negatively during times of constant change and thus, affecting the place where work is conducted. This makes organisational engagement particularly important to investigate during a pandemic when employees are working from home.

Job engagement on the other hand focuses on the engagement towards the employee's specific job role (Saks, 2006). Employees looking forward to doing their job, indicating this by their behaviour at work, have job engagement (Farndale et al. 2014). More specific, if the employee is satisfied with the characteristics of the job it will result in job engagement (Saks, 2006). However, there are difficulties in knowing what specifically affects the level of job engagement (Guest, 2015). Saks (2019) argues that skill variety is the most important job characteristic to create job engagement, indicating that the job shall challenge the employee while simultaneously being fulfilling. An issue concerning job engagement however, is how to make it remain stable (Guest, 2015). Bakker and Demerouti (2008) argue the job role as important to facilitate employee engagement indicating how job engagement can be enhanced with changes in the work role that encourage development. According to Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010), the outcome of job engagement is an employee putting a lot of effort into the job and willing to lend a hand to other members of the organisation. The reason for this can be that the employee is fully invested in the job and therefore, does more than expected, even though it is not a part of the working tasks.

3.5 Positive and negative conditions of working from home

The great importance of employee engagement has been acknowledged in recent decades. However, the pandemic has given rise to an extended focus for researchers to investigate the positive and negative conditions of working from home and how this as a consequence has an impact on employee engagement (Kumar, 2021). According to Palumbo (2020), previous studies have shown negative as well as positive sides of working digitally from home. Working digitally from home has contributed to a wider extent of flexibility where the employee can combine work and home-related commitments simultaneously, which in turn has implied a greater work effort amongst employees and affected engagement positively. Argued as well is how home-based work tends to reduce exhaustion. On its contrary, working from home has also shown tendencies on an extensification of work with extended work related efforts causing a greater chance for exhaustion and fatigue. Fatigue as a consequence tends to further decrease the employees ability to achieve work-life balance (Palumbo, 2020)

On the one hand, Vnockova (2020) further explains how working digitally has facilitated efficient and rapid information sharing and an increased ability for employees to foster relationships with employees in different countries. Opportunities that have been of greater challenge before the pandemic (Caliguri et al. 2020). On the other hand, Vnockova (2020) explains how working digitally has contributed to great impediments and challenges that HR-managers have been forced to tackle. Caliguri et al. (2020) refer to these as increasing managerial demand for stretching working hours and a general expectation of employees being available in different time zones which in turns has resulted in an increasing health risk amongst employees in terms of anxiety and stress. In addition, working digitally has hindered individual identity creation which is crucial for being satisfied at work, as well as relationship-building with colleagues. Working from home has also challenged employees' ability to extend networks (Caliguri et al. 2020). Besides, Carnevale and Hatak (2020) emphasise loneliness as an effect of the changing working conditions as well as the difficulties in separating work and private life, which tend to cause exhaustion. Caliguri et al. (2020) further points out how these effects might prevent employees from gaining a shared understanding of organisational goals, values and norms as well as other internal tacit organisational knowledge. Hence, a lack of professional stimulation has ended up in directing employees into self-directed knowledge-seeking paths such as online training courses which aim to increase individual engagement (Caliguri et al. 2020).

As a result of the pandemic, HR has been forced to think differently regarding strategies securing high engagement. Kumar (2021) mentions the crucial importance of making the employee feel valued in the organisation. The organisation can do this by appreciating the employees efforts, commitment and loyalty towards the organisation. Besides, it is important to listen to the employee and take issues and concerns into consideration as well as give support and feedback. In addition, clarifying the company visions as well as keeping the employee stimulated by providing variation in the working-task is also an element that can be seen as creating engagement. Kumar (2021) means that if organisations are taking these elements into concern an organisation can ponder upon the level of employee engagement.

Previous literature has touched upon the importance of employee engagement as a key factor to secure performance and organisational success. Engagement in itself is an exchange process where the employee and the organisation, in this case the HR-managers, are dependent on each other to secure engagement creation. Due to changed working conditions, working remotely has reduced the physical meetings and thereby challenged the relationship between the employee and the HR-manager. Therefore, it is of high relevance to study this field further in order to contribute with knowledge about how engagement is created while working from home. Carnevale and Hatak (2020) clarifies how an employee sharing norms, values and beliefs with the company tends to have greater chances to be engaged than those who do not. However, since the new digital working environment seems to have contributed to conditions that prevent employee engagement to flourish (Caliguri et al. 2020: Carnevale & Hatak, 2020: Vnockova, 2020) there is great relevance to conduct further research in the field of employee engagement.

4. Empirical analysis

The following chapter will present the empirical data that has been collected through the semi-structured interviews. The organisational culture has always been deeply embedded in the company as well as a fundamental for how “things are done”. Since cooperation, unity and social activities was an essential part of the culture, working from home proved specifically challenging. Consequently, a few elements have been of greater importance for not only continuing engaging the employees but also, trying to remain the culture. Therefore, the Empirical Analysis starts with a shorter section about the organisational culture, laying a foundation for the respondents answers. The timeline below illustrates a pattern of subordinates and HR-managers' experiences from the start of the pandemic and the consecutively affects since then. The first theme Communication, present material about the sudden importance of individual check-ups and the current lack of casual conversations. The second theme, Relationships, represent the lack of physical interaction which has resulted in an increasing importance of interacting digitally with one's colleagues to maintain a high level of engagement. Even the challenge to adapt a work-life balance became over time something all our respondents could agree upon. These elements in turn have steered the way for our fourth and final theme: Shared liability? This theme concerns the confusion of who is responsible for engagement creation, the subordinate or the HR-manager? The purpose of the analysis is to interpret and make sense of the conducted interviews in order to answer our research question: *How do subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home?*

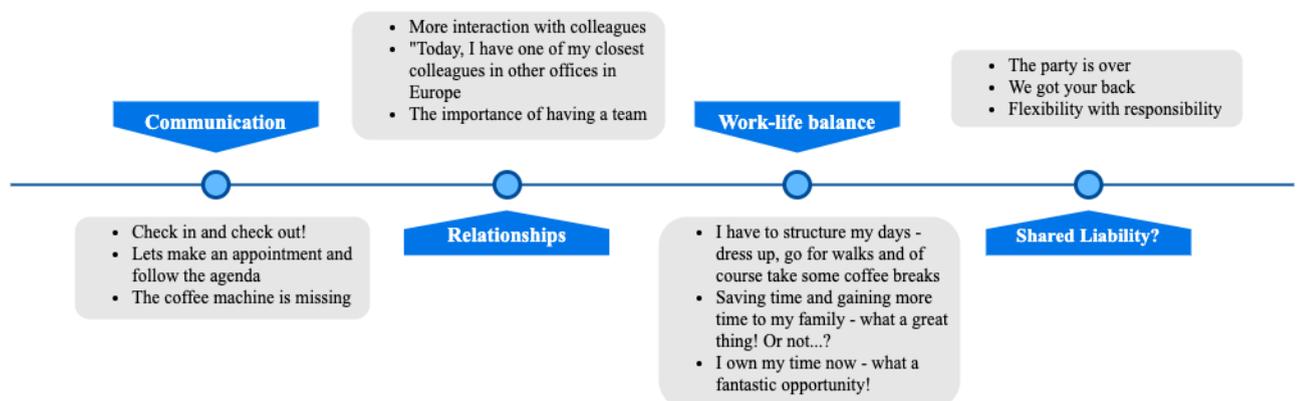


Table 3. Outline of the analysis.

4.1 The culture as key

The organisation is well known for its embedded culture and is argued as a challenge to remain the same since everyone works from home. HR-manager Barbara illustrate this in the comment below when we asked her what the greatest challenges have been in the process of start working from home:

“To maintain the culture we have. Our culture is so forceful, and the employees are the greatest part of it”

Barbara clearly argues for the strong culture the organisation possesses and how the employees are the culture. Sarah, another HR-manager, reinforces this challenge even further by saying:

“It has been hard to accept being forced to work from home. We have a nice atmosphere, there is always food in the fridge. So to keep that feeling together, even if we work digitally. Because this feeling is so connected to our office. It's like we are not connected in the same way now.”

As Sarah highlights, the office is also an important aspect of creating their strong culture and since they are not physically together, these feelings are not produced in the same way as before. Susan, one of the subordinates, further explains how events and activities, as a great part of their culture, does not exist to the same extent anymore and emphasises how the cultural feeling is not as great as it used to be. She says the following:

“Our organisation had a lot of events before the pandemic, we don't have that in the same way anymore. We used to have breakfast and afterworks and so on. All of that is gone but they are trying to do it more virtually. But that said, that kind of culture is not as big as it used to be.”

The culture that has been essential in the organisation is negatively affected by the transition of working from home since things are not as they used to be. At the same time Jennifer, one of the subordinates, points towards the work that has been done to maintain the strong culture:

“My organisation tries to still give us the culture we have and remain it stable even if we are not at the office.”

Even though the employees are working from home it is important for the organisation to continue working with the culture and thus adapt it into the virtual sphere. However, it is obvious how working from home, as a new working standard, has implied challenges for HR-management trying to maintain the strong cultural feeling. As a result of the culture being affected, various elements in the organisation have been emphasised as more important now since work is conducted from home. Communication is one of them which will be elaborated for below.

4.2 Communication

As a strive to maintain the strong culture the company possesses, communication was identified as crucial. The respondents could identify an increase of short meetings with attention paid to individual needs, that an appointment had to be made in order to be able to talk with colleagues in the organisation and how there is an agenda in every meeting. Also, how the casual conversations are gone as a result of the missing coffee machine at the office.

4.2.1 Check-in and check-out as result of seeing to the subordinates needs

As a result of working from home there is of greater importance with meetings where the managers have the possibility to check-in to see how things are going and then check-out again. The amount of these short meetings is not only a consequence of lack of physical interaction and thus, a decreasing level of communication but also, as a result of a greater importance to see to each subordinate's needs. This was mentioned by HR-manager Mary, when we asked about the biggest differences in HR-managements way of working now versus before the pandemics start:

“What we encourage is to have frequent check-ups with the subordinates. Daily as well as weekly. And talk about how it is to work from home and how engaged they feel. What creates engagement and what does not? One has to understand each individual and what she wants.”

Another HR-manager Linda, reinforces the importance of having frequent check-in and check-outs to see how each subordinate is doing. Linda formulates:

“We encourage the managers to have more frequent one to ones, that they have individual meetings with the employees to see how they are doing, how the work environment is, what can we do, how is the motivation, do they feel that they have goals they can work towards in order to develop and talk about career development.”

We can argue that it seems to be important to have frequent check-in and check-outs to be able to see to each individual's need and listen to what each subordinate requires to feel engaged. Mary, one of the HR-managers, emphasise how one reason for the frequent check-in and check-outs is the managers lack of insight as a result of not being physically together with the subordinate at the office:

“Mostly, it lays a lot of responsibility on the managers to check-in how the days of the employees look like. Are they having breaks, what does their day look like? I mean they don't have the same insights as they have when you are at the office.”

Sarah highlights this even further and points to the importance of being visible as a manager by saying:

“When we are at the office our employees can see that the managers are there and that they have not disappeared. We try to work more with one to one, and have constant feedback just because the engagement is not maximized.”

This excerpt shows how the HR-managers check-in with the subordinates since they need to be visible and communicate that they are there for them. It is also seen as a way to increase the level of engagement. This is further reinforced by the subordinate Jennifer who said the following when we asked her what conditions she concern as important while working from home:

“I would say to have transparent and open communication with my bosses. I want to have frequent check-ups of how one is feeling, the challenges ahead, if support is needed.”

Obviously it is important to have frequent check-ups with the manager where conversations about well being and eventual support is of primary focus. Furthermore, Sarah, points to the importance of seeing to each subordinate need:

“We constantly try to minimize the gap between what we offer our employees and what they need.”

Jennifer, one of the subordinates response by indicating how she feel more engaged now when management take her needs into concern to a greater extent:

“I think the engagement level is better in some ways because the organisation has been very good to see my needs and have been asking what I need to feel that I do develop and perform better within my working tasks”

Since work nowadays is conducted from home, there has been focus on subordinates' needs and feelings that in turn has positively affected engagement. When we asked how the HR-managers will continue to work if work will be conducted from home in the future, Mary said:

“But... Hm... Important is to continue supporting the subordinates through the managers and continuing talking to them. I mean, it is important to adapt a individual-based-leadership”

It seems important to keep encouraging the frequent check-ups with subordinates and see how they are doing. Moreover, it is of great significance to talk to the subordinate with respect to each subordinate's specific situation and need. However, the short meetings are a new daily basis activity different from before the pandemic. The lack of physical interaction combined with an increasing need to communicate has resulted in the amount of appointments where an agenda often guides the conversation between the subordinates and the HR-managers.

4.2.2 Let's make an appointment and follow the agenda

As explained, making appointments has become important due to lack of spontaneous meetings with colleagues while walking down the halls at the office. Therefore, subordinates actively have to reach out to colleagues they want to talk to and make an appointment.

Recognized as well, is how the meetings always follow an agenda where there is no room for spontaneous conversations. This way of interacting differs from the interaction at the office. Susan says:

“It has been more important to by yourself investigate whom you can ask. I mean, you do not go around in the office and can ask your colleagues spontaneously if someone can help me.”

Today, Susan has to figure out herself whom to contact for help rather than asking around until she finds a person with the information required to solve her working task. Having colleagues close around is important to redirect the question to the right person, something that is of greater challenge since the employees are not physically gathered. HR-manager Jessica comment the following, when we asked about the disadvantages of working from home:

“I cannot pass through someone at the office and ask something. As soon as I wonder about something I need to book a meeting so there are a lot of meetings during one day. It makes you very tired.”

Emphasised again is the inability to pass by someone’s desk to ask a question. Being required to always make an appointment in order to ask a question differs from when the employees worked together at the office when the meetings had more of a spontaneous character. However, making an appointment can be seen as positive as well. Sarah, HR-manager, explains why:

“I think it has been good for HR to have this structure because when we are at the office we usually get disrupted by someone who walks in and wants to ask something. Do you have 2 seconds? A constant disruption. So for our sake, I would say we have a healthier way of working now. It's a more planned way of working. If you want to say something, you book a meeting.”

Making an appointment is acknowledged to be an advantage for the HR-managers that usually used to be disturbed with questions while working since subordinates could drop by HR's seats. Taking a subordinates perspective into account, this can have a negative effect on engagement. Reflecting on the challenges of working from home, Karen says:

“For me personally, it's that I want to talk to people and I have to book a meeting for that. My role is also about seeing what problems we have and if I don't talk to anyone I don't know what problems we have, then I can just guess, so for me it's difficult to do my job kind of.”

As the excerpt above illustrates, having to make an appointment can result in difficulties in proceeding the working tasks since Karen's role requires to gain an insight to what is going on in the organisation. Which consequently is of greater challenge to figure out while working from home. Even though an appointment is made, there is still an agenda that needs to be followed in which directs the conversations into different subjects. This is mentioned by HR-manager Sarah:

“On the other hand, there are only meetings and no time for spontaneous talks. In the spontaneous, creativity grows so that is the biggest disadvantage. The social lack, it endangers creativity.”

The appointments with structure are one the one hand, seen as something positive since it increases focus on the specific working tasks. But on the other hand, following an agenda hinders spontaneous conversations which in turn might threaten creativity to flourish.

4.2.3 The coffee machine is missing

Having a cup of coffee, talking with colleagues is an important way of communicating with each other. The coffee machine is where the employees usually meet and talk and thus, getting an update on what is going on in the organisation. However, the coffee machine is no longer available. HR-manager Sarah said the following when she reflected upon engaging employees when they are working from home:

“I always used to stop and talk with my colleagues by the coffee machine before. And for instance say like ”hi, I see you are very stressed right now, is there anything you would like to talk about or can I help you?” We cannot do this now. And this also creates engagement when someone feels that someone sees you. That you get support.”

As expressed below, the coffee machine is a facilitator for creating engagement since it makes it possible to meet and talk to colleagues and get an understanding for how they are doing. Seeing the employees in real life makes it easier to identify how a colleague is doing and thereby, ask a question about it. However, this is not happening anymore which has a negative effect on employee engagement. Being seen by colleagues is therefore seen as an important aspect. Having conversations by the coffee machine is also important from a subordinates perspective. Karen, one of the subordinates, continues:

“There is a chance engagements get reduced but if you see each other everyday and talk about things to do or existing problems, how to solve them and not just schedule meetings, that takes place over lunch or by the coffee machine, that is worth quite a lot as casual chats.”

As indicated above, level of engagement is affected by not having casual conversations. Seeing each other at the office where it is possible to talk about different things and not solely work related matters is important. Since there always have to be appointed meetings the casual conversations by the coffee machine are gone, something that otherwise were valuable for engagement creations. The importance of having a coffee with colleagues was also mentioned by HR-manager Linda:

“And since the working environment is highly relevant now when we work as we do, when we sit in our homes, there are not these natural breaks when you get up for a coffee and meet someone in the kitchen to chit-chat with.”

As argued above, it is difficult to take breaks naturally while working from home. Natural breaks have been easier at the office since the coffee machine has facilitated physical meetings. Thus, having a casual conversation when drinking a coffee with colleagues seems important for the working environment, emphasising the important role the coffee machine has for the employee's well being. Besides, casual conversations were helpful while trying to

find someone providing assistance in a work related question. This was something Susan, one of the subordinates, talked about while asking how she has been affected while working from home:

“You are alone responsible to find something out compared to the spontaneous meeting over a coffee at the office when someone maybe says ”ask that person.” Now I have to figure out myself who to ask if I need help. You cannot ask out directly today.”

Casual conversations by the coffee machine is also important to get hold of people when one has work related questions. Thus, it is more difficult to get hold of colleagues when it is not possible to meet up for a coffee at the office. Moreover, relationships with colleagues have been affected by not being able to meet by the coffee machine. Barbara, one of the HR-managers continues:

“It's maybe stable or a bit worse but thanks to the fact that I have worked many years before because today I knew them all pretty well. I can imagine if someone were new. It would be a different situation if you hadn't had the chance to build a solid relationship. But no for sure it's not the same since you don't meet at the coffee machine today and laugh a bit.”

As acknowledged above, creating relationships seems to be of greater challenge while working from home. Having a coffee with colleagues is considered as something that can be fun and thus, only achieved at the office. Communicating online is different and makes it harder to create relationships. The importance of the coffee machine and having fun is also evident from the subordinate perspective. Elisabeth says the following:

“I am a social person so the disadvantage is to not be at the office and meet your colleagues and have this coffee talk because first, you don't get the chance to learn things about the organisation and second, you don't have these good times with colleagues. So that's the biggest disadvantage.”

As stated above, the coffee machine facilitates physical meetings and casual conversations. Chit-chat by the coffee machine is essential since it is where everyone gets to know tacit organisational knowledge as well as where the colleagues have a good time. What remains clear, is how the subordinates miss their colleagues as well as the physical interaction.

4.3 Relationships

Relationships to colleagues were expressed as something highly important to stay engaged while working from home. There has been an increase of interactions with colleagues, the global network has been expanded and the importance of having a team was pointed out. This will be further elaborated on below. But to start with, we want to show two quotes illustrating the two aspects of relationships to colleagues while working from home. The first one from the subordinate Jennifer:

“The social part, to physically interact with your colleagues, you can not get that while working from home”

The quote represents the overall feeling that almost all of the respondents pointed to during the interviews and indicates the clear difference in how one interacts with colleagues depending if you are physically together at the office or work from home. Interestingly however, was how relationships to colleagues also have grown. Jennifer continues:

“But when the world faces a crisis like this, people come together and connect and help each other. We have been brilliant to be there and support each other.”

The excerpt illustrates how working from home, on the other hand, and certainly with respect to the crisis, has created a strong connection amongst the employees.

4.3.1 More interaction with colleagues

Some of the interviewees indicated how their relations with colleagues within the organisation have become stronger since they started to work from home. Jennifer continues to describe the situation by saying:

“I think one have established another connection to each other since we always support and help each other now, and talk more. People are more humble in some way, more available”

This excerpt clearly shows that it is easier to interact with each other while working from home since another kind of connection is established. People are supportive and willing to

help each other. Jennifer continues by explaining how this way of helping each other has resulted in another kind of organisational culture. She says:

“Since it has been this crisis and people help each other out more we have also established a culture that did not exist before the pandemic where it's easier to beg for help”

As one can see, another type of culture has been created as a result of the crisis, which in turn makes it easier for employees to beg for help. Patricia, one of the subordinates fulfills this point by saying:

“You invest so much more time to check-in with each other”

Communication occurs more frequently within the organisation and as a result, relationships amongst colleagues seems to have grown to some extent. Not only do subordinates' relationships to each other seem to have grown stronger in terms of supportiveness, but also in terms of relationship to the managers. Karen expresses how the relationship to her manager has grown even stronger since she started to work from home, something she really appreciates:

“Present managers are very important for me, and that is something we have seen a lot here during the pandemic. I have such a great connection with my manager now”

This is confirmed by HR-manager Mary who emphasises HR-management's responsibility to check-in how the employees' days are going. She says:

“A lot of the responsibility for the managers today is to check-in how the employees day is”

One of the subordinates, Karen, further explains how relationships have been established as a result of a greater collaboration amongst the teams within the organisation. Something not identified before the pandemic started:

“Collaboration between different teams have become more visible and greater”

The quote shows how teams collaborate while working. Furthermore, Jennifer also highlights how relationships have been established to colleagues in other departments in the organisation since there seems to be curiosity to learn about other parts of the organisation as well as an extended willingness to interact with other employees:

“People are more willing to interact and generally more curious about other parts of the organisation”

This illustrates how home based work has opened up for new opportunities in terms of creating new relations with employees in other departments which has created a supportive mentality in the organisation. This as a result of individuals having a greater willingness to interact now then when they worked at the office.

4.3.2 “Today, I have one of my closest colleagues in other offices in Europe”

Having been able to expand one's network and digitally interact with employees globally was also one of the identified aspects throughout the interviews and can be illustrated by what Jennifer expresses while we asked how relationships to her colleagues looks like today:

“Today, I have one of my closest colleagues in the other offices in Europe”

The excerpt shows how relations to colleagues have been established globally as a result of working from home. Jennifer further expresses how this in turn, has created a company working across the borders and thus, created a feeling of being together as one big team instead of being several smaller teams established all over the world:

“Before we were divided into different teams around the work – The Stockholm team, the X team, the X team, and so on. Now we are like one big team and it doesn't matter where your office is located”

Drawing upon the quotes stated above, we can argue that relationships established with colleagues in other countries have created a feeling of being one great unity. Even Jessica, one of the HR-managers, acknowledges this by saying:

“Now when we are working, we do it globally which makes everything into one unit. When

we do culture activities for instance, earlier when we did that, we arranged it at the office in Stockholm but nowadays, we do it at other offices around the world. The culture has been globally based, so to speak”

This illustrates how working from home has resulted in working across different countries. When cultural initiatives are shared it is done globally and therefore, the culture has adapted more of global character and not only local.

4.3.3 The importance of having a team

Identified during the interviews was the great importance a team had for one's engagement as well as having great relationships with the team members. Karen, one of the subordinates, expressed this even further when she was questioned how engaged she is now while working from home, compared to before the pandemics started:

“I would say my engagement level is a bit lower than before (...) in this role I don't have so many colleagues that I work with on a daily basis”

This excerpt clearly illustrates a different side of what has been outlined earlier in this theme. Karen says that her level of engagement is not the same as it used to be due to an eventual lack of digital interaction with colleagues. Moreover, one can argue for the great importance of relationships to colleagues to feel engaged. Patricia, one of the subordinates, reinforces this by saying:

“Since you sit at home alone, there is more important than ever to have great relations to you colleagues, otherwise you lose all the social part”

The excerpt shows how relationships to one's colleagues have become more important as a consequence of working from home, especially since the employee sits home alone and will risk not gaining any social interaction whatsoever if these are not established. Karen further acknowledge this by emphasis the importance of having a team:

“You have to feel that you work as a team. You look to your teammates and feel loyalty towards them and that you want to perform, but when you sit alone I think a lot of that disappears and there is maybe not the same willingness to perform as before.”

Karen further indicates the increased importance of having a team and thereby, relationship to one's colleagues, to feel loyalty and be willing to perform. If there is a lack of interaction with the employees which has a negative effect of feelings of being a part of a team, that seems to affect the level of performance. However, one can argue that it seems to be of greater importance to be a part of a team to feel engaged now, compared to when everyone was at the office where they physically interacted. HR-manager Linda confirms this by stating:

“I think that engagement and motivation lies in the team feeling, there was a very strong team and association culture that’s not there today and that’s what the employees want and miss.”

Linda explains that the team feeling is not as strong as it was before and the feeling of being in a team is key to feeling engaged for the subordinates.

4.4 Work-life balance

The following section will present an analysis of what we could identify as a common issue amongst the subordinates after some months working from home. The challenge of separating private life and work life and thus achieving a work-life balance. It was emphasised as important to structure one's days, how saving time has been a positive aspect as well as the opportunity to own one's time. The excerpt below is expressed by Patricia, one of the subordinates, and illustrates the complexity of gaining a work-life balance and to know, what is work and what is private life? When we asked her how her day at home looks like, she formulated:

“How does a workday from home look like for me? Do we also mean what I do privately I almost said, but what I don’t do, yes I assume so... it comes together, that’s what is a bit tricky”

The quote shows the confusion of knowing what is working and private life since the office is both an office and a home. Mary, one of the HR-managers, further emphasises the struggle for the subordinates of separating these two:

“When you are sitting in front of the computer all the time and then your children suddenly come home from school and yes... what is private life and what is working life?”

Mary illustrates this struggle even further by mentioning when the children suddenly are coming home from school. Since the children come home to the home and office simultaneously, it gets even harder to draw a clear line between what is working life and private life. Jennifer, one of the subordinates, further point to the issue by stating:

“If something happens in my phone 20.00 pm it is still hard to not check the phone and see what is going on”

Elisabeth, another subordinate further describes:

“It is easier to work during lunch or in the evening because the line between working-life and private life is blurred. When we worked at the office I never started my computer when I came home, I didn't even bring it home. But after 5p.m today, it happens more often”

The excerpts clearly show the difficulties of finishing work at 5 p.m and how easy it is to exceed regular working hours since you are at home. While continuing asking Elisabeth about what she concerns as the greatest challenges of working from home she says without doubting:

“Set boundaries from when you shall work and when not, because the problem is when you work from home, even if you have had a tough day at work, you have had a tough day at home as well. So if I go for a walk, and then I come home, I do feel it can be frustrating to come home because it was frustrating at home. So the home and work is blurred”

The struggle of separating work and private life has been acknowledged for as well as the advantages and disadvantages. Consequently, a lot of the interviewees have pointed to the importance of having a clear structure while working from home.

4.4.1 I have to structure my days - dress up, go for small walks and of course take some coffee breaks

While asking Patricia, one of the subordinates, about her engagement now when she works from home she says:

“Some days are much easier for me not to feel engaged if I am honest, because there can be some days where for example, in my case with dogs, you sit in your go for a walking-clothes even during the first meeting (...) I guess, that you have to get up and make a real workday out of it and feel that you have an adequate workplace and so on”

Patricia points towards the importance of dressing in a way that makes one feel engaged and avoid sitting in lazy clothes while working. She also emphasises the importance of oneself making a real workday out of the day and therefore, we can identify a need for creating a working day at home as similar as possible to the one at the office. This argues for a strong need in order to feel engaged and perform. HR-manager Mary, further stresses the importance of gaining a structure while working from home since breaks do not occur in the natural way they did at the office:

“When we sit in our homes, there are not these natural breaks when you get up for a coffee and meet someone in the kitchen to chit-chat with or when you walk from one meeting room to another (...) So, when I notice that I start to lose concentration or it feels difficult to get started on a new work task, I leave and go to the toilet or take a glass of water, eat a fruit or put out my head outside the door to get some fresh air”

The excerpt shows how the home office does not facilitate taking breaks as the real office does. Therefore, it seems to be important to do it yourself. Furthermore, Linda, one of the subordinates describes how walking outside has become a new daily standard amongst her colleagues:

“I don't think I have found the right way yet but all my employees says that a walk outside before you start the day is important, and also to go out for a walk during lunch”

Jessica, one of the HR-managers, explains how a walk outside is of greater importance today since the subordinate otherwise risks becoming “screen-tired”. Preemptively, the HR-managers have begun to encourage subordinates to take breaks:

“We could see that our employees started to be more tired since they are sitting in front of the computer all the time. So then we created X. (...) A tool that only entails activities to encourage employees to take a break from the screen”.

This indicates a greater need for breaks while working from home, something the HR-managers have responded greatly to.

4.4.2 Saving time and gaining more time for my family. What a great thing! or not?

While asking the respondents how working from home affects their engagement, almost all of the subordinates responded how the time saved in the mornings and in the afternoons by not traveling back and forth to the office, were a condition affecting engagement positively.

Karen, one of the subordinates, explains this by saying:

“To work from home saves time. So that's an advantage for sure”

Even the subordinate Jennifer agreed upon this by saying:

“...and ofcourse to not be forced to go by train to work. I save so much time that I can use to my working-tasks instead”

Jennifer also points to the advantage saving time has given her which has resulted in the opportunity to spend more time on working tasks. Some of the subordinates having small children at home also pointed to the opportunity working from home has given them in terms of being a present parent as well as being able to create a stronger relationship with one's child. Jennifer is one of those parents and when we asked about her opinion regarding the flexibility ones are given while working from home, she said:

“To combine the private life with working life has made it easier for me. My relation to my

daughter has been better, and not having this bad consciousness that I am coming late to school when I shall pick her up. It's easier to arrange the days as you like.“

The quote indicates the great opportunity the blurred line between work and private life has given the employee. To be able to cherish her relationship to her daughter. An opportunity that was not as easy as before the pandemic started. To contrast, HR-manager Mary, explains how working from home has shown its darker sides:

“We see that some people really appreciate it. To gain more time for the family, to not be forced to travel everyday to work, save time and facilitate the day in general. But, there are also a lot of our employees who misses the office and thinks there is quite exhausting to work from home”

HR-manager Jennifer further refers to certain situations where this has been especially visible:

“We employ people from other countries that move to Stockholm and sit alone in their small apartments without their families. Not super funny... So it differs depending on the situation I would say”

From the quote, one can argue that to what extent engagement increases or decreases as a result of working from home, seems to depend to some extent on family conditions. Without a family or a partner, it seems to be quite lonely to work from home. As a consequence of the negative factor of working from home, HR-management seems to have tackled this by help of frequent check-ups with the subordinates to see how they are doing at home. Mary expresses this by stating:

“This is an extremely prioritized subject to talk about with the employees while we are having check-ups with them”

She continues...:

“We have had working environment-educations for our managers so they can support the subordinates in different hard situation that can occur within a home-office”

Elisabeth, one of the subordinates, further reinforces the work HR-managers has done in order to support subordinates and their different family conditions while working from home. But having a present family or partner, also seems to have its downsides:

“I sit in a big house for example where we can get away from each other and thanks for that...! I know others in our team who live in small apartments in town and can't get away from their partner or children when they work from home, which I know they find extremely frustrating. I know HR has worked a lot with this”

However, it is evident how subordinates' impressions of working from home differs due to home conditions such as a present family or a partner. Also, the support provided from the HR-managers. From this we can argue how it seems to be a current and necessary subject to talk about while working from home.

4.4.3 I own my time now - what a fantastic opportunity!

Almost all of the subordinates mentioned the wonderful opportunity to be able to own one's time while working from home. Patricia, one of the subordinates, expressed the following when we asked her about in what way working from home has affected her engagement:

“ I think it increases my engagement to feel that I own my time and my agenda more than I would have at the office.”

Another subordinate, Susan, described this even further by continuing saying:

“You can go to the gym during lunch as long as you do your work. And it is easier to manage the work now, since you are able to coordinate your day as you like”

The comment above shows the ease to manage your spare time while working from home, whether it concerns being at the gym during lunch or other activities. Besides, it points to the possibility to structure and coordinate the day as one likes. While asking Jennifer, one of the HR-managers, about how her working day looks like when she is working from home, she

says:

“I try to coordinate the meetings as a walk at talk sessions so I can go out for a walk while having meetings.”

Karen, one of the subordinates, illustrated the possibility to be able to own one's time accordingly:

“I try not to have meetings in the morning, I think that's quite nice, you can have Nyhetsmorgon on for thirty minutes or so and wake up a bit (...) But I have blocked a few parts of the day where the idea is that I can look through the mail and work more focused with things so maybe one longer and two shorter blocked parts of alone time and beyond that the day consists of a lot of meetings.”

This quote clearly shows the possibility to manage and coordinate the work. By coordinating the meetings to the later part of the day as well as coordinating blocks in the schedule gives her the possibility to dedicate some time for reading email or other activities. This represents a different way of working compared to a day at the office and seems to be an advantage for the subordinates. Jennifer, illustrates this even further when we asked if she wants to work from home even after the pandemic:

“I perceive that I do work better from home, I can be more focused and more productive and effective in contrast if I physically was at the office. Because it is easier to be disrupted there. The standard routine is that everyone is supposed to take a coffee at a certain time or everyone shall go to lunch... now! I mean, at home you decide by your own what suits your schedule”

Apparent is also how one can be more productive and gain more focus while working from home since you decide yourself over your time. Besides, Jennifer highlights the advantage of being alone so you don't get disrupted by other colleagues, which tend to occur more frequently at the office. But, seeing from an HR-managers perspective, Barbara says the following about to be able to own one's time:

“Freedom comes with responsibility, an old cliché, but if you want to have more freedom you need to take more responsibility for some parts as well”

As one can see from the quote above, responsibility comes with freedom. However, it seems like the HR-managers have experienced challenges with the freedom that comes with working from home. Mary, one of the HR-managers, points to lack of performance as a challenge of having subordinates working from home:

“It is a new situation which is hard to manage. If someone sits at home and does not perform, yes it is hard.”

And when Mary is questioned what she concern as the greatest challenges in the transition of having subordinates working from home she says:

“There are more questions regarding the home-office and challenges connected to it. For instance mental illness or someone who does not do their work properly because of children at home. It's a lot of problems that come with a home office because the managers do not have the same insight and control anymore”.

Mary points to managers lack of insight as a consequence of the challenges HR-managers are facing when employees are working from home. Besides, HR-manager Sarah expresses how they have dealt with mental illness amongst employees during the period of working from home. She explains it like this:

“We aim to spread information about how much support this organisation provides the employees. Both with respect to if some of our employees should get COVID-19 or if someone in their family should. And what we can support in terms of financial resources or if there is a table or a chair that someone need to avoid neck or back issues”

The excerpt shows the great support the organisation has been ready to provide the employees. However, one can argue that being able to own one's time as well as being able to coordinate the days as one like also seems to have some backdraws. Consequently, mental illness amongst subordinates seems to be a subject widely discussed now when work is conducted at home. However, HR-management seems to have taken a great responsibility in

order to support the subordinates. Linda, one of the HR-managers further explains their effort in trying to support the subordinates:

“They get wellness days from the organisation, they try to give back a bit, it's hard to work like this. Or if you have a hard time working from home we have gotten extra wellness days, paid days off around every sixth week”

Reading between the lines there is obvious that working from home has been a great challenge for some subordinates but by offering them support, HR-managers aim to show an understanding for the challenging situation the subordinates are in.

4.5 Shared liability?

As a result of working from home, questions concerning who is responsible for creating engagement have been raised. Thus, if there is one responsible actor or if it is a shared liability between the subordinates and the HR-managers. Evident however, is how the events and happenings that used to take place at the office are over, that HR has taken a very supportive role in the new work situation and that flexibility that has become prominent since working from home comes with responsibility, including the subordinates own responsibility to create engagement.

4.5.1 The party is over

In this organisation a lot of effort has been put into creating an unique working environment at the office. The aim has been to make it a fun place to work where the subordinates are provided different surprises in terms of foods and events to boost their engagement. Emphasised has also been the parties that have been arranged to engage the employees. Since the employees are working from home, the prospect of having the same events has been constrained by what is achievable in the virtual sphere which has put an end to the fun parties. Important however, is to continue work with these events. When we asked Sarah, one of the HR-managers, about her most important task during this transformation she said:

“Normally we offer smoothies, breakfast and lunches. It's a tech company that offers a lot to its employees. So we have tried to translate it into virtual. For instance a lesson over Teams on how to create really good drinks or a cooking-lesson on how to make burgers at home.”

The subordinates are used to receiving offers from the company when they are at the office and since the subordinates today sit at home, the HR-managers have tried to keep offering these things digitally. Patricia, one of the subordinates, says the following while talking about her level of engagement while working from home:

“HR have worked really hard to create initiatives online, both workouts and different competitions, we have gotten things sent home and that is overall fun.”

Acknowledged is how there has been a lot of effort, seen from the HR-managers perspective, to continue arranging activities such as workouts together online or other competitions. Even though the efforts in creating these events are appreciated from the subordinates point of view, Linda, one of the HR-managers points to the difficulties in creating these:

“We try to arrange events and happenings online. I understand that eventually it becomes a bit flat. We usually have events with food, or that we go out together and have a drink after work. I think that these things have been more difficult to arrange, but we are trying”

Creating fun events digitally has not been an easy task, but since it has been highly valued from a subordinates perspective, HR-management are still trying to create these. Jessica further explains how HR tries to see to each individuals need and not only to what can be done in a big group:

“We have an event plan that we have tried to adjust to meet their needs. To exemplify, this autumn, we could see that our employees started to be more tired since they are sitting in front of the computer all the time. So then we created a kit, a box including things that made the employees take a screen-brake.”

As identified above, having a plan for events coming up meanwhile seeing to each individual's need in the present work situation are a priority for HR. Furthermore, since the employees do not meet at the office it is important to make the subordinates feel they are a part of the company. Patricia, one of the subordinates, comments the following when we were talking about what makes her engaged:

“I think that it is really good to make each employee feel like a part of the company even if you sit spread out in different homes because what is clear is that you are not in that context at the office where everyone has the same nice breakfast. Everyone lives different lives and has their own worlds.”

As explained above, the organisation has an important role in making the subordinates feel as part of the company since the feeling that you are not part of it tends to increase when you are not working together at the office. The office context is therefore essential since it represents a place where the subordinates are given a lot of gifts in terms of breakfast and events. However, this is something HR-managements still aims to provide, even though it seems to not evoke the same positive feelings.

4.5.2 We got your back

As a result of working from home, HR-managers have created a lot of supportive functions for subordinates in order to be there for them in what can be described as a new and challenging working situation. They have got the subordinates' backs since they support them in different matters to make working from home easier. This can be seen through what HR-manager Linda says:

“When an employee needs support there are many employee assistance programs and rehabilitation instances. You can get help to coordinate your work life in contrast to the private life and talk to psychologists or therapists.”

As one can see, there is support for those who find working from home difficult. This support is targeted towards different situations such as receiving help with balancing work and private life or mental illness support. However, focus has not only been on the employee's health. HR-manager Barbara points out:

“Programs have been organised around financial security since some are struggling more than others... Each individual's economy gets affected differently during times of uncertainty. There have been a lot of large safety programs in financial security to increase the overall security.”

Financial support has also been given to make the subordinates feel secure while working from home. Jennifer, one of the subordinates, also tells about the financial support provided when someone gets COVID-19. She says the following:

“If you have a very exhausting situation at home, if someone should get COVID-19 in your family, whatever, then there are possibilities to take some extra days off to recover and I would say people within the organisation have been very effective in using this possibility.”

As seen in the quote above, the subordinates are given support to deal with what is happening in their private life in which the subordinates have been taking advantage of. Besides the support that has been given to the subordinates, support has been given to the managers. This is something Mary, one of the HR-managers argues for:

“We have recently launched a working-environment-training so we try to provide the managers with tools in order to support the subordinates and keep them updated within different fields. And also, within their leadership style and what happens within their teams. Is there someone who is feeling bad or someone that does not do their work?”

The training session is provided to the managers that in turn aim to support the subordinates in terms of well-being. The managers are also supported to be able to see what is going on in their team, if anyone is not doing well to exemplify. With support from HR, the managers can support the subordinates. The essential role the HR-managers possesses is mentioned by one of the subordinates, Jennifer:

“HR has done a great job during the pandemic. My colleagues are very aware that all employees shall be fine while working from home. They have done a lot to show that “hey, we are here for you”. You hear quite often from people in the company that HR has been extremely supportive”

The support given during this time has been well received from the subordinates and HR’s role has been crucial during this difficult situation where a lot of effort has been done in order to secure a good working environment at home for each employee. Sarah, one of the HR-managers explains this even further:

“We have financially helped employees with tables and chairs in order to facilitate a comfortable working environment.”

As we can identify above, financial support in terms of buying office equipment has also been provided. Something that for example Patricia, one of the subordinates, appreciates:

“Rewarding the employees has been taken seriously. And how you during such special circumstances as pandemic, work for a company taking care of its employees in a very humble and supportive way. And that is HR.”

Being supported is thereby seen as more important during challenging and uncertain times since it seems more significant, from a subordinates perspective, to not be taken for granted. As we have been able to identify, this is something the subordinates have appraised. However, this has evoked questions regarding who is responsible in creating engagement.

4.5.3 Flexibility with responsibility

Working from home has resulted in flexible working-days for the employees where the subordinates have the chance to visit the gym during lunch as well as put on a washing-machine between meetings. However, a lot of responsibility lies in this flexibility. Not only when it comes to performing the working tasks even though one works from home, but also in creating one's own engagement. This was something the HR-managers emphasised despite the fact that they create a lot of events and happenings meanwhile supporting the subordinates. When we asked Mary how the HR-managers has worked to engaged the subordinates during these times she said:

“One has to understand each individual and what she wants. Everyone interprets this so differently so try to understand each needs, but it's also up to each individual to be engaged in their daily work as well. It is not only the manager who shall come with the solution for this. It is a collaboration between the manager and the employee.”

As shown from the comment below, a collaboration between HR-managers and subordinates is to prefer to create engagement. A responsibility that not only should be put on the HR's

shoulders. What engages one subordinate does not have to engage another and therefore, it is important to understand each subordinate's different needs. This view is further reinforced by HR-manager Linda:

“I can't just sit in my chair and expect to get, get, get, and that it is someone else's responsibility to solve my engagement because engagement is individual and comes from inside. To get employees to understand the responsibility and the reliability you get when working from home is important.”

As illustrated above, the subordinate has a responsibility to engage herself, rather than only expect HR-management to. Furthermore, expectations of constantly receiving gifts, food and being part of funny events are not suitable. The subordinate and HR have an equal importance in the engagement creation process. Important however, has been to gain an understanding regarding this. HR-manager Barbara says:

“It has been more obvious that you have to put engagement and the responsibility for engagement on the employees themselves as well, we have tried to talk to the managers about how this can not be our responsibility. We and the other managers can not dance for them. They have to talk to them about how they can work with their own engagement and motivation.”

As seen above, HR-managers have made the managers aware that creating engagement, also shall be done by the subordinates themselves. Thereby, managers and subordinates are encouraged to communicate about engagement and how these two parts can create it together. As Barabar emphasises, freedom comes with responsibility while work is conducted from home:

“Freedom comes with responsibility, an old cliché, but if an employee wants more freedom, the employee needs to take more responsibility for some parts as well. Communicate what you need, do what you can for one's own engagement.”

The managers roles are of a different character when work is conducted from home. It is about supporting the subordinates to engage themselves and to make this process equal for both parties. Therefore, greater communication is required between these two. Taking the subordinates perspective into consideration, it is evident from all the subordinates interviewed how HR-management has an essential role for their engagement. To illustrate this, Susan mentions the following:

“When I think of HR I think about it as a people part that tries to secure a culture or a feeling in the organisation with focus on the softer parts, people parts. The entertainment and event part of our company together with HR takes an important role for me.”

As outlined, the HR-managers have a great function in the organisation with focus on the subordinates. Moreover, the events and entertainments are an essential part and there is nowhere throughout the interviews where the subordinates mention themselves responsible to create engagement. Rather the important role HR has in creating engagement.

4.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter the empirical material has been outlined. First, the organisation's strong culture has been presented as essential, where focus has been to create a funny atmosphere where gifts and events have been offered on a daily basis. However, maintaining this culture has been difficult working from home, something that has affected the way employee engagement is managed. Secondly, four themes were presented to make sense of how the subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement while working from home namely: Communication, Relationships, Work-life balance and Shared liability? As identified, HR-managers have more frequent meetings with the subordinates today with an overall focus on the individuals need to secure and engage employees. At the same time, the employees miss the coffee machine at the office as a lack of physical interaction. Also, maintaining relationships to one's colleagues is emphasised as important to stay engaged. Identified as well, were the difficulties in separating work and private life with some employees struggling more than others to achieve this balance. Lastly, a discrepancy could be identified regarding which of the two parts being responsible to create engagement. On the

one hand, HR-managers pointed to the subordinates' responsibility for the engagement creation process, and on the other, the subordinates expressed the great role HR management has got for their engagement.

5. Discussion

Having analysed the empirical material, we have been able to obtain an understanding of conditions making subordinates engaged while working from home and accordingly how the engagement creation process is managed. The identified conditions will be elaborated on by holding a reflexive discussion below. The themes discussed will be based on subordinates' mixed feeling of working from home and how this as a result has increased HR-managers obligation to act upon the individual's needs to remain engaged, illustrating the individual on center stage. Consequently, a discussion of the give and take situation between subordinates and HR-managers regarding who is responsible for creating engagement, will follow.

5.1 Mixed feelings of working from home

Overall, the empirical material showed upon mixed feelings of working from home amongst the subordinates. On the one hand, the possibility to coordinate the day as one like while being able to go to the gym during lunch had a positive impact on engagement but on the other hand, it was obvious how the subordinates missed to physically interact with their colleagues. Beardwell and Thompson (2017) describe how engagement is mostly developed through interaction with colleagues in the workplace. The importance of having a team was emphasised throughout the interviews, where the individuals could maintain and have a relation to the team members, something that affected their level of engagement positively. Ashforth and Mael (1989) further argues how an individual's social identity, which in turn positively correlates with engagement, is strongly affected to what extent the individual can identify herself with a group. According to Caliguri et al. (2020), working from home creates an obstacle towards this way of creating relationships with one's colleagues. This goes in line with the subordinates' expression of how the team feeling is less evident today compared to when they worked at the office. Thereby, one can argue the essential importance of being able to build relationships with colleagues, which depends on what extent the individual is able to identify herself with the team. This was something that seemed to be of greater challenge while working from home.

Simultaneously, Vnouckova (2020) points to the ability to be able to foster relationships with colleagues in other countries as a factor that has had a positive effect on employee engagement. This goes in line with what one of our respondents also concerned as something making her engaged since she pointed out how interactions with employees across the

borders has resulted in a culture that is not only locally based, but also globally based. Interestingly however, is how one subordinate, despite the lack of social interaction, has built relationships with colleagues in other countries and thus, seemed to have created a social identity globally instead. Furthermore, Carnevale & Hataks (2020) describes how loneliness is concerned as a negative effect of the changed working condition, which in turn has a negative effect on employee engagement. This is consistent with what the majority of our respondents said as the less engaging part of working from home. This can also be an answer to the frequently implemented meetings management coordinates since the HR-managers may try to decrease this feeling amongst the employees.

Strikingly evident from our study was the challenge of separating work and private life. Even Carnevale & Hatak (2020) confirm this as a challenge which tends to be confusing and cause exhaustion and stress. Some of our respondents indicated the challenges of quitting the day on regular working times and how they often worked during lunch or in the evenings. Just as Palumbo (2020) mentions, drawing upon the theory of social exchange, an extensification of work occurs as a consequence of a willingness to give back to the organisation as an appreciation of the flexible conditions the subordinates are offered while working from home. Taking the HR-managers perspective into consideration, mental well-being programs were concerned as a more frequent activity during the pandemic, and therefore we can argue how working from home and thereby, the challenge of separating working and private life, seems to have caused exhaustion amongst the subordinates. This also points to an underlying intensification and extensification of effort from the subordinate which can be explained from the social exchange process and thus, a willingness to give back. However, Caliguirri et al. (2020) mentions self-directed knowledge-seeking paths as one effect of not being sufficiently engaged while working from home. This finding is consistent with what appears in our study since one of our subordinates expressed how the employees sometimes are seeking connection with other departments in order to learn more about the organisation.

5.2 The individual is on centre stage

A majority of our respondents pointed to the remarkable increase of the frequent meetings they had with their managers. Drawing upon Cropanzano and Mitchell's (2005) theory that relationships are crucial to create engagement as they advance to create mutual commitments

among parties, something that not is developed over only one meeting, we can argue how the frequent meetings can be a result of a try to establish great relations to the subordinates and to secure high engagement. Another explanation for the constant meetings can be what Kurum (2021) mentions about the importance of listening to the employees' concerns and issues to secure an engaged employee. Something that the organisation seems to have focused a lot on.

Saks (2006) differentiate between job engagement and organisational engagement as two ways of being engaged. During the interviews, it remained clear how the subordinates obtained a greater level of engagement towards the organisation than engagement to their specific job roles. The frequent support the HR-managers has aimed to give the subordinates was clearly articulated both from the HR-managers and the subordinates themselves. This finding is consistent with Malinen, Wright & Cammock (2013) stating that if the subordinate trusts management, she will repay with organisational engagement. Therefore, one can argue how the subordinates might feel engaged towards the organisation since the HR-managers put a lot of effort in favour of the subordinates. The subordinates emphasised frequently how they have felt taken care of during this time. The overall impression is therefore, a positive view regarding what HR-managers have done which has affected organisational engagement positively.

Just like Welch (2011) describes, managers can increase organisational engagement by communicating with their employees. What we could identify from the interviews, was the increasing amount of meetings in combination with an overall focus to act upon the subordinates' needs. This has been highly appreciated by the subordinates and has affected their organisational engagement positively. Saks (2006) further describes how listening to the subordinates and acting upon their needs is a key to create engagement towards the organisation. Therefore, there might be a strategy from HR-management aiming to create engagement towards the organisation rather than towards their specific job roles. However, from an organisational perspective, Saks (2006): Farndale et al. (2014) argues the importance of having employee engagement both towards the job role and the organisation to secure an engaged employee, but since the respondents does not show any lack of engagement, we will take a critical standpoint towards this statement. The high level of engagement our respondents showed can further be argued by Farndale et al. (2014) explanation on how organisational engagement tends to engender positive emotions and loyalty towards the organisation, something that was strikingly evident during the interviews. By constantly

trying to act upon the subordinates' needs, one can question if the subordinate is the powerful player in this game? And does the powerful subordinate challenge the traditional hierarchical organisational structure where the managers are seen as the most powerful actor in the game?

An eventual overall focus from the company's perspective, aiming to create organisational engagement might also be explained as a result of what is mentioned in the literature review. According to Malinen, Wright & Cammock (2013), times of uncertainty are a period when the subordinates' perceptions of the company are extra sensitive and thus, affect the place where work is conducted. This can be an answer of why not only, we can glimpse a tiny decrease of engagement amongst the subordinates in the company but also, account for the support the HR-managers has provided during this period. The HR-managers have an important role in the seemingly creation of organisational engagement by adhering to the subordinates needs. The importance of taking the individuals needs into concern, has generated an emotional dimension in the frequent conversations between the subordinate and the HR-manager where conversations about how the subordinate are feeling has become a new standard subject to talk through. Thereby, the role of HR seems to have generated an additional purpose. Not only to manage the subordinate in terms of development and engagement but also, in terms of acting as a supportive person which almost can be similar to the character of a therapist. Is the "private-life-related" conversation a result of the nowadays blurred line between work and private life? On the contrary, it is also important to take Saks (2006) 's idea of the subordinates oneself responsible to stay engaged into consideration. Because just as our interviews indicate, subordinates also have a responsibility to engage themselves. Accordingly, this raises questions of who is responsible to engage the subordinate? Are we depicting a transformation of the role of HR as the subordinate's new therapeutic? However, one can dispute to what extent this is appreciated by the HR-managers since they try to return the responsibility to the subordinates.

5.3 A give and take situation

The interviews gave signals of the huge effort HR-managers have done in order to secure a high level of engagement amongst the subordinates. Molm (1994) describes how the theory of social exchange is based on the idea of reciprocal dependence between two parties where one part provides the other with something only that part obtains to give. In the organisation we could see how there has been a development of reciprocal dependence between the

HR-managers and the subordinates. Before the employees began to work from home, the relationship between the two parties was constructed with the HR-managers creating a lot of fun events and happenings in order to receive engagement from the subordinates. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), the social exchange relationship constructed between the two parties is developed over time, resulting in mutual commitment to reward reactions. Since work no longer is conducted at the office there is still of great importance to continue with the events and happenings by translating them to fit into the digital sphere. An explanation can be the mutual relationship that has been created and requires them to keep on giving what the subordinates want. Also important to recognise is Wiener (1982) explanation of how norms in an organisation directs towards standards to follow. The norm of having HR-managers working to engage the subordinates with funny events and support the subordinates, can be difficult to deviate from since it has become the standard and if this is broken, the same level of engagement from the subordinates will not be expected.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) further argues that social exchange relationships are based on the notion of a manager, taking individuals' needs into consideration to secure an engaged employee. This goes in line with the HR-managers realisation from this study, who expressed the great support they need to provide their subordinates with as a result of the new working constellation. Programs such as financial support as well as health security have aimed to keep securing a great working environment in the company. As identified throughout the interviews, the subordinates have appreciated the various initiatives taken by HR and emphasised their important role for engagement while working from home. This has increased the level of engagement among the subordinates, which goes in line with Oluwaseyi, Fawehinim and Yuslizas (2021) research, indicating that the social exchange process during times of uncertainty involves the providing of support. Indeed, at a first glance we can depict a give and take situation in the organisation where the HR-managers give the subordinates support and provide them with events and happenings while they gain engagement from the subordinates in a social exchange process. This clearly illustrates a relationship between the two parties which accordingly is based on mutual commitment.

The social exchange theory is based on Malinowski (1922) notion of reciprocal obligations where individuals create relationships with each other that will be ongoing since the giving of a gift triggers a strive of returning this to the giver. The coffee machine can be seen as a facilitator for social exchange relationships between the subordinates and the organisation.

The coffee machine makes it possible for the employees to have casual conversations with each other. This is a place where they can interact and socialize. Accordingly, we can identify how an exchange takes place since the interaction and conversations between the employees, facilitated by the coffee machine, leads to a high level of engagement. Hatch and Schoultz (1997) further argues how subordinate identities are affected by the organisational culture. The coffee machine is seen as essential for facilitating conversations and having a good time with one's colleagues. This in turn symbolises the organisational culture where emphasis lays on socializing and hanging around with the colleagues. This goes in line with Alvesson and Kärremans (2019) statement, that socialisation at the office and having conversations with colleagues easily turns out to become a norm, affecting how the subordinates are expected to act. This can explain why the coffee machine is frequently brought up as something the employees are missing. However, the coffee machine is a key symbol for the organisational culture as well as individuals' identities.

An anchoring event is described by Ballinger and Rockman (2010) as a social exchange where one part is relying on the other to reach a desired state. However, what is received from the other part might not always turn out as expected. The decision to prohibit the employees from continuing work at the office has forced the employees away from the coffee machine. The removal of the coffee machine can thus be seen as an anchoring event where the individuals who have been dependent on casual conversations with colleagues do not achieve what they used to. This follows the statement by Beardwell and Thompson (2017) indicating how engagement can be negatively affected as a consequence of lack of communication. Casual conversations by the coffee machine became a function that came to have a positive effect on engagement as well as a facilitator for establishing relationships with colleagues. Today, conversations with colleagues only occur when the employees make an appointment but then, there is an agenda that needs to be followed. The missing coffee machine has thus left a void in the organisation. Moreover, by a negative anchoring event, the receiving part will not act in a desired way from the receivers point of view (Ballinger and Rockman, 2010). Therefore, it could be argued how the importance of events and happenings is greater than ever to create engagement among the subordinates. At the same time, we are aware of Dulac et al. (2008) statement, indicating that if the subordinate has a positive view of the organisation before the anchoring event, the outcome does not have to be negative. However, the give and take situation that at first glance was clear, is starting to be disputed by the HR-managers.

As identified, a lot of flexibility comes with working from home. However, the HR-managers also emphasised how flexibility also comes with responsibility since the subordinate has a responsibility to engage herself. As described by Dulac et al. (2008), the social exchange relationship entails expectations of what to receive from the other part. If one part receives something that does not live up to the expectations of the other the outcome can be distrust. Drawing upon the crucial role HR possesses in creating employee engagement, a minimization of events and happenings can result in distrust from the subordinates point of view and be devastating for the organisation since this, according to Malinen, Wright and Cammock (2013) will affect engagement negatively. By stating the subordinate as responsible for engaging herself, the HR-managers seems to want to break the social exchange relationship that is currently taking place in the organisation. Nevertheless, this occurs in a period when it appears to be important with mutual relationships to maintain a high level of engagement among the subordinates. So far, we have not been able to depict indications of a subordinate striving to engage herself. As HR-management continues to provide the subordinates with what they seem to need to be engaged, the subordinates can be argued to be a powerful part in the exchange relationship. Consequently, HR-managers' expressions of returning the responsibility of engagement to the subordinates are not taken into action. But, if these words were taken into action one can ask to what extent the subordinates level of engagement would remain stable and if this in turn would decrease individual performance and thus hinder organisational success?

Just as Mauss (2002) describes, mutual commitment occurring in a social exchange relationship, comes with the notion that no gift is ever free. Therefore, if HR-managers want the subordinates to be engaged they have to bear in mind the importance of exchange processes. However, individual responsibility for engagement creation is something HR want to raise awareness of. But as Beardwell and Thompson (2017) states, if an exchange between the two parties does not exist, the same level of engagement cannot be expected. The complexity of the interplay between HR-managers and subordinates is thus acknowledged. The HR-managers indicate how there is no longer a give and take situation in the organisation, meanwhile they do still provide the subordinates with what they need to feel engaged. Evidently, this points towards the powerful subordinates that are in charge of the give and take situation.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of subordinates as well as HR-managers perceptions regarding employee engagement while working from home. Moreover, to contribute with insight and knowledge of how to engage subordinates while working from home in the future. Therefore, this chapter will summarise the empirical findings and theoretical contributions. In addition, the concept of interactive engagement will be presented. Lastly, the limitations of this study are addressed together with suggestions for future research as well as practical implications.

6.1 Empirical findings

Our first finding shows how there is a quite high level of engagement amongst the subordinates but even though there is, the level seems to have decreased compared to the level of engagement before the pandemic. Many of our respondents pointed to the positive opportunity to be able to coordinate the day in terms of going to the gym during lunch, be able to socialise with family-members as well as save time of transportation, as conditions that had a positive affect on their engagement. However, the lack of physical interaction with colleagues could be identified as an explanation of the tiny decline of employee engagement today compared to when work was conducted at the office. Identified as well, was how employee engagement seemed to be more directed towards the organisation than to each subordinate's specific job roles.

Our second finding indicated the importance of being able to separate work and private life as these lives today are blurred. A majority of the subordinates expressed the importance of taking lunches, breaks and shutting down the computer at 5pm as they would do a regular working day at the office. According to the HR-managers, this was a highly prioritised subject that was often spoken about during the digital meetings with subordinates. The HR-managers also highlighted the support provided to the subordinates in order to help them separate work and private life, and thus facilitate a higher level of engagement.

Our third finding illustrates HR-managers importance of seeing to each subordinate's needs and acting upon it. It was evident how the amount of meetings had increased significantly since the pandemic started where one of the reasons seemed to be the increasing need for management to meet individual needs. Identified as well, was the support HR-management

provided the subordinates with in terms of well-being programs, financial support as well as events. However, it seems to be of greater relevance to take individuals' needs and concerns into consideration while the subordinates are working from home.

Our fourth and final empirical finding concerned questions regarding the responsible party for creating engagement. Recognised were the two different views regarding this. The HR-managers were inherent in the belief how the subordinates themselves should be more responsible to engage themselves while working from home. Simultaneously, subordinates emphasised the important role HR had in engaging them. Thus, we can depict inconsistencies in who the responsible part is. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words, and in the current situation the HR-managers talked about reducing their responsibility for engagement creation. However, they continued to implement digital events as well as support functions to meet the subordinates' needs, which was highly appreciated. Moreover, the powerful subordinates hinder HR-management from reducing their responsibility in creating a high level of engagement in the organisation.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

As our problematization and introduction clearly shows, employee engagement has not only gained little attention with respect to the specific context in which employees navigate in but also, not been made with the purpose of making sense of both subordinates and HR-managers stories (Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2007). In addition, studies made within the field of employee engagement have adapted a quantitative approach so far (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009; Schaufeli, 2012). By investigating employee engagement in a context when employees are working from home while adapting a qualitative approach, we have been able to gain a nuanced understanding of what engages the home working employee and how HR-managers operate in the field. In addition, this has been investigated by taking both subordinates and HR-managers stories into consideration. Therefore, this thesis has been conducted with the purpose to close this gap.

Our thesis contributes to the existing literature on social exchange theory. As described by Molm (1994), social exchange theory is founded on relationships based on reciprocal dependence, where one part provides the other with something that is highly valued and that solely that part obtains to give. We could see how there was an established social exchange

relationship between the HR-managers and the subordinates, where the exchange process involved events and support for receiving engagement. Interestingly however, was how HR-managers expressed the importance of subordinates themselves being responsible for their engagement, something that did not match the subordinate's view of HR-managers as essential for their engagement creation. Thus, we could see intentions from the HR-managers to breach the social exchange relationship. However, they continued providing the subordinates with factors that engaged them. This indicates the power the subordinate possesses, something previous literature on social exchange theory do not consider. Therefore, it seems difficult to break the reciprocal relationship when the other part is powerful and thus controls the relationship that according to Malinowski (1922) is ongoing once fostered. This study points to the difficulties of not giving the other powerful part what it wants to create engagement during changed circumstances of work.

6.2.1 Introducing interactive engagement

By combining the concept of employee engagement and interactive motivation, we propose a new concept namely Interactive Engagement. Not only could we depict the social exchange illustrating the relationships between HR-managers and subordinates, but also account for subordinates' significant connection to norms and identities as a result of the level of engagement. By combining the two concepts, we are fully able to make sense of the engagement creation process by gaining a more thorough understanding for the conditions affecting the level of engagement. In addition, this concept provides an understanding of an exchange taking place by emphasizing, not only subordinates and HR-managers' interplay but also their perceptions regarding norms and identities.

6.3 Limitations

This thesis is based on empirical material collected through interviews within a financial technological company. The company is known for having a strong organisational culture which characterises them. Recognised during our interviews was how HR-management provided a lot of things for their subordinates in order to maintain this cultural feeling and thus a high level of engagement. However, we are made aware of the strong culture the organisation possesses in which steers the way for standards and routines contributing to certain actions. This implies how the result of a similar study in a different industry could be

different. Despite being aware of this limitation we believe that this study provides an incentive for future research in various industries.

Our research method contained a total of ten interviews of which five were with subordinates and five with HR-managers, something that from a critical perspective can be viewed upon as a small sample and thus a limitation to this study. An increased number of respondents could have provided more insight of how subordinates and HR-managers experience and manage employee engagement. Yet, we argue for the knowledge provided from this study since a coherence could be depicted throughout the respondents answers. Therefore, we do not regard the number of respondents as something that withheld our ability to provide for an accurate view of employee engagement in this organisation.

Another limitation is that all of the interviews, as a result of the current pandemic, were conducted through online communication platforms. However, we do not consider this as something that hindered the respondents from talking openly about their new work situation and engagement during this time. Rather, having the interviews taking place on a digital platform mirrored their current way of interacting in the organisation.

6.4 Future research

The past year has forced companies to do radical organisational changes to avoid the spread of the virus, where working from home has become a new daily standard for employees around the world. Thus, employee engagement is something that has gained extended attention. Even though the pandemic has been regarded as an exceptional state as well as a temporary one, a lot of speculation is currently going on regarding how the new working situation will turn out to be when the pandemic is over. The future is unpredictable and we can not be completely sure about to what extent organisations will continue to work from home. Therefore, we can only speculate. But as far as we are concerned, modern companies will not force their employees to physically be present at the office, but maybe half of the week. Therefore, an eventual future working solution can be working from home half of the week while the other half is conducted at the office. Interestingly however, would therefore be to investigate how subordinates as well as HR-management in such a constellation would experience and manage employee engagement. Another speculation can be that companies

will continue to work full-time remotely even after the pandemic. Thus, looking one year ahead it would be interesting to investigate to what extent our findings have become of less or greater importance. Has the responsibility for HR-managers of keeping the employee engaged increased or has the employees responsibility to engage herself grown even greater as a result of a wider physical distance to management? This becomes especially interesting since we already now can depict an overall expectation of the HR-managers having the main responsibility to engage employees. Finally, the concept of interactive engagement would be interesting to investigate, especially if we assume working from home as a continuing standard way of working.

6.5 Practical implications

As mentioned throughout the thesis, employee engagement is crucial for employee performance which in turn, has a great impact on organisational success. So, having arrived at the final section of this thesis, we want to emphasise the practical implication we think our study can contribute with. Firstly, we believe that our findings can be valuable for employees that will continue to work from home even after the pandemic, either part time or full time. Even though we are fully aware of each individual's different needs in order to feel engaged, we hope that other employees around the globe can take inspiration and be provided with tools in order to stay engaged while working from home. In addition, we hope the HR-managers' thoughts and opinions regarding the subject can be of importance, both from a subordinates point of view but also from the HR-managers. This will not only steer the way to a happy employee willing to perform, but also contribute to organisational success. Secondly, we suggest this study of value for present and future HR-managers in order to enhance the understanding of employees' needs and thus be prepared to act upon them, even though we are well concerned with the individuals' different needs, our knowledge contribution can act as a stepping stone. Consequently, this might facilitate HR-management operations regarding employee engagement. Thirdly and lastly, the results of this study can be of support for investors as well as stakeholders in order to gain an understanding of conditions that are concerned as important for employee engagement, a key crucial for organisational performance and thereby, organisational success.

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Appendix A - interview guide for HR-managers

General questions about the role today

What does a day look like for you?

What are your primary working tasks? Give example

What is the highlight of your week? Is there something that you look more or less forward to?

What would you say has been your most important task since all employees started to work from home?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

How valuable are your role for your company and why?

Would you say your role has become more valuable as a result of working from home?

What is your experience of what the employees think about working from home?

Would you like to work from home after the pandemic? Why? Why not?

Employee engagement

Have you experienced any difference in employee engagement since you started to work from home?

Do you experience any differences in level of engagement to the specific employee role or to the organisation as whole?

In what way have you worked to engage employees during the pandemic?

Are there any differences now vs. before the pandemic?

Based on your own experiences, do you find it harder or easier to engage employees during the pandemic? Why and why not?

What would you say engage your employees?

What are the biggest differences in terms of HR tasks now vs. before the pandemic?

How do you see your relations to your employees today vs. before the pandemic?

What have been the greatest challenges while engaging and managing employees while they are working from home?

How have you worked to tackle them?

What have you learnt in terms of engaging employees who work from home?

Round up

What do you think the future looks like for HR when it comes to managing employees?

How will engagement related tasks turn out to be in the future if we assume that home based working will continue?

Appendix B - interview guide for subordinates

General questions about the work role today

What does a day look like for you?

What are your primary working tasks? Give example

Have you been affected by working from home? In what ways?

In which way have your level of engagement been affected as a result of working remotely?

Do you enjoy your work? In what way does it create value for you?

What factors have been important for you to feel engaged now while working from home?

What are the advantages of working from home?

What are the disadvantages of working from home?

Would you like to work from home after the pandemic as well? Why? Why not?

Employee Engagement

What do you think about your level of engagement today vs before the pandemic?

Are there any differences in engagement towards your role and daily working tasks and towards the organisation as whole?

What would you say about the level of engagement today vs. before the pandemic amongst your employees?

What role would you say HR has when it comes to engaging employees?

What are the greatest differences today in the daily work in the organisation vs. before the pandemic?

How would you say your relationship to your colleagues affects your engagement?

How is your relation now to your colleagues vs. before the pandemic?

What do you think about the “freedom” that one are given while working from home, and how does that impact your engagement?

Are there some aspects that you would say are more important today, as a result of working from home, in terms of engagement?

What have been some great challenges while working from home?

What have you done to tackle them?

What is your main take-away from this year?

Round up

What do you think the future looks like for HR managers when it comes to managing people?

What will the future for employee engagement look like in the future if we continue to work digitally?