



**SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT**

Master's Program in Managing People,
Knowledge & Change

“With great freedom comes great responsibility”

A Qualitative Study of Managers' and Their Respective Employees' Experiences of Mandatory Remote Work and Relationships in this Work Setting

By

Anna Rebeka Dinnyes & Siri McGarvey

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Supervisor: Monika Müller
Examiner: Stefan Sveningsson



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Anna Rebeka Dinnyes & Siri McGarvey

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Abstract

Title	“With Great Freedom Comes Great Responsibility”: A Qualitative Study of Managers’ and Their Respective Employees’ Experiences of Mandatory Remote Work and Relationships in this Work Setting
Authors	Anna Rebeka Dinnyes & Siri McGarvey
Supervisor	Monika Müller, Lund University, Sweden
Examiner	Stefan Sveningsson, Lund University, Sweden
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Purpose	The purpose of our master’s thesis is to fill our identified research gaps about remote work to some extent. We aim to research individuals’ experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting.
Methodology	We conducted 9 qualitative semi-structured interviews and applied a thematic analysis method in order to make sense of our empirical material. Moreover we grounded our study in an abductive research approach and an interpretative tradition of the symbolic interactionism.
Theoretical Perspectives	To analyze relationships in the mandatory remote work setting, we applied the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership by Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017).
Contributions	Our study mainly contributes to the remote work literature by investigating experiences of the mandatory remote work setting. Moreover we also contribute to the e-leadership by applying the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership in order to investigate the experiences of relationships in mandatory remote work.
Keywords	Mandatory Work for Home (MWFH), Remote Work, E-leadership, Reflexive leadership, Remote Communication

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1. Introduction

“With great freedom comes great responsibility” - Mandatory remote work is the new black in the business world, however it does come with a price. This work setting created a newfound freedom for employees in how to structure and conduct their own work, however this also means that they have more responsibility and decision-making power which is something organizations and leaders should take into consideration.

1.1 Background and motivation

The Corona-pandemic that emerged in 2020 has had a great impact on the world in different ways. Social distancing, travel bans, and various restrictions became the new norm for many individuals. This is something numerous organizations had to adapt to, and therefore implemented mandatory remote work for their employees (Savić, 2020; Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020). Since they were forced to work from home, an increasing number of individuals have experienced mandatory remote work (International Labour Organization, 2020). This resulted in employees having no choice but to adapt to this new work setting which impacted their lives greatly (Savić, 2020). Currently, when writing this master’s thesis, the mandatory remote work setting has been implemented in organizations for over a year and will continue for an indefinite time. Moreover, since remote work is expected to continue after the pandemic to some extent (Savić, 2020; Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020), more research is needed about this topic.

When investigating the literature on remote work, we discovered that the research about it was scarce (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017), mainly conducted with quantitative research methods (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Fønner & Roloff, 2010; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Kłopotek, 2017; Delanoëije & Verbruggen, 2019; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Nedelcu, 2020), and focusing equally on the opportunities and challenges of this work setting (see Table 1). We found this equal focus in the research before the pandemic unexpected, since it did not fully go in line with our own experiences of the mandatory remote work setting that included more challenges. Nevertheless, when looking into studies about remote work that was conducted after the start of the pandemic, we found a

shift in the research. After the start of the pandemic, the work setting became more mandatory and the studies have an increased focus on the challenges of remote work (Savić, 2020; Daraba, Wirawan, Salam & Faisal, 2021; Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen & Huber, 2021). Moreover, the mandatory aspect of remote work has generated new challenges for employees in adapting and switching to this new work setting (Savić, 2020, p. 104). These new challenges have remained relatively unexplored since the concept of Mandatory Work From Home (MWFH) arose approximately a year ago (Savić, 2020; Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen & Huber, 2021). Therefore, more research is needed that takes the mandatory aspect and its new challenges into consideration.

The challenges and opportunities that we found in the previous research about remote work are mostly grounded in quantitative research methods (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Kłopotek, 2017; Delanoëje & Verbruggen, 2019; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Nedelcu, 2020). Moreover, we only found one article that focuses on the employees' experiences of mandatory remote work (Gupta & Pathak, 2018). Therefore, in-depth studies that focus on how individuals experience this work setting are scarce. Furthermore, there is a need to further explore how individuals' circumstances affect their experiences of mandatory remote work with qualitative research methods.

Something that characterizes remote work is the communication which is conducted through information communication technology (ICTs) such as phone calls and video meetings (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020). Previous research about communication in remote work has found that ICTs cannot fully substitute face-to-face communication, the information sharing process gets hindered, and that the quality of the communication is dependent of the ICTs skills and utilization (Outvorst, Visker & De Waal, 2017; Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy & Ready, 2020; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016; Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019; Gupta & Pathak, 2018; Darics, 2020). Therefore, the research about communication in remote work is largely focused on the challenges.

Another topic that is connected to remote work is e-leadership. When remote work became mandatory in organizations it meant that leader-follower relationships also had to be developed and maintained remotely (Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen & Huber, 2021). Therefore, a relational

leadership perspective on the mandatory remote work setting could provide new insights into how leader-follower relationships are affected. When looking at the research about e-leadership, we found that it is mostly focusing on the challenges rather than the opportunities, and that it mostly focuses on leadership styles and traits rather than the leader-follower relationship (Horner-Long & Schoenberg, 2002; Hambley, O'Neill & Kline, 2007; Wang, Liu, Lee & Chen, 2018; Sullivan, Lungeanu, Dechurch & Contractor, 2015; Sousa & Rocha, 2019; Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim & McCarthy, 2019). Consequently, there is a need for more studies about e-leadership that takes both challenges and opportunities into consideration simultaneously, and focus on leader-follower relationships in order to get a better understanding of how employees experience relationships in the mandatory remote work setting.

Our motivation for writing this master's thesis sparked from our own experiences, since we also experienced mandatory remote work to some extent during our Master's Program and while writing this thesis. These experiences resembled our interviewees' experiences, which helped us in relating to their feelings and emotions and furthermore motivated us to find interesting themes in remote work to discuss from the new mandatory angle.

1.2 Research aim and question

The purpose of our master's thesis is to fill our identified research gaps about remote work to some extent. We aim to research individuals' experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting by conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews, applying a thematic analysis method, an abductive approach, and an interpretative tradition. Moreover, in order to further analyze experiences of relationships in the mandatory remote work setting, we apply the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership when investigating leader-follower relationships.

In order to explore mandatory remote work and e-leadership we created this research question that guided us throughout the master's thesis;

How do managers and their respective employees experience mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting?

1.3 Research outline

This research outline provides an overview of the structure and content of the different chapters in our master's thesis. Chapter 2 contains our literature review of remote work, communication and e-leadership. This chapter includes studies that will be applied in our discussion (Chapter 5). Chapter 3 contains the methodology of our master's thesis, which consists of the philosophical grounding, research approach, organizational context, data collection, data analysis, reflexivity, research ethics, limitations, and critique. This chapter shows how we conducted our study, why we chose the specific approaches and methods, and includes a critical discussion about the limitations of our master's thesis. Chapter 4 contains our empirical findings and thematic analysis of our collected data. This includes our main themes; Employees' experiences of switching to the mandatory remote work setting, Challenges in connecting & collaboration, and Shift in power and leadership preferences. Chapter 5 contains a discussion about our empirical findings in relation to the studies that were presented in the literature review (Chapter 2). Chapter 6 contains our conclusions from this study, practical implications and future research possibilities of mandatory remote work.

2. Literature review

In this chapter, we elaborate on relevant studies for our chosen topic of remote work. The first part contains research about remote work before the pandemic, which includes studies about communication and leader-follower relationships in remote work. The second part and final part contains a summary of our literature review, which includes the various research gaps we aim to contribute to with this master's thesis.

2.1 Remote work

2.1.1 Remote work before the pandemic

Digitalization was an important step in the globalization process which generated many opportunities for organizations (Dicken, 2015, p. 80-82). This gave rise to *information and communication technologies (ICTs)* such as telephones and video conferencing (Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019, p. 92). These ICTs enabled employees to communicate with their colleagues and have digital face-to-face meetings from a distance. Consequently, employees became less bound to a specific geographical place and could conduct their work anywhere and anytime (Dicken, 2015, p. 80-82). This phenomenon is called *remote work*, but is also referred to as teleworking, working from home (WFH), working in virtual teams, and virtual work. In our master's thesis, we apply this definition of remote work; "... a flexible working method that is not limited by time, location, type of communication technology, and the use of information." (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020, p. 1).

Remote work was a more voluntary mode of working before the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020 (Daraba, Wirawan, Salam & Faisal, 2021, p. 13). Before the pandemic, an increasing number of organizations realized the advantages of remote work, and how it could potentially lead to competitive advantages in global markets. The organizations could for instance recruit people from all over the world, not be constrained by the domestic labor market, and deepen their organizational capabilities and strengths (McCann & Kohntopp, 2019, p. 26). Another advantage of implementing remote work is that organizations were able to attract more talented employees with their flexible working possibilities (Morgan, 2004, p. 349). Consequently, the remote work setting increased in organizations before the pandemic and became something

that was implemented to gain competitive advantages. However, even though remote work was generally increasing in organizations before the pandemic, the research about it is still scarce (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017).

Research about remote work before the pandemic focuses on both its challenges and opportunities. Moreover, the majority of the studies are conducted with quantitative research methods, and aim to find general challenges and opportunities rather than capturing in-depth individual experiences (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Kłopotek, 2017; Delanoëije & Verbruggen, 2019; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Nedelcu, 2020). Furthermore, remote work is not suitable for everyone due to personal circumstances (Pyöriä, 2011; Gupta & Pathak, 2018). Moreover, when thoroughly investigating the remote work literature, we found that the research about individuals' experiences of remote work is scarce. We only found one study that focuses on experiences which is a qualitative study by Gupta and Pathak (2018) who identified significant motivators and skills for virtual team members and concluded that more qualitative research about experiences is needed. Grounded in this, more in-depth qualitative research is needed that focuses on individuals' perspective on and experiences of remote work.

Some of the key challenges we found in research about remote work before the pandemic are; *Increased Professional and Social Isolation, Problematic Work-Life Balance, Decreased Job Performance, Career Development and Visibility, and Increased Negative Emotions* (see Table 1). Regarding increased professional and social isolation, previous studies have found that both professional and social isolation hinders employees' professional development and job performance (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Pyöriä, 2011; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008). Moreover, the social isolation can affect the information sharing and relationship building negatively due to the lack of face-to-face communication (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Pyöriä, 2011; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016). Previous research about problematic work-life balance in a remote work setting, have found that the balance is affected by the individual's volition together with the perceived work pressure and home pressure (Delanoëije & Verbruggen, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, Fedáková and Ištoňová (2017, p. 75) found that family life might interrupt employees' work processes at home and that insufficient living space could affect the work-life balance negatively. Previous studies about decreased job performance, career development and visibility suggest that being

less visible in the office when working remotely can negatively affect the measurement of employees' performance or willingness to perform, which in turn negatively affects their career advancement (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012, p. 462). Regarding increased negative emotions, research has found that the remote work setting can evoke a feeling of helplessness if the employees have difficulties in getting in contact with colleagues or solving emerging problems (Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016, p. 36). Moreover, if the employees do not succeed with the work tasks as well as they did in the office setting, it is possible that the employees feel a gradual demotivation in the remote work setting (Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016, p. 36).

Some of the key opportunities we found in research about remote work before the pandemic are; *Improved Work-Life Balance, Increased Job Performance, Increased Job Satisfaction, and Opportunity of Flexible Working Hours* (see Table 1). Previous studies about the increased work-life balance found that employees are more flexible to organize their working time with their family or private life better (Morgan, 2004; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016; Fedáková and Ištoňová, 2017). Regarding increased job performance, studies have found that employees have increased their work productivity in the remote work setting (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015). Moreover, Vega, Anderson and Kaplan (2015, p. 313) found that employees improved their execution of creative work tasks when working remotely. Previous research about increased job satisfaction found that employees generally were satisfied with work when working remotely (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019). Moreover, Nedelcu (2020, p. 10) found that employees get more autonomous when working remotely which increases their sense of value for the organization and thus results in a higher job satisfaction. Regarding the opportunity of flexible working hours, Nedelcu (2020, p. 10) further explains that being able to work anywhere and anytime can increase the quality of employees' personal life, and therefore increase positive emotions.

Key Challenges in Remote Work (Before the Pandemic)	Article	Key Opportunities in Remote Work (Before the Pandemic)	Articles
Increased Professional and Social Isolation	Cooper & Kurland (2002); Pyöriä (2011); Golden, Veiga & Dino (2008); Maruyama & Tietze (2012); Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016)	Improved Work-Life Balance	Morgan (2004); Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton (2006); Maruyama & Tietze (2012); Fedáková & Ištoňová (2017); Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016)
Problematic Work-Life Balance	Fedáková & Ištoňová (2007); Delanoëje & Verbruggen (2019);	Increased Job Performance	Vega, Anderson & Kaplan (2015); Morgan (2004); Gajendran & Harrison (2007); Maruyama & Tietze (2012);
Decreased Job Performance, Career Development and Visibility	Maruyama & Tietze (2012) See also: Golden, Veiga & Dino (2008); Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016)	Increased Job Satisfaction	Gajendran & Harrison (2007); Fonner & Roloff (2010); Vega, Anderson & Kaplan (2015); Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė (2019); Nedelcu (2020)
Increased Negative Emotions	Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016)	Opportunity of Flexible Working Hours	Nedelcu (2020)

Table 1: Key Challenges & Opportunities in Remote Work (own work)

2.1.2 E-leadership before the pandemic

The increased remote work setting in organizations led to leadership being practiced in a new context. Avolio, Kahai and Dodge (2000, p. 617) emphasize that the interaction with technology is an important aspect of leadership in a remote work setting. To capture this aspect of interaction with technology, they named this concept e-leadership. The definition of this concept has been updated in a more previous article, where Avolio, Sosik, Kahai and Baker (2014) define e-leadership as “a social influence process embedded in both proximal and distal contexts mediated by AIT that can produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance” (p. 107). Our master’s thesis is grounded in this definition of e-leadership which includes advanced information technology (AIT). This definition of e-leadership goes in line with Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson’s (2017) concept of reflexive leadership, since they both highlight social influences and related aspects such as feelings and behavior.

Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017, p. 3,10) suggest a relational view of leadership called *reflexive leadership*, which emphasizes the relationship between leaders and followers and contradicts the traditional leadership perspectives. Leadership is therefore not something that

leaders have, but rather a relationship that exists between the leaders and followers, which requires reflexiveness of one's thinking and self in relation to others. In our master's thesis we apply this theoretical concept of reflexive leadership when discussing relationships in the mandatory remote work setting. Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) defines reflexive leadership as "influencing ideas, meanings, understandings and identities of others within an asymmetrical (unequal) relational context" (p. 3). Moreover, reflexive leadership involves reflexive thinking which Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) explain as "... thinking broadly critically about one's thinking and one's self concerning others" (p. 10). Creating meaning for followers is one of the main tasks for reflexive leaders (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017, p. 66). There are several constraints on leadership that can make the creation of meaning more difficult and complex, which are different cultural ideas, time pressure, and limited personal abilities (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017, p. 133-147). Despite these constraints, leadership is still possible if both the leader and followers reflect about each other, their behaviors and emotions (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017, p. 139,159). Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson (2017, p. 137-138) furthermore explain that most managers are under the influence of their own superiors, and that superiors might constrain managers to their own commands or wishes. Therefore, the manager-subordinate relationship is affected by the manager's relationship with his/her superior. Moreover, being a manager does not automatically mean having an influence on the subordinates because it depends on what kind and how much leadership the subordinates prefer (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017, p. 138). Thus, the employees' preferences of leadership affects their relationship and is something the manager has to be reflexive about and take into consideration when leading them in order to have a possibility of influencing them.

When studying e-leadership before the pandemic, researchers applied different leadership concepts to make sense of it, for example; *characteristic leadership*, *transactional leadership*, *transformational leadership*, *passive leadership*, *shared leadership*, and *leadership skills and competences*. Horner-Long and Schoenberg (2002, p. 611) investigated leadership characteristics and contingency leadership theories simultaneously, and found a degree of support for both in remote work. Hambley, O'Neill and Kline (2007, p. 1) explores transformational and transactional leadership styles in relation to team interaction styles and outcomes in remote work, and found that the different styles did not affect it. Moreover, Wang, Liu, Lee and Chen (2018) also studied remote work from a transformational leadership style, but put it in relation to a passive leadership style, and investigated how it impacted engagement

and job performance. When investigating shared leadership in remote work, Sullivan, Lungeanu, Dechurch and Contractor (2015, p. 1) focused on how space and time interact with each other and affect the shared leadership structures. Two articles that focus on leadership skills and competences in remote work are Sousa and Rocha (2019), and Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim and McCarthy (2019). Sousa and Rocha (2019) identified innovation, leadership and management as the needed leadership skills in remote work, whilst Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim and McCarthy (2019) identified e-communication, e-social skills, e-change management, e-team skills, e-tech savvy, and e-trustworthiness as the important leadership skills in remote work.

Since most research focuses on the traits and styles of leaders in a remote work setting, there are only a few studies which emphasize the leader-follower relationship (Schwarz Müller, Brosi, Duman & Welppe, 2018; Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen and Huber, 2021). Schwarz Müller, Brosi, Duman and Welppe (2018, p. 130) explain that relationship-oriented leadership is important in remote work since the work-home balance changes whilst competency requirements increase. In order to handle these challenges and have a relationship-oriented approach to leadership, leaders can focus on coaching, teambuilding and taking individuals' needs into consideration (Schwarz Müller, Brosi, Duman & Welppe, 2018, p. 130). Moreover, Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen and Huber (2021, p. 71) found that employees in service organizations needed task- and relation-oriented leadership in order to maintain their job performance during mandatory remote work in the current pandemic. These studies indicate the importance of relational leadership in remote work. Therefore, more research about leader-follower relationships is needed in order to get a deeper understanding of relationships in a mandatory remote work setting.

Some of the key challenges we found in research about e-leadership before the pandemic are; *Increased Utilization of ICTs, New Skills Required, and New Challenges in Ethics and Trust* (see Table 2). Previous research regarding technology found that a poor understanding of ICTs, and underutilization of appropriate ICTs could affect the communication and thus the leadership negatively in the remote work setting (Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa, 2015; Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019). Other studies have found that new skills are required for leaders such as; technical skills, interpersonal skills, time management, and communicating through ICTs (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007; Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa 2015; Outvorst, Visker & De Waal, 2017; Gupta & Pathak,

2018; Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019; Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy & Ready, 2020). Previous studies regarding culture and trust have found that it is important for the leader to develop a sense of mutual trust between him/her and the employees in the remote work setting (Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim & McCarthy, 2019; Norman, Avey, Larson & Hughes, 2019). The ability to develop a sense of trust can be affected by the leader's technical skills (Norman, Avey, Larson & Hughes, 2019, p. 279). Moreover, Lee (2009, p. 462) found that ethics differ from the traditional office setting, and that the e-leader plays an important role in defining what is ethical and not in the remote work setting. The only study we found about opportunities in e-leadership before the pandemic is the Increased Autonomy of employees. Schwarzmüller, Brosi, Duman and Welpé (2018, p. 128-129) found that employees got increased autonomy and influence in organizational decisions, and that participative leadership thus increased in importance. Participative leadership means that more employees in the organization participate in making executive decisions (Schwarzmüller, Brosi, Duman & Welpé, 2018). However, studies about e-leadership are still argued to be scarce (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020). Therefore, there is still room to explore the challenges and opportunities related to leadership in the remote work setting.

Key Challenges in E-leadership (Before the Pandemic)	Articles	Key Opportunities in E-leadership (Before the Pandemic)	Articles
Increased Utilization of ICTs	Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu (2019); Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa (2015)	Increased Autonomy	Schwarzmüller, Brosi, Duman & Welpé (2018)
New Skills Required	Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen (2007); Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa (2015) ; Outvorst, Visker & De Waal (2017); Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu (2019); Gupta & Pathak (2018); Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy & Ready, (2020)		
New Challenges in Ethics and Trust	Lee (2009); Norman, Avey, Larson & Hughes (2019); Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim, & McCarthy (2018)		

Table 2: Key Challenges & Opportunities in E-Leadership (own work)

2.1.3 Communication before the pandemic

A recurring theme in the research about remote work before the pandemic was communication. The different types of communication that can be found in this literature are; formal, informal and face-to-face communication (Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016). As explained above, the rise of ICTs enabled employees to communicate with their colleagues and have video meetings from a distance (Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019, p. 92). Moreover, ICTs is an important element in the definition of remote work (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020), which means that the interaction with this type of technology determines the communication between employees, and therefore greatly affects the outcome of remote work.

Some of the key challenges we found in research about remote work communication before the pandemic are; *Communication Dependent on Skills and Utilization of ICTs, ICTs not Being a Sufficient Substitute for Face-to-Face Communication, Decreased and Difficult Information Sharing, and Decreased Informal Communication* (see Table 3).

The challenge of communication being dependent on skills and utilization of ICTs is something that Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy and Ready (2020) and Outvorst, Visker and De Waal (2017) address in their studies. Outvorst, Visker and De Waal (2017) explain that organizations and leaders have the responsibility of making sure that employees have the right ICTs skills in order to ensure a sufficient level of quality of communication in the remote work setting. Moreover, Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy and Ready (2020, p. 316) found that an insufficient implementation and utilization of ICTs can increase social isolation among employees.

The challenge of ICTs not being a sufficient substitute for face-to-face communication was addressed in many studies (Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016; Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019; Gupta & Pathak, 2018; Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa, 2015; Darics, 2020). Golden, Veiga and Dino (2008, p. 1418) suggest that communication through ICTs can never fully live up to the richness of face-to-face communication. Maruyama and Tietze (2012, p. 463) found that face-to-face communication is needed in order to develop strong personal relationships, which is not possible in the remote work setting. Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova and Polakova (2016, p. 35) explain that the lack of face-to-face communication, which includes

non-verbal clues such as body language and postures, makes it more difficult for employees to understand the context of messages. Gupta and Pathak (2018), Van Wart, Roman, Wang and Liu (2019), and Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa (2015) all found that there are more misunderstandings and misinterpretations in remote communication, since the lack of face-to-face communication makes it more difficult for employees to understand the context behind the messages. Moreover, Darics (2020, p. 21-22) suggests that the nonverbal language in formal remote communication can affect how employees interpret messages and therefore also how they interact with their colleagues.

The challenge of decreased and difficult information sharing in remote work is addressed by Pyöriä (2011), Maruyama and Tietze (2012), and Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova and Polakova (2016). Pyöriä (2011) suggests that it is more difficult for employees who work remotely to exchange ideas with colleagues and to ask for help with more complex work-related issues. Maruyama and Tietze (2012) explain that due to lack of face-to-face communication, the information sharing becomes more difficult, which in turn hinders employees from sharing and improving their work-related expertise. Moreover, Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova and Polakova (2016) found that difficulties in finding a sufficient amount and quality of information could result in employees feeling helpless to some extent in the remote work setting.

The challenge of decreased informal communication in remote work was addressed by Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova and Polakova (2016). They suggest that informal communication in organizations helped employees to interpret and understand each other better. The lack of informal communication in remote work leads therefore to more misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

Grounded in these presented articles (see Table 3), the research about communication in remote work before the pandemic was largely focused on the challenging and negative aspects of it. Therefore, studies about the opportunities of communication in remote work are scarce.

Key Challenges in Communication (Before the Pandemic)	Articles
Communication Dependent on Skills and Utilization of ICTs	Outvorst, Visker & De Waal (2017); Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy & Ready (2020)
ICTs not Being a Sufficient Substitute for Face-to-Face Communication	Golden, Veiga & Dino (2008); Maruyama & Tietze (2012); Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016); Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Abdullah & Abdullah, (2016); Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu (2019); Gupta & Pathak (2018); Darics (2020)
Decreased and Difficult Information Sharing	Pyöriä (2011); Maruyama & Tietze (2012); Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016)
Decreased Informal Communication	Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova (2016)

Table 3: Key Challenges in Communication (own work)

2.1.4 Remote work, e-leadership and communication after the start of the pandemic

The Covid-19-virus was first detected in 2019 in Wuhan, China. The virus spread to most of the world during the year 2020, which led to the World Health Organisation announcing a pandemic (Savić, 2020, p. 101). Governments in many countries implemented lockdowns, travel restrictions, whilst encouraging social distancing and working from home (Savić, 2020, p. 101). These recommendations resulted in the concept of *mandatory work from home (MWFH)* emerging in the research (Savić, 2020). Savić (2020, p. 104) explains that MWFH led to organizations and employees having no choice but to switch and adapt to this new work setting, and find innovative ways of changing the way they work and live. Furthermore, Daraba, Wirawan, Salam and Faisal (2021, p. 13) explain that the work-home balance was affected due to the mandatory remote work setting which led to both challenges and opportunities. Grounded in this, more research is needed in order to explore the challenges and possible opportunities of the mandatory aspect of remote work. Furthermore, this pandemic is expected to have long-term consequences in organizations such as an increasing flexible work setting for employees (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020; Savić, 2020). Therefore, the practice of remote work, and perhaps even mandatory remote work, will increase and accordingly also

the need for research about it. Furthermore, the concepts of communication and e-leadership within remote work have not been researched sufficiently since the work setting became mandatory one year ago. More research is thus needed about how communication and e-leadership are affected by the mandatory aspect of remote work.

2.2 Summary of Literature Review

After investigating the literature on remote work, we found several gaps in the research. We found that remote work was generally increasing in organizations before the pandemic, but the research about it was scarce (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Moreover, most of the research was quantitative and did not focus on individuals' experiences of remote work (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Vega, Anderson & Kaplan, 2015; Kłopotek, 2017; Delanoeije & Verbruggen, 2019; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019; Nedelcu, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for more in-depth studies that focus on how employees experience the work setting. In the studies about e-leadership, we found that it was an under-researched area even though organizations were generally implementing more remote work before the pandemic. Furthermore, there are only a few studies which emphasize the leader-follower relationship (Schwarz Müller, Brosi, Duman & Welp, 2018; Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen and Huber, 2021). Therefore, there is a need for further research in order to get a better understanding of leader-follower relationships in remote work. The research about communication in remote work suggest that there are several challenges such as difficulties in information sharing and more misunderstandings (Outvorst, Visker & De Waal, 2017; Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy & Ready, 2020; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Wojcack, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016; Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019; Gupta & Pathak, 2018; Darics, 2020). Furthermore, the opportunities of communication in remote work seems to be under-researched.

Before the pandemic, remote work was a more voluntary work setting compared to after the pandemic when it became more mandatory. Considering that the concept of Mandatory Work From Home (MWFH) was very recently acknowledged in the academic world, it is currently an under-researched area (Savić, 2020; Daraba, Wirawan, Salam & Faisal, 2021). The research about mandatory remote work found that new challenges emerge from this context (Savić,

2020; Daraba, Wirawan, Salam & Faisal, 2021), which generates a research gap to explore these and possible opportunities in remote work further. Therefore, there is also room to further explore the related concepts of communication and e-leadership in relation to the new mandatory aspect of remote work and gain insight into how they are affected. Since many organizations and employees have realized the opportunities with this work setting, remote work will still be relevant after the pandemic. Therefore, the need to further research mandatory remote work has increased.

To summarize, the purpose of this master's thesis is to fill these research gaps to some extent by using a qualitative method that focuses on both managers' and their respective employees' experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting. Moreover, in order to analyze employees' experiences of leader-follower relationships in the mandatory remote work setting, we apply the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, we elaborate on our methodological decisions for our master's thesis. The first part contains our philosophical grounding, what research traditions we drew upon, our research approach, and how these are connected to our specific study. The second part contains the data collection which includes organizational context and semi-structured interviews. The third part contains the data analysis which is how we sorted, reduced and argued for our material, and how we applied the thematic analysis method. The fourth part contains a discussion about our reflexive approach to our master's thesis, and how we worked in line with the ethical principles in Swedish research and EU's GDPR. The final part contains the limitations and our own critique of this master's thesis.

3.1 Philosophical grounding

We approached our topic of mandatory remote work with a qualitative research method. Bryman (2018, p. 455) explains that qualitative research is grounded in interpretive epistemology. This means that the main focus is on understanding how individuals interpret their social reality (Bryman, 2018, p. 59). Qualitative research is moreover grounded in a constructionist ontology, which means that the social reality is something that individuals continuously create and re-create (Bryman, p. 455). Rennstam and Wåsterfors (2018, p. 55) further explain that applying a constructionist approach means trying to understand and interpret how a certain phenomenon emerges, unfolds, and gets reinforced. Our master's thesis is therefore grounded in interpretive epistemology and constructionist ontology. This goes in line with our research question, since we seek to understand how managers and employees experience and interpret mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting.

The qualitative research method we decided to apply is qualitative semi-structured interviews. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 85) explain that a qualitative interview is grounded in a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee where knowledge is co-constructed. A semi-structured qualitative interview can be defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining stories and descriptions of the interviewee's social reality in order to interpret and understand the interviewer's pre-decided phenomena that he/she wants to investigate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 19). Therefore, qualitative semi-structured interviews helped us to

obtain descriptions of the interviewees' social reality, which in turn helped us generate conclusions about their experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting.

We drew upon interpretative traditions which according to Prasad (2018, p. 7) are grounded in constructionist philosophy. The interpretive traditions focus on the interpretative acts which construct the social world. One of the interpretative traditions that resonates with our research purpose is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism means understanding how individuals create meaning and understand different phenomena through different interpretative acts (Prasad, 2018, p. 19). One important concept within symbolic interactionism is the different roles (Prasad, 2018, p. 22). The concept of roles helped us investigate how these experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting changed the managers' and employees' roles in their social reality.

Furthermore, when analyzing the leader-follower relationships in mandatory remote work, we applied the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). This concept takes several constraints into consideration in leader-follower relationships, which means that we had a more critical approach when discussing this part of our research question.

We ground our study in an abductive research approach. Bryman (2018, p. 478-479) explains that an abductive approach means that the researcher grounds the conclusions in the participants' descriptions and understandings of their social realities. Furthermore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 11) argue that abduction is more appropriate when trying to understand interviewees' unpredictable social realities because it is a more dynamic approach. Therefore, the abductive approach goes in line with our chosen qualitative research method, and also helped us in generating conclusions about how our interviewees experienced mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Organizational context

The company we decided to collaborate with is Sustainic which is a large-sized and international company with over 15,000 employees. They mainly focus on sustainable innovation, which includes both practical and knowledge work. The company has existed for a long time and is currently going through a digital transformation. Their values include customer-focus, an informal and supporting work environment, and sustainability.

In March 2020, due to the pandemic, Sustainic strongly recommended their employees to work from home. The employees we interviewed were based on a site in Sweden and had experienced mandatory remote work to some extent during the pandemic. Our interviewees included three managers and their respective employees which helped us to get a deeper understanding of how they experienced leader-follower relationships in a mandatory remote work setting.

The three teams we interviewed worked in different departments at Sustainic such as sales and R&D which meant that they had different work tasks and focus areas in the company. The three managers we interviewed, Alex, Jordan and Taylor, do not have practical work on site, which means they had to conduct their work remotely almost 100% since March last year. The employees, Charlie, Drew, Kim, Lee, Robyn and Sam, have some practical work that needs to be conducted in the office and therefore worked less from home during the pandemic. However, most of our interviewees have worked a higher percentage from home than in the office, which makes their experiences of mandatory remote work still valid.

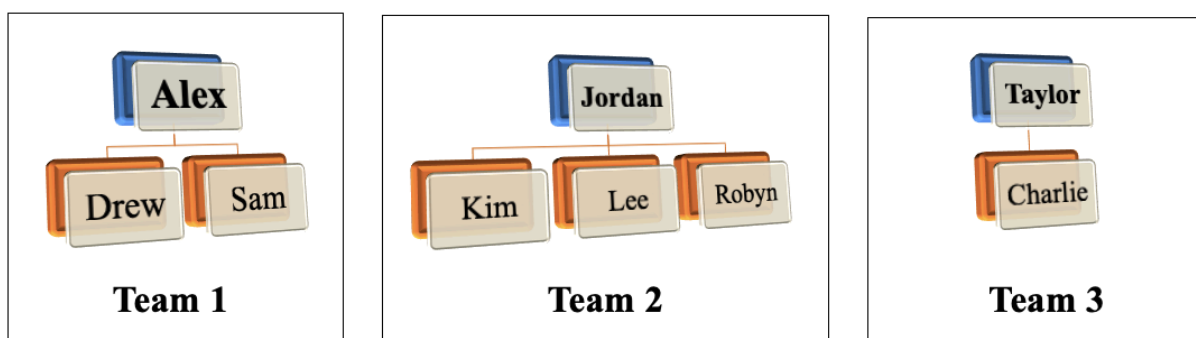


Figure 1: Team configuration at Sustainic (own work)

In Figure 1 we present an overview of the three managers and their respective employees we interviewed in order to give a better picture of how these departments are divided. Alex the manager works with Drew and Sam, Jordan the manager works with Kim, Lee and Robyn & Taylor works with Charlie. In order to analyze their relationships it was important to us to divide these teams and analyze their experiences accordingly to be able to make well-grounded conclusions about their experiences of relationships in the mandatory remote work setting.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews since we had pre-decided themes grounded in the literature review that we wanted to discuss with the employees. However, we also wanted to be flexible about follow-up questions and give opportunity to the interviewees to elaborate on the aspects they felt were relevant. This resulted in the interviewees providing new perspectives on our topic which in turn helped us generate a nuanced discussion. In advance of the interviews, we created an interview guide which included our pre-decided themes of remote work (see Appendix). The interview guide included different kinds of questions such as; background questions, introductory questions, theme questions, and concluding questions (Bryman, 2018, p. 569-570). We began with asking the background questions with the purpose of receiving background information about the interviewees and also making them comfortable with the interview process. Furthermore, we asked introductory questions, with the purpose of introducing our themes to the interviewees and providing them the freedom to talk about what they perceive as important or relevant in relation to remote work, communication, and e-leadership. We continued the interview by asking our theme questions, which included deeper and more detailed questions about our chosen themes. At the end of the interview we incorporated concluding questions, in order to connect our themes and receive the interviewees' final thoughts and comments about mandatory remote work and their relationships in this work setting.

In order to investigate the experiences of relationships in the mandatory remote work setting we interviewed both managers and their respective employees (see Figure 1). Moreover, to investigate the mandatory remote work setting, we decided to interview individuals who had experienced this type of remote work. Furthermore, we mostly interviewed individuals who

had experiences with both in-office work and mandatory remote work, which helped us to understand the changes and therefore the individual challenges of this work setting.

In order to find employees who had experienced both in-office and mandatory remote work, we only contacted companies who were knowledge-intensive such as R&D companies. This is because knowledge work contains less or non-practical work, and therefore can be conducted remotely. We contacted Swedish and Danish companies, since we knew that many companies in these countries had implemented mandatory remote work for their employees (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020; Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2020). When we approached these companies, we sent out an email which included our research purpose, our criterias, and preferences for the collaboration. Our first criterium was to have 8 to 10 interviewees, whereof 2-3 managers and 5-7 of their respective employees. Our second criteria was to interview employees who engaged in knowledge work that could be conducted from home. Furthermore, we had a preference of the interviewees having experienced both in-office work and mandatory remote work. We chose the final company Sustainic because they met all of our criterias and preferences.

We used a snowball sampling method to find our interviewees. Snowball sampling means that the researcher initially chooses a small group of participants in the study, who in turn suggest other participants that could be relevant for the study (Bryman, 2018, p. 504-505). Our contact person at Sustainic helped us to find interested managers to interview. These managers helped us in turn to find employees who were interested in participating. Our sampling includes both female and male participants, various age-groups, various nationalities, and work in different departments within this company. In order to ensure that our interviewees remain anonymous in our master's thesis, we gave them fictional personal names that are gender-neutral and also gave the company the fictional name of Sustainic. Therefore, our interviewees are referred to as he/she in our empirical findings. These employees also had various lengths of work experience, both overall and at Sustainic. All of our interviews were conducted individually, via Zoom, and in English. We were both present at all of the interviews. The length of the interviews varied between 30 minutes and 68 minutes. Moreover, the data was collected from the 31st of March to 17th of May in 2021 (see Table 4).

Fictional Name	Job Description	Length of Interview	Interview Format
Alex	Manager	48 min	Zoom-interview
Jordan	Manager	1 hr 8 min	Zoom-interview
Taylor	Manager	1 hr 1 min	Zoom-interview
Charlie	Employee	44 min	Zoom-interview
Drew	Employee	30 min	Zoom-interview
Kim	Employee	1 hr	Zoom-interview
Lee	Employee	32 min	Zoom-interview
Robyn	Employee	58 min	Zoom-interview
Sam	Employee	1 hr 10 min	Zoom-interview

Table 4: Empirical Data Information (own work)

3.3 Data analysis

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018, p. 189) explain that there are three occurring problems when dealing with qualitative material which are the problems of chaos, representation and authority which are solved by sorting, reducing and arguing. Sorting means getting an overview and familiarizing oneself with the empirical material (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 190). The reducing process is choosing between different themes and also choosing data within these themes in order to get a more manageable set of data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 191). Arguing means theorizing or argumentation which is when the empirical data is put in relation to previous research and society or offers practical advice (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 192-193). In order to prevent these occurring problems, we had both sorting, reducing and arguing in mind during the whole analytical process. Our analytical process began during the interviews and transcribing process. All the interviews were transcribed manually by us. We wanted to have detailed transcripts that included laughs, pauses, and hesitant sayings. This enabled us to get a deeper understanding of the context and meaning behind the interviewees' words when analyzing. Furthermore, we applied a thematic analysis method in order to make sense of our empirical data. This method is the process of labeling "what" is being said in the interviews and "how" it is talked about (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 61-62).

During the initial coding process we analyzed the transcripts individually and left comments where we felt these could be connected to a specific theme in our thesis or where interviewees

talked about interesting issues related to their experiences of the mandatory remote work setting. We analyzed “what” was being said and “how” it was being said from our interviewees in order to answer the question “why” (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 61-62). We searched for themes which the interviewees felt were important in relation to the mandatory remote work setting and relationships in this work setting. Afterwards, we compared our comments and our ideas about overarching and sub-themes in order to revise them and create the final themes and the structure for our empirical findings. Furthermore, in the process of writing our findings we sorted and reduced the quotes even further and made changes in their structure as we realized new ways of connecting the data together in the revised final structure of our empirical findings. We used excerpt-commentary units as guidelines on how to write our empirical findings (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Each sub-theme included analytical points, excerpts, and analytic commentaries in order to argue for our chosen empirical data. We moreover connected our findings to the previous literature of remote work in our discussion (chapter 5) in order to argue for the relevance of our findings.

3.4 Reflexivity and Research Ethics

To improve our understanding of the interviewees’ description of their social reality, we took a reflexive approach throughout the whole process of writing this master’s thesis. Bryman (2018, p. 471) explains that reflexivity can mean philosophical self-reflection which is when the researcher is self-critical and reviews his/her own thoughts, opinions and assumptions in relation to various aspects of the study. When reflecting about our own opinions and assumptions, we found our differences in nationality, education, and work life experiences to be beneficial for our reflexive approach. These differences between us meant that we could provide different perspectives on the various components of this master’s thesis. Because of these different perspectives we could challenge each other’s way of thinking throughout the whole writing process and push each other to be reflexive. Since we wrote and discussed all of the parts of the thesis together, we could stay reflexive until the end of our thesis. Furthermore, we had some similarities in age, gender, education, and work experiences. These common traits and experiences could have hindered us in being reflexive. However, it helped us to collaborate efficiently and in understanding each other’s arguments.

To conduct this study in accordance with the Swedish research ethic principles, we continuously had discussions about various ethical aspects. These principles include the information requirement, consent requirement, confidentiality requirement, and the utilizing requirement (Bryman, 2018). This means that we informed all our interviewees about the research purpose, that their participation was fully voluntary, that they had the right to decide over their own participation, that they could revoke their participation if they wanted to, that we would handle their personal information and the collected data confidentially, and that we would only utilize the data for research purposes (Bryman, 2018, p. 170-171). We moreover made sure that our interviewees were not harmed or experienced discomfort in any way before, during, and after the interviews, that we did not intrude into their personal lives, and that we did not give them any false promises. To make sure that all of our interviewees were aware of the various principles, we included this information in the mails to the interviewees, and also explained them verbally at the beginning of the interviews. Considering that qualitative interviews are subjective and not value neutral, it is highly important to respect the interviewees' integrity, and to keep a balance between searching for valuable knowledge and maintaining respectful relationships with the interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 33). We continuously tried to keep this balance when asking the interviewees more personal interview questions.

Moreover, we also followed EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) before, during, and after the interviews (European Commission, 2018). In order to further protect and safely store our interviewees' personal information and data, we made sure to utilize the data in line with the regulation. This regulation is enforced in all EU countries in order to give individuals more power over their personal data as they have to provide their consent for us to store it and also have the right to revoke it at any time (European Commission, 2018). Before the interviews, we explained to our interviewees how we will use and store their data in accordance with the ethical principles and GDPR to make sure they were aware of their rights (see Appendix). Furthermore, we have stored their data safely on our personal hard drive and utilized it exclusively for research purposes. This data was deleted from our devices after finishing writing our master's thesis.

3.5 Limitations and critique

Considering that our master's thesis is grounded in a qualitative research method, the conclusions are subjective to how we interpreted the empirical data. Bryman (2018, p. 484-485) explains that one of the main critiques of qualitative methods are that they are based on a small sample and that the findings are hard to replicate in further studies, which means that these studies cannot produce generalized conclusions about a population. However, the conclusions grounded in qualitative research can instead generate theories about various phenomena (Bryman, 2018, p. 484-485). Since we did not seek to produce generalized conclusions about a population, but rather theories about how individuals experience mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting, we chose a qualitative method for our master's thesis.

Due to the pandemic, we had to contact all the companies from a distance which made it more difficult to find a company to collaborate with. Moreover, many companies and employees had limited time to participate in interviews, because of the changes and increased workload caused by the pandemic. Since all the interviews were conducted digitally via Zoom, it could affect our interviews and therefore our findings. However, these virtual interviews made it possible for us to interview employees who did not live close-by to us. Some of the negative aspects of having the interviews via Zoom is that the meetings sometimes lagged. To prevent this from affecting the interview, we told the interviewees that they should ask us to repeat what we said in case they could not hear us clearly, and vice versa. Furthermore, we asked the interviewees to repeat some of their answers when we noticed lagging. Another problem we encountered during the interview process is that Alex' interview could not be correctly recorded and therefore not transcribed. However, we wrote down notes from Alex' interview the same day as it was conducted to be able to use this interviewee's answers in our analysis. To prevent this from happening again, we decided to record all the remaining interviews with both the Zoom application and also QuickTime. Another problem we encountered is that Charlie did not have a camera during the interview, which made it more difficult to know if silence or pauses meant that he/she was still reflecting about the answers or finished with answering the question. To overcome this and prevent us from interrupting him/her, we implemented longer breaks between the questions. Moreover, most of the interviewees did not have English as their native language which affected how they expressed their experiences and understood our questions.

However, we decided to have all the interviews in English in order to have the quotes in the original language in the analysis. We did not have to translate any of the interviews and could therefore present the empirical data as originally as possible, and maintain the meaning of the interviewees' quotes.

Most of our interviewees were sitting at home and not in an office setting during the interviews, which could have affected their answers. By them being in a remote work setting during our interview about this topic it could generate more enriched answers about their experiences, because they are experiencing remote work while they're being interviewed about it. Moreover, this could have made the interviewees feel more comfortable with talking about their experiences since they were separated from their co-workers and managers. Therefore, they could have felt less monitored in their home office environment during the interview process. Nevertheless, we are aware that the employees at Sustainic might not have answered completely truthfully due to impression management (Prasad, 2018). This means that they could have hesitated to elaborate on exactly how they felt in order to keep up a good impression, both for us and the readers of our master's thesis which includes their respective manager/employees. To prevent this impression management as much as possible, we used fictional names for both the company and all the employees that we interviewed. We told all the interviewees about the usage of fictional names before interviewing them in order for them to feel more anonymous, and therefore more comfortable with participating and telling us about their experiences.

4. Empirical findings & analysis

In this chapter, we present our empirical findings of the managers' and employees' experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting in three main themes. The first main theme is called "Employees' experiences of switching to the mandatory remote work setting". The second main theme is called "Challenges in connection & collaboration". The third and final main theme is called "Shift in power and leadership preferences". The findings in the third theme "Shift in power and leadership preferences", will be further analyzed by applying the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership. All the findings in this chapter will be further discussed in the next chapter (5. Discussion). As explained in chapter 3, Alex' interview could not be successfully recorded and transcribed. Therefore, his/her statements will be presented without direct quotes.

4.1 Employees' experiences of switching to the mandatory remote work setting

4.1.1 External environment and negative presumptions about remote work affecting employees' experiences

When asking the interviewees about how they experienced switching to mandatory remote work, the majority of them expressed negative emotions towards the mandatory remote work setting and also the pandemic. Alex expressed that he/she saw a lot of challenges and did not like it. Drew explained that the pandemic had a big impact on him/her; *"... but this impacted me pretty much. I got more stressed and I am not the same person as I was before I would say."* Kim said that he/she did not like it and felt isolated due to the switch to the new work setting;

"I didn't like it. Uhm... because I have uhm.. I don't have a big space in my uhm.. place and it wasn't quiet per se, and then it was isolating, you no with no colleagues around, I couldn't take a break and have a coffee and talk with anybody in the breakroom. Uhm... I mean, I was really effective and productive, but it felt isolating."

Both Charlie and Robyn expressed that they experienced boredom in relation to the pandemic. Moreover, Robyn said that it was the pandemic that affected him/her negatively rather than the switch to remote work;

“I mean it’s difficult (laughs), because it is so connected with everything else that had been happening in society or these lockdowns or not really lockdowns, but only the switch to remote work, it’s... I think it’s not a big problem I think. I think it’s uhm... It works well for me. Uhm...so I am not depressed of this I guess (laughs). But as I say, since everything is super boring now it’s kind of effect the entire feeling now, but I think it’s something we struggle with all of us, so yeah.”

In these quotes Alex, Drew, Kim, Charlie and Robyn expressed various negative emotions towards the pandemic; boredom, helplessness, uncertainty, stress, and isolation. The increased negative emotions due to the external environment or the switch is something that impacted the employees’ experiences of the mandatory remote work setting.

Something else that had an impact on their switch to the new work setting was their negative presumptions about remote work due to the employees’ lack of experience of this remote work setting. Jordan expressed that he/she was scared and skeptical about remote work not being able to work in the beginning, and was surprised that it was an efficient and productive work setting;

“It has shown that it is possible. I would say we were all a little bit scared in the beginning, a little bit skeptical perhaps. Even about how this is gonna work, I mean it’s very strange. But it’s been working! You know? You can say good and bad, but it’s been working. ... I think it was kind of a surprise for ... for many people, to be honest, that we became more efficient, and more productive. Eh, I think people expected the opposite to be honest, that it would probably be, ah... more difficult to, you know, to accomplish things, but yeah. It was somewhat surprising I have to say.”

Drew expressed how he/she felt like remote work would hinder him/her from having an influence on his/her work performance;

“There is an aspect of, I don’t know what... I would call it fear related to these times. ... To me the fear is that uhm... and this maybe just personal, but the fear is that it’s more difficult to have an influence on a... structures and processes and outputs if you are doing it remotely.”

Robyn expressed how he/she felt judged by others when working remotely before the pandemic;

“I would say before it was not relaxed to work from home. Because it was always that “I am working from home” people are insinuating that maybe you didn’t work, or you had something to do. Which could be true also, because maybe you had something you need to do at home in the middle of the day and then you could work, yeah but now it will be easier to have this... yeah, no one will point at you I think. And maybe no one did, but you had a feeling of... I had a feeling myself, it was inside me this feeling (laughs) that it was not accepted.”

Moreover, Robyn explained how he/she believed it will be more acceptable to work remotely after the pandemic;

“I think it will be more accepted now so... that’s why I think it will be more common. The tröskel (translation to English = threshold) the step will be a little bit lower.”

When we asked Taylor if he/she thought remote work would be more acceptable in the future, Taylor explained that he/she believed that remote work will be more acceptable in the future, and how people before assumed that employees who worked remotely were not working efficiently;

“Absolutely, it is! I mean, if you were to sit at your summerhouse before people would say, “oh, you're not working, you just take your e-mails once an hour and attending meetings.”

Grounded in Jordan’s, Drew’s, Robyn’s and Taylor’s quotes, we found that employees had negative presumptions about remote work before the pandemic. Furthermore, we found that negative presumptions decreased due to their experiences of the mandatory remote work setting. Therefore, the increased negative emotions due to the external environment or the switch and the presumptions impacted the employees’ experiences of switching to a mandatory remote work setting.

4.1.2 Living situation, IT skills & mental health affecting employees’ adaptation

When asking our interviewees about switching to mandatory remote work, they had varied preconditions that were either suitable or not optimal for working remotely. This resulted in them having different ways of adapting to this new work setting. Alex explained how his/her colleagues coped with it differently because of their varied preconditions. Charlie, Drew, Jordan and Lee expressed how some of their home preconditions helped them to adapt more easily. Charlie explained that he/she had a good office setup at home *“I had no problem sitting*

at home. I have a good spot here”. Drew talked about how switching to a separate room helped him/her in adapting; *“I am in a separate room now (laughs), I used to work from the kitchen. At least I have a room”*. Jordan expressed that he/she had to be creative in order to have a sufficient work space at home, but living in a bigger apartment with a separate office space made the mandatory remote work setting less challenging;

“We also, last year actually, moved to a bigger flat, where we can actually have separate kind of office spaces for both in this case, which made the situation much better. Eh, in the beginning we lived in a smaller flat and then... it was a little bit more challenging then, definitely. You have to be a bit more creative, finding different spaces, especially if you have, you know, meetings and stuff like that, at the same time. Eh... people talk and then, stuff like that. But eh... yeah, since I would say we moved to a bigger flat, everything has become much much more smoother as well, in this case. So it’s been... okay to kind of (snaps with fingers) switch off also, or focus when you need to, it’s been good.”

Taylor explained that he/she tried different work spaces to find the most optimal one, and having his/her office setting in the garage and a separate space for solely work purposes helped him/her to switch from home to work mode;

“I for sure I couldn't sit in my bedroom, I couldn't work in my bedroom. If I sit in the living room, that's easier. But leaving your house is to go to the next house. And that's that that has mentally helped me to go to work.”

From these quotes, we found that the interviewees had to be creative in order to find sufficient office space at home. Moreover, we found that for employees with proper office setups, larger living spaces, and separate rooms for working, it was easier to adapt to the mandatory remote setting. Our interviewees with smaller living spaces, not having a separate room for working, and not having a proper office setup had more difficulties in adapting to the mandatory remote work setting. Kim expressed that sharing a small living space with his/her partner and having an inadequate work setup affected him/her negatively;

“Yeah, it’s a battle for space you know on a personal level “Ok I have to take over the table and move all that stuff out of the way” and then “oh it’s dinner time” and so yeah, those are the practical challenges of working remotely. ... It is very easy to start early and run late, so you know it is another impact and very easy to take over my social space, you know I had to move stuff off from my table to have a work space now and an office space and spare that one, like you know the dining table. ... My table is not designed for 8 hours a day work. It’s designed to sit there for 20 minutes to eat or chat, so ergonomics is probably sacrificed and so on and I like to stand up a lot when I work and move around.”

Robyn also explained how his/her work setup at home was not suitable for working several hours in a row which affected his/her physical health and work efficiency negatively;

“Ergonomic conditions are not ideal at home. At work I have a desk that I can rise and lower, as you see my home does not fit with this kind of office equipment (laughs). Uhm... so that is one negative thing I think and that’s maybe why I need to take breaks all the time, because it’s not comfortable to sit and work here.”

Sam expressed that working in a small space together with his/her partner and having the work and home life more merged than before affected his/her adaptation to mandatory remote work negatively;

“Ehm, I’m living with my partner. And we both had an office-setup. And you know, so it becomes like... 4 or 5 monitors, 200 cables, so and... Dinner (laughs) on there, and then all the things were merged there in one place (laughs). So... it was... It was not very... In the beginning it was good, but after a while you... eh... All of these... It was not so pleasant I mean. It was hard, I should admit it, for me. And for my family. It was a... change that... we were not ready for (laughs), actually. ... I want to change my apartment, and I want to have a bigger office.”

Grounded in Kim’s, Robyn’s and Sam’s quotes, we found that having a smaller space, an inadequate work setup, and having someone else working in the same space at the same time can affect physical health, work efficiency, and work-home balance negatively. Therefore, we found that the employees’ different living situations affected how they adapted to and experienced the mandatory remote work setting. Since the employees’ different living situations affected how they experienced the mandatory remote work setting, it was very individual how they were able to adapt.

Moreover, we found other preconditions that affected them in their adaptation to mandatory remote work. One of the preconditions we found affected their adaptation is the employees’ already established digital skills. Jordan expressed that his/her already established digital skills in ICTs helped him/her to adapt to using more digital tools in the mandatory remote work setting, and how it was more difficult for his/her older colleagues with decreased digital skills;

“I’m still from the generation that is okay, eh you know... having online talks, and then using chats, using this kind of... group things. I find it that my colleagues that are older, find a bit more difficult perhaps, you know, to do everything remote and eh... yeah, always make sure that the cameras are working, and you know, this kind of things. But perhaps especially those that for instance retired last year. I know that for them it was quite a challenge

you know... But I think they also in the end were proud of themselves, you know, when they started using this kind of group chats, and then some reactions, you know messages, and stuff like that. So they felt like "oh, we learned something new from it".

Robyn explained that he/she had to improve his/her digital skills in order to use the ICTs in an optimal way;

"This corona really started the use of internet meetings I think, yeah and people have learned a lot, how to use it, we learned. Before it was always a problem "ahh didn't worked, started" and "how do we do this" but now it's almost seamless to work with this tool. The only thing is internet lagging sometime or more."

Grounded in Jordan's and Robyn's quotes, we found that their level of already established digital skills affected how they could adapt to the increased usage of ICTs, which affected their overall ability to adapt to the mandatory remote work setting.

Other conditions we found that affected our interviewees' experiences of switching to a mandatory remote setting was their state of mental health. Drew talked about isolation affecting his/her mental health;

"When you are sitting alone, I mean my partner is working not from home so uhm... for like a little bit more than a year I am sitting home with the cat... so that can be really uhm... depressing after a while ... It can have pressure on the person especially mentally."

Charlie explained that he/she did not feel good mentally because he/she had difficulties mentally with switching from work to home mode;

"And I still feel, hm... not clear in the head. It's a little bit problematic now still, and I don't really know how to solve it because... it can be like when my wife cooks the food and I'm working a little bit and I... When I go down to eat I still have the work task on the top of my head. So it's hard to change from working mode to family mode. That was easier before when you had like 40-45 minutes in the car to think about nothing. So that is the challenge now."

Grounded in Drew's and Charlie's quotes, we found that their state of mental health was affected by switching to a mandatory remote work setting which in turn negatively affected their experiences.

4.1.3 More freedom leading to more responsibility

Mandatory remote work resulted in the employees gaining more freedom with some limitations. Kim explained that he/she gets a lot of freedom to schedule his/her work but needs to take some of his/her manager's expectations into account;

"My boss he/she gives a window and says, " this is the time I expect you to be available to do work". So not a 100% but a wide percentage of freedom to manage your own work and manage your own time."

Alex, Charlie, Sam, Drew, Lee, Robyn and Taylor all explain that this freedom meant that they could balance their work with private/home/family life more efficiently. Alex and Taylor expressed that they could spend more time with the family after switching to the mandatory remote work setting. Charlie said that he/she could be more flexible in his/her work-family balance;

"I would I say it became more flexible. Because I could distribute my time between work and private life more efficient. ... With having the kids in kindergarten and stuff. It's very convenient to be close to leave and pick them up. It saves a lot of time."

Sam also expressed that he/she could spend more time with his/her family during the work days and could be more free in how he/she conducted his/her work;

"You're more free so you can talk more with your partner during the day. You are free to listen to your music. I mean, this kind of freedom is good, and it's a positive side of working from home."

Lee explained that he/she had more freedom to finish work earlier which resulted in more time for his/her private life and also incorporate time to work out during his/her work day;

"I get some shorter days, some... I can quit earlier because I... I start right when I wake up and I... Then I skip breakfast and eat lunch instead, so (laughs). Yeah, saves some time actually. ... Some improvement could be like I can do some workout in the middle of the day. So I don't... Don't need to get away from the work I guess, I just do it at home."

Drew explained that the flexible schedule enabled him/her to incorporate errands in his/her work day;

"I can use the time in between the days, like I can decide you know like you do not have a certain time for lunch, breakfast etc. You can work out or take a walk during the day, or go have your car fixed, or have an appointment and have it very flexible. It is more flexible than before... That is a general advantage. Because it is nice to have one day, when you need to arrange something, I mean you have appointments etc."

Robyn also expressed that he/she was able to do various errands during his/her work day which was required more time and planning when working in the office;

"You don't need to spend half a weekend making laundry (laughs). ... Yeah, it is easy to have home things done, whatever it is, if you need to go and make an errand, that had to be planned much more and maybe took longer time before you had to earlier from work and now it can be in a switch in between of two meetings."

Grounded in Alex', Taylor's, Charlie's, Sam's, Drew's, Lee's and Robyn's quotes, we found that employees experienced more freedom to plan their days and balance their work-private life more efficiently in the mandatory remote work setting. They had more time to be with their families, partners, running various errands and work out. However, we found that this freedom came with a responsibility to structure and plan your own work days efficiently. Jordan explained that adapting to this newfound freedom required a lot of discipline from the employees; *"It really required a lot of discipline from all of us to complete this period"*. Furthermore Jordan had a strategy of keeping his/her old routines which helped him/her to adapt to this newfound freedom in his/her work life;

"I try to keep my own routines, I try to really separate still work and home in this case, even though it became more or less the same place (laughs). Eh, but sort of still try to take my brakes when I can, keep my lunch times as I used to keep it in a way. I still get up as early as I did before, you know. And try to also kind of finish work when I feel like "okay, now it's time to finish". So you just turn off the computer and say "okay it's done". So, so far I feel like it's been okay to be honest."

Taylor explained that planning his/her work and deadlines made it easier to switch on and off work;

"But it's always been easier for me to switch on and off. I never been stressed about work. Really. And maybe it's because I tried to plan my work, and if I have a deadline, I ensure that, you know, I know that I can meet that well in time before the deadline."

Kim expressed that he/she did not have a strategy of how to adapt, which is something Kim wishes he/she would have implemented when switching to the mandatory remote work setting;

“That was probably what was missing. No I did not. The only strategy I had was that I needed table space (laughs). That’s it, you know, I didn’t have a strategy at all. No, I did not have a strategy at all. No... apart from making sure technical requirements, you know I had access, took my computer THAT (emphasizes). No I did not have a strategy.”

Kim further explained that it was hard to draw boundaries between work and private life which resulted in him/her working late;

“The challenge of boundaries like ”when do I start when do I stop”. Very difficult to say, “ok it’s dinner time now” and for you not to go back after dinner and respond to some e-mail or type a few more paragraphs or read an article related to work.”

Robyn also talked about how keeping the balance between work and private life got more difficult, how he/she could not stay disciplined to work efficiently, and that it was hard for him/her to cope with this increased free time;

“Then I start to work at eight o’clock, but probably taking more breaks than I did at um... (laughs) in the office. Um.. because as I said there is no definite end for me (laughs). I live alone, I don’t have a family so... There is no definite END. ... I have 16 hours per day full off.. available for work. Not that I use it all the time for work, but it makes some problems in planning my days. Sometimes I can do that a little bit later or I can do that um... tonight instead, so the limits between working and free time is a little bit erased... So... I am quite sure that I fill up my hours and I probably don’t work more or less than before, but its uh... more scattered, which is negative I think. I let it come to a little bit undisciplined I think (laughs). ... Yeah. No I would prefer that I really work eight to five and then um.. I would prefer that, but I fail ever day so far (laughs). ... So I would prefer that it was not like that. So it is a discipline problem (laughs).”

Sam explained that keeping a routine was hard for him/her, and how this affected the work-life balance;

“It’s harder to have a good routine. And routines always help you to have a better balance even. A work-life balance. When you think you are free to do it at 8 o’clock in the night, you do it, but your mind is still in it when you want to go to sleep, so you’re gonna have a bad sleep. When you have bad sleep, you will be tired the day after. I mean, all of these routines become a little bit different, and it has an impact, I would say.”

Grounded in Jordan's, Taylor's, Kim's, Robyn's, and Sam's quotes, we found that keeping a routine or having a strategy of how to structure the work days was important to keep a good work-life balance. The lack of it resulted in decreased time to spend on your private or family life, which is something our interviewees' experienced as a negative side-effect of mandatory remote work. The level of self-discipline and ability to structure the work days was found to be individual and something that affected the employees' work-life balance. If the employees did not manage to be structured, it resulted in negative emotions and experiences of mandatory remote work. However, if they were able to create a set of routines or remain structured and disciplined, it resulted in a better work-life balance and more positive experiences of this work setting.

4.2 Challenges in connection & collaboration

4.2.1 Decreased, slower and weaker formal communication

When asking our interviewees' about the communication in mandatory remote work, they explained how the communication was affected negatively in different ways. One of the changes was that they collaborated and spoke to less colleagues than before. Alex explained that he/she did not talk to colleagues he/she did not have a clear connection to. Charlie expressed that he/she contacts fewer colleagues than before when working in the office;

"I contact fewer people. I contact people that I already know a little bit more. I don't contact people that I are... I would say further away from me. Because I really don't know who they are. But in the office it was a bit more convenient that someone overheard a conversation and jumped in and helped. And that kind of stuff. But now it's.. A little bit more narrowed group I would say."

Taylor talked about how he/she interacts with fewer employees from other departments;

"I think that would be a negative aspect, that the interaction with colleagues from other departments has gone down, of course. And that's not good for the corporation."

Grounded in Alex', Charlie's and Taylor's quotes, we found that the formal networking got more limited due to the mandatory remote work. In the office they were able to spontaneously talk about work-related tasks with anyone. However, now in the mandatory remote work

setting our interviewees mostly communicate with colleagues they already knew. Moreover, we found that formal communication became slower due to various reasons. Alex explained how he/she had to give phone calls in order to get more information. Charlie expressed that because he/she could not spontaneously meet and discuss various work-related issues with his/her colleagues, Charlie had to use more time to plan and schedule meetings;

“You need to reserve the time to do it and have open discussions about anything. So maybe you need to be a little bit more planned or... A little bit more meetings instead of just... talking? (laughs). In the corridor and in the office. ... It’s only harder to find people. Before you could just walk to a specific department and a specific group within a department.”

Drew said it took longer time to get answers from his/her colleagues which generated some frustration, and also talked about how getting information and help was easier in the office setting because he/she could contact them more spontaneously;

“It is more challenging to find a common time to talk to your colleagues about things or projects or problems or getting solutions. ... Some of the colleagues uhm.. they just keep saying that they are busy and then you cannot get like an appointment when you want to talk to them, while when you are in the office you just talk to the person and be like “Hey, I have a question and you are gonna reply now” (Laughs) “Because I need it now” (Laughs). You don’t have that many tools to use from home, because if the person is not available on the phone, does not reply e-mail and Skype, then you are like... yeah.. that’s it.”

Jordan talked about how communication in remote work required more time due to planning, scheduling and arranging meetings;

“It requires more planning, maybe more preparation, because it’s... basically impossible to have this kind of spontaneous talks, as you could have when you were sharing an office with your colleagues. ... So it does require more discipline, and more planning, you can say, to do maybe the same things. ... Nowadays of course everything has to be either arranged, again, as a meeting, or you just, you know, send an email instead, you know if you have something that normally would take 5 minutes of talking.”

Grounded in Alex’, Charlie’s, Drew’s and Jordan’s quotes, we found that they experienced that they needed to use more time on scheduling meetings and communicating with their colleagues than before when working in the office. This resulted in slower communication and exchange of information between colleagues. Therefore, formal communication became more limited both in quantity and speed. The decreased formal communication can affect the information

flow between colleagues. Not getting the information that is needed to proceed with work tasks in time could create tension between employees which could affect their relationships negatively.

Moreover, the interviewees also talked about how the communication in the mandatory remote work setting became weaker in the way that it included more misunderstandings. Charlie explained how that he/she needed to communicate more clearly in order to prevent misunderstandings;

“How you communicate with people, it needs to be a little bit extra clear. ... Maybe a little bit harder to explain things now and so on. ... I mean if you can go and talk to a person it will be a lot easier to understand and see if the person understands or not. Or understands if he/she understands wrong (laughs). The risk is that someone says that they understand it, but they don’t understand it as you want them to understand it.”

Jordan expressed that it is more difficult to understand and interpret each other which requires him/her to be more alert when communicating;

“(You have to) Make sure that you do understand each other, even though you don’t see the other person really. So that’s... maybe the main challenge. ... And to feel when someone actually maybe needs your help. ... So you have to be a bit more alert in this case I think when you have this online communication.”

Kim explained that since it is harder to detect the body language it becomes more difficult to interpret how others are reacting and feeling which affects the communication negatively;

“What I miss out on is the body language, so if I ask a question or make suggestion, I don’t see him/her scratching his/her head, I don’t know if he/she is (imitating sound of exhaling) you know none of that I am not getting. ... And I guess... I don’t know... I don’t know if that’s ultra-sensitive, but it means a lot to me to see how people are feeling about what I am talking about. ... You know, when it’s just neck above or shoulders above and in the camera, the body language is difficult to capture when we work remotely.”

Grounded in Charlie’s, Jordan’s and Kim’s quotes, we found that remote communication can lead to more misunderstandings and hinder detecting body language and how employees are feeling. This results in the communication becoming more unclear and weaker in the remote work setting. However, some of our interviewees explained how using cameras helped to improve remote communication. Alex and Lee explained that seeing their colleagues’ facial expressions in remote meetings helped with the communication, but how they still would prefer

to meet physically and face-to-face. Robyn also expressed that cameras improves the remote communication, but that it is still more difficult to communicate remotely compared to face-to-face;

“I think it is much better if you have the camera on actually. It takes time to get used to it, but now I think it’s much better like this... It’s probably very human that you need eye-contact and yeah...there are things happening when people are meeting in real life, that disappears over internet I think.”

Kim furthermore talked about how he/she prefers when colleagues have their cameras on in meetings in order to improve the communication;

“I would encourage people to turn their cameras on please, so we can have the human connection and it’s not just a bleeping light and a sound.”

Grounded in Alex’, Lee’s, Robyn’s and Kim’s quotes, we found that cameras in remote meetings improve the quality of the communication. However, they still experienced that physical meetings were more optimal when communicating. Therefore, seeing each other's facial expressions and body language improves the quality of remote communication and hence helps employees to interpret and understand each other more easily. This means that the utilization of information and communication technology (ICTs) affects the communication. Since we found that the communication in the mandatory remote work setting is weaker, this could result in more misunderstandings and difficulties in interpreting employees’ emotions and behaviors. Therefore, the communication through ICTs could affect employees' relationships in the mandatory remote work setting.

4.2.2 Tunnel vision & hindered creativity and learning

Five of our interviewees all mentioned an unexpected aspect of communication that was not a part of our pre-decided questions. Charlie, Drew, Kim, Robyn and Sam all experienced tunnel vision in relation to mandatory remote work. Charlie explained that he/she missed having spontaneous conversations that could lead to new ideas and solutions, and this could affect his/her learning process in his/her job role negatively;

“Yes, I would say the biggest challenge is that you miss all these improvised conversations and anything that can lead to like new ideas on how to solve things and... both technically and also process wise. And also I miss

learning things that I don't know, that I might need to know for later. Eh... I've only been doing this for 2 and a half years."

Robyn talked about how discussing new ideas remotely is more difficult due to it being less spontaneous, which affects the creativity and innovation negatively;

"There are some things you need to discuss in a room in a meeting where everyone come in and an easy way to contribute with their ideas or thinking or... it is less possible to be spontaneous I think over Teams meeting. So I think the organization is... I don't think innovative work is as good now as it was when we were meeting and discussing things, both in-office informal meetings or in a corridor or, so that is, I think the organization is lacking a little bit."

Kim expressed that he/she got tunnel vision due to less interaction with colleagues in person and not getting challenged or inspired by others' thoughts and ideas;

"Yeah, brainstorming, thinking and challenging each other, tackling analyses, I miss that. ... Because you don't have that interaction with a person it is sometimes difficult to see another point of view. Do you know what I mean? You are spending so much time just your own thoughts and your own ideas... yeah... you get what we call tunnel vision."

Drew explained that he/she appreciated to have discussion with colleagues in order to prevent tunnel vision;

"It is nice to have a discussion to see from a different perspective, because sometimes you can have just this tunnel vision in some of the cases especially if you do have repetitive work."

When we asked if these discussions were possible in a remote work setting Drew answered that it was more difficult; "It is possible, but it is not that easy.". Grounded in Sam's, Charlie's, Robyn's, Kim's, and Drew's quotes, we found that due to less and weaker communication in mandatory remote work they experienced tunnel vision, which negatively affected creativity, innovation, and learning. However, Taylor explained how he/she had found different ways to prevent tunnel vision for some of his/her employees and improve their learning and job role development;

"I think it's about the interaction and challenging people to ensure that, you know, keep them on their toes, that they feel that they develop, that they... That they don't sort of level out in their development curve. I had helped

one of my teammates, one of the guys/girls in the team. He's/She's been working for like a year, a year and a half, more or less. And he/she said that "I feel like I don't learn anything now because I don't get to travel and see customers". So we had to address that in some way. So new tasks. You know, giving him/her a little bit more challenging task involving him/her in stuff that he/she wouldn't normally be involved in, you know? Challenge them. I think that's, you know, part of the fun, having fun at work."

Therefore, it is possible to find innovative ways of preventing tunnel vision in the mandatory remote work setting. Due to tunnel vision and hindered creativity and learning, employees experienced mandatory remote work more negatively. We found that it was possible for a manager to prevent this tunnel vision to some extent for his/her employee by finding innovative ways of challenging him/her in the mandatory remote work setting.

4.2.3 Difficulties in building and maintaining social connections

When asking our interviewees about informal communication in the mandatory remote work setting, they explained there was less informal communication with colleagues. Robyn talked about how he/she really enjoyed talking having spontaneous informal communication with his/her colleagues in the office but that he/she has limited these informal conversations to his/her closest colleagues now when working remotely;

"The more social breaks that's very good, that I like, so maybe that is not very productive either for the company, but very good for the soul in a way to talk with your colleagues and that I don't have here, because I talk with some colleagues on Skype sometimes per day, but it's not the same as having a coffee break (laughs) or just a corridor chat ... I think the informal talks I have now when working from home is more with one in the department, that I would consider my friends. ... When you are in the office you speak with everyone, but I think now it's more concentrated on one that you have more in common with."

Some interviewees also expressed that they missed meeting their colleagues spontaneously at work and talking about non-work-related topics. Alex explained that he/she missed having spontaneous social interactions with colleagues, and that they rarely had any informal conversations before and after the remote meetings. Charlie expressed that he/she also missed having spontaneous informal conversations with colleagues; *"The bad thing about working from home is that you miss all these small talks with people, which you don't get a chance to do"*. Jordan explained that he/she missed the informal conversations, but that the implemented informal fika meetings helped him/her to keep some informal communication with colleagues;

“I mean the only thing you really miss is maybe the personal, sort of, personal contact, these kind of very informal chats, eh yeah. Simple small talks, coffee breaks all together... But we try to even make some virtual coffee breaks via Teams, at least once a week. And then some kind of, yeah smaller online gatherings like every little now and then, just to keep a bit of a contact.”

Grounded in Robyn’s, Alex’, Charlie’s, and Jordan’s quotes, we found that informal communication had become limited and that employees missed these social interactions. Moreover, the implemented fika meetings, or virtual coffee breaks, was a way to increase the informal communication between the employees in the mandatory remote work setting. However, employees did not feel that the online fika meetings were as socially fulfilling as the coffee breaks in the office. Drew explained that virtual fika meetings does not give him/her as much energy as coffee breaks in the office;

“I mean especially if you are alone sitting home, you are not gonna have a coffee break with yourself or have just like have a casual chit-chat that can like boost you with some energy or you know having anything like that. Sometimes we have virtual fika but it is still not the same.”

When asked about their online fika meetings, Kim talked about how the quality of the social interaction is not as good as meeting in the office;

“It is okay, you know it's making the best of it. It's not like sitting in a room across from people and we are chatting.”

Lee explained how he/she and his/her colleagues preferred to meet in the office rather than online; “Then also, everyone likes to be together in the normal way more, I think.”. Taylor talked about how his/her employees did not like informal online fika meetings, and that they prefer to wait until they can meet and socialize in person;

“But now we don't have any fika meetings because it's not... I don't think it's... or I'm quite sure that it's nothing that my team would encourage because there are sort of these afterwork arranged by Sustainic where people from all over Sweden can call in, and they have sort of mocked that activity a little bit. So. So, you know, I don't want to be in the line of fire. So we we wait until we can meet in person.”

Grounded in Drew’s, Kim’s, Lee’s and Taylor’s quotes, we found that even though these fika meetings increased the informal communication between colleagues, they still preferred to

meet each other in person. Moreover, our interviewees explain that it was harder to build and keep social connections remotely than in the office. Charlie talked about how it is more difficult to build a social connection online; “It is a lot harder to get to know people through internet I would say.”. Drew expressed that it was difficult for his/her manager to build strong relationships with his/her employees due to the mandatory remote work setting;

“I think the tricky part could be to have this relationship with your group, because I mean in Alex’ case, he/she joined during the remote time and it was hard to keep contact with the whole department for him/her. We have a lot of new people and we of course could not have any teambuilding or anything and some of the people they haven’t even met each other. So, I think that part can be challenging to make it work together in that way and sense.”

Jordan explained that it was important for him/her to meet his/her employees in the office in order to maintain the social connection to them, and that this was challenging to do in the mandatory remote work setting;

“I’m actually trying to be in the office, at least couple of days, to really still keep this kind of eh, personal touch as well. Because then you can really see what people actually feel, and if there’s anything I need to do or I need to help with. So that’s the challenge, it’s to... To keep this close contact maybe with each other.”

Robyn explained that it was important for him/her to meet colleagues in person, and that he/she believed that team members in a remote work setting could not build and keep strong social connections to each other;

“It is very important to... this physical contact, if you understand what I mean by that, LIVE contact with colleagues its uhm... now we are fortunate because we are in the lab sometime so we meet now anyway, but for those who are home 5 days a week I think it’s not good at all. I don’t think a team could be built only on remote work, yeah...”

Grounded in Charlie’s, Drew’s, Jordan’s and Robyn’s quotes, we found that they experienced that keeping and building social connections in the mandatory remote work setting is more difficult than in the office setting. Therefore, our interviewees experienced that the informal networking and communication decreased, and that informal online meetings were still not optimal to build and keep strong social connections. Since we found that employees experience building and keeping strong social connections to be more difficult in the mandatory remote work setting, it could affect the quality of their relationships.

4.3 Shift in power and leadership preferences

4.3.1 Increased autonomy leading to shift in power

As discussed in 4.1.3, employees got more freedom over how and when they conduct their work. The presence of leadership decreased and the employees had to work more autonomously. Alex and Taylor explained how they experienced doing less leadership now in the mandatory remote work setting compared to when working in the office. Jordan expressed that he/she gave his/her employees the power to decide themselves if they wanted to reveal their individual schedules;

“I don’t ask my employees to disclose their calendars. ... With my employees, I keep it on a voluntarily basis.”

Robyn explained that some colleagues took advantage of their newfound freedom in the way that they were in office more than strictly necessary, due to the lack of clear instructions from the manager;

“He/She has been a little bit absent... maybe not clear... instruction was... wanted really... it is sad that of course we have to work in lab, but on the same time he/she has not forbidden people to be there, so some colleagues are there more than they need I think. ”

Grounded in Alex’, Jordan’s and Robyn’s quotes, we found that the presence of leadership decreased in the mandatory remote work setting. This resulted in employees being able to hide their schedules from their managers and employees taking advantage of unclear rules. Therefore, the employees gained more power due to the mandatory remote work setting in the leader-follower relationship. To adjust the leadership accordingly, Taylor explained that he/she now focused more on supporting them in their newfound freedom and autonomy;

“So, yeah. I think that that freedom is important and that, you know, that you have that freedom and you know that you are to a certain limit or you can make your own decisions and you feel that you have that responsibility and that you have that power to be, you know, to conduct your work independently. It is important. So so, yeah, it’s my task to be there and support them and to be available. ... I always tried to make myself redundant. ... I give a lot of freedom to my team, I delegate a lot of responsibility, and I hold them accountable for their decisions and I support them in their decisions, so.”

Therefore, the leader's role in the mandatory remote work setting can shift from being controlling to being more supportive of the employees' increased autonomy and decision-making. When analyzing this with the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership, leaders in this work setting should be reflexive about how this increased responsibility affects their employees. Being reflexive could lead to a better understanding of the employees' preferred level of managers' support in executing decisions and work tasks. By taking the employees' preferences into consideration when leading them, leaders can affect the leader-follower relationships positively.

4.3.2 Change in leadership preferences

In this part, we focus on the managers' and employees' leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting and if those are aligned with their managers' leadership. In order to focus on the relationship, we have analyzed this in accordance to what team they belong to (see Figure 1).

Team 1: Alex the manager & employees Drew and Sam

As discussed before in 4.2.3, Alex thought that having social connections and spontaneous interactions with colleagues was important but hard to realize in the mandatory remote work setting. Alex further explained that there were no informal conversations with his/her superior. Moreover, Alex felt constrained in the way he/she could not ask questions and get help spontaneously due to only having one planned formal meeting with his/her superior. Not having informal conversations and only having few planned meetings goes against his/her leadership preferences of having a close and informal relationship with his/her superior. Therefore, the mandatory remote work setting hinders his/her leadership preferences to be fulfilled in the relationship with his/her superior.

Since it was important for Alex to have a social connection with his/her employees, he/she implemented fika-meetings in order to maintain their informal communication. Therefore, Alex found a way to socially connect with his/her employees in the mandatory remote work setting. However, Alex talked about how his/her employees prefer to socially interact in person.

Moreover, as discussed before in 4.2.3, Alex' employee Drew thought that the online fika meetings were not as good as in person. From this we found that Alex tried to keep a strong social connection with his/her team, but that it was somewhat constrained due to the mandatory remote work setting. Therefore, their leader-follower relationship was negatively affected.

Sam, another of Alex' employees, explained that he/she thought it was important for leaders to be more humane, but that it could be more difficult to detect this in the mandatory remote work setting;

“(At the start of the pandemic) it was even more important to put some more humanity in your leadership, so... because it was needed. ... With eye contact, you understand that it's a good person, but without that... In a remote setup, this approach is a little bit harder.”

However, Sam also talked about how despite this, he/she experienced that Alex had managed to create a safe and humane environment, which was needed in the mandatory remote work setting;

“We have a good relationship with all of this kind of communication that we have. He/She has... I always tell my concerns, and I hope that he/she tells me if something concerns him/her. ... He/She created psychological safety, for me as an individual. I mean, I have seen that he/she creates that environment for other colleagues as well. So that is very good, especially in these days when we are working remotely. ... And Alex is a person that is also very open and a bit informal.”

Therefore, Sam experienced his/her relationship with Alex to be in accordance with his/her leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting. Moreover, Sam also experienced their relationship to be open and somewhat informal, which is something that goes in line with Alex' leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting. Therefore, this could mean that Alex and Sam are more aligned in their leader-follower relationship.

Team 2: Jordan the manager & Robyn the employee

Jordan talked about how trust and open communication is even more important in the mandatory remote work setting because you do not see your employees/manager as frequently;

“A good leader according to me is a person that gives a lot of trust to the employees. It’s very important for me to, eh... That my manager trusts me that I don’t need to, you know, be like always be thinking like ”ah, I need to prove something, I need to prove that I’m working” for example. Especially now when this remote work when we don’t see each other as much, trust I think becomes, in my opinion, very critical. Because it’s the only way we can actually assure a very good work and life balance if you do have trust between you and your manager, in this case. But your manager knows that, yeah, you’re doing your best actually in this current situation, even if you can’t see each other, and stuff like that. So trust, I would say it’s a very important factor for me in a manager.”

Jordan explained that it was challenging to keep a social connection with his/her superior in the mandatory remote work setting. However, Jordan also talked about how it was possible to have good and open formal communication with his/her superior;

“I actually feel very good about my manager. I think he’s/she’s also very open and very fast at giving feedback, and... Yeah. I’m also very happy to be honest I can say, we have a very good communication. Like I feel I can call him/her anytime, I can tell him/her thing whenever I want, and I always feel a very good level of understanding, to be honest.”

Therefore, Jordan’s superior has lived up to his/her leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting to some extent. However, their relationship is somewhat constrained by the limited social connection. Jordan further explained that he/she tries to lead his/her employees according to the above mentioned leadership preferences as much as possible;

“And this is something I’m trying also to exercise myself with my employees as well. Give them a lot of trust and credibility (coughs), in this case. ... So, we need this sort of a mutual understanding, with trust, respect and very good communication between each other. ... I feel it’s good, open type of relationship, but not too close, like you know, we’re not this kind of best friends, so whatever, it’s... We keep a bit of a professional, I think, relationship between each other.”

Jordan also talked about how his/her employees had told him/her that they wanted to see him/her more in the office, but that they all understood that it was not possible due to the Corona situation;

“I know that also people do say that they miss of course seeing me, they loved also having more personal, you can say, face-to-face communication. But at the same time they all understand that okay, right now the situation is what it is, so eh, we try to do the best out of it you can say.”

Robyn explained how he/she wanted to have a social connection with his/her manager, but that this leadership preference was difficult to fulfil in the mandatory remote work setting;

“The little social part that was there is totally gone which is not good so... you know I think, but that’s hardly his/her fault, so to say, I mean it’s the situation.”

Moreover, Robyn talked about how others also had missed having a social connection with Jordan, and that when they told him/her that they wanted him/her to be more present Jordan started coming to the office more often;

“I mean... since his/her department need to work there I think he/she also needs to work there part of the time. And he/she didn’t in the beginning, but I know colleagues told him/her that uhm.. “we should see you sometimes here” because yeah. His/Her coworkers’ work is not only from home and then he/she cannot be out there all the way home because uhm... but I think he/she learned to be there and now he/she is coming sometimes which is very good I think.”

From this, we found that Jordan took his/her employees' needs into consideration, and changed his/her work processes in order to maintain the social connections with his/her employees. Moreover, Jordan’s increased presence led to Robyn’s and other employees’ leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting getting more fulfilled. This increased alignment could affect their leader-follower relationship positively.

Team 3: Taylor the manager & Charlie the employee

Taylor explained that his/her superior is constrained due to top management, and this resulted in his/her superior being busy and Taylor not wanting to disturb him/her;

“I mean, he/she is really busy, because he/she reports to his/her manager, has the responsibility and he's/she’s really, you know, pushing. His/Her is one of the most intense managers in the whole team or in the whole company, actually. So he/she keeps my manager extremely busy. ... I know, like my manager here, he/she comes to work and he/she closes the door. And then you feel like, you know, am I disturbing? Am I welcome? So being present physically is important. And in a pandemic when you cannot be physically present, you need to be present.”

Therefore, Taylor thought it was important to be present as a manager, which is something he/she didn’t experience enough from his/her superior, but something Taylor applied in his/her own leadership;

“And I have been available always for my team, with an open door... So I never close my door unless I have people here in the room.”

As discussed in 4.3.1, Taylor explained that it was important to be more supportive as a leader due to the employees’ newfound freedom and autonomy in the mandatory remote work setting. Moreover, Taylor’s employee Charlie talked about how he/she wanted a leader that is caring, supportive, fun and not micromanaging in the mandatory remote work setting;

“I believe a good leader knows what he’s/she’s doing and eh... I don’t like the people that talk a lot and don’t know what they are talking about. Eh, also like a caring leader that are also interested in the person. Mm... And supportive and fun I would say. Fun is also very important. Especially in these times to not... So that you can talk about other things than just work. Otherwise you would get very lonely. ... A very trusting leader or manager that don’t require reports or data about everything all the time to just keep control. He/She trusts us a lot which I guess helps this situation.”

Grounded in Taylor’s and Charlie’s quotes, we found that Taylor’s superior was constrained due to top management, which in turn affected Taylor’s relationship with his/her manager. Furthermore, Taylor seemed to live up to Charlie’s preferred leadership in the mandatory remote work setting which increased the alignment between them and could positively affect their leader-follower relationship.

By analyzing different leader-follower relationships within these three teams, we found that the leadership preferences changed for some employees in the mandatory remote work setting. We moreover found various constraints and alignments regarding their leadership preferences which affects the leader-follower relationships. In team 1 we found that Alex’ manager’s leadership was not aligned with her leadership preferences. This was due to mandatory remote work limiting the possibility of building and maintaining a close and informal relationship with him/her superior. However, this misalignment did not seem to affect Alex’ and Sam’s leader-follower relationship, as Alex lived up to Sam’s leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting of being an open and humane leader who creates a safe environment. Therefore, Alex’ leader-follower relationship with his/her superior was negatively affected whilst Alex’ leader-follower relationship with Sam was not affected by the mandatory remote work setting. In team 2 we found that Robyn’s leadership preferences were at first not met due to limited visibility of his/her manager (Jordan), and lack of informal communication with

him/her. However, when Jordan found out about these leadership preferences, Jordan adjusted his/her way of leading and increased his/her visibility and informal communication. This meant that Robyn's leadership preferences were better met, which resulted in an increased alignment that in turn could affect their leader-follower relationship positively. In team 3 we found that Taylor's superior was constrained due to top management, which limited Taylor in getting the support that was needed in order to lead his/her own employees. This was not in line with Taylor's leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting as he/she wants a more open and supportive leader-follower relationship. Taylor tried to lead his/her employees according to his/her leadership preferences, which went in line with his/her employee Charlie's preferences of leadership in the mandatory remote work setting which increased the alignment between them, and therefore could affect their leader-follower relationship positively. Grounded in this, we found that leaders should reflect about their employees' preferred leadership in the mandatory remote work setting and take this into consideration when leading them. This could increase the alignment between managers and employees and therefore affect the leader-follower relationship in mandatory remote work positively.

5. Discussion

In this chapter we discuss our findings of employees' experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting, and put them in relation to the remote work research that was presented in our literature review in chapter 2. The discussion is grounded in our three main themes from chapter 4; Employees' experiences of switching to the mandatory remote work setting, Challenges in connection & collaboration, and Shift in power and leadership preferences. Furthermore, we also discuss the findings in the third main theme Shift in power and leadership in relation to the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership.

Our master's thesis was guided by the research question "How do managers and their respective employees experience mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting?" which resulted in these main themes; *Employees' experiences of switching to the mandatory remote work setting, Challenges in connection & collaboration, and Shift in power and leadership preferences.* These main themes contain in turn different sub-themes and findings that answer our research question.

5.1 The consequences of mandatory remote work setting

In this part, we discuss the findings from the first main theme from chapter 4 *Employees' experiences of switching to the mandatory remote work setting* which contains three sub-themes; *External environment and negative presumptions about remote work affecting employees' experiences, Living situation, IT skills & mental health affecting employees' adaptation, and More freedom leading to more responsibility.*

5.1.1 Negative emotions & More social acceptance

In the sub-theme *External environment and negative presumptions about remote work affecting employees' experiences*, we found that the increased negative emotions due to the external environment or the switch is something that impacted the employees' experience. This goes partly in line with Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova's (2016, p. 36) finding that employees feel an increased level of negative emotions in remote work. However, we found a connection to the increased negative emotions to be more connected to the external

environment, rather than work-related problems. Therefore, we argue that emotions in the mandatory remote work setting could be more affected by the external environment rather than the problems related to the work setting. However, our interviewees' negative emotions related to the external environment could be largely affected by the pandemic, and therefore not applicable to the mandatory remote work setting when the pandemic is over.

Furthermore, we found that employees' negative presumptions of remote work affected their experiences of the mandatory remote work setting. This goes partly in line with Maruyama & Tietze (2012, p. 464) findings that employees had more negative presumptions about remote work before experiencing it. Moreover, they also found that after experiencing remote work, these negative presumptions decreased and did not affect their overall experiences of remote work which were mostly positive (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012, p. 464). This could also be connected to our findings since the employees' negative presumptions decreased after having experienced the mandatory remote work setting for some time. Therefore, we argue that employees' have similar experiences regarding the decreased negative presumptions in both remote work and mandatory remote work. However, we also found that employees' not only had their own negative presumptions about remote work, but that they also felt judged by their colleagues when working remotely before the pandemic. Moreover, employees believe that remote work will be more socially accepted in the future after many employees have experienced mandatory remote work. From this, we argue that mandatory remote work actually led to less negative presumptions about remote work due to more employees having experienced the mandatory remote work setting, and will positively affect employees' experiences of remote work in the future.

5.1.2 Balancing work and home life & Realizing the necessity of ICT skills

In the sub-theme *Living situation, IT skills & mental health affecting employees' adaption*, we found that having a smaller living space, and having someone else in the same space at the same time when working from home, can affect the work-home balance negatively. This goes partly in line with Fedáková and Ištoňová (2017, p. 75) who suggest that family life might interrupt employees' work processes at home and that insufficient living space could affect the work-life balance negatively. However, we further found that employees' work setups in their homes could affect their physical health and work efficiency negatively. Another finding in

this sub-theme is that the employees' different living situations affected how they adapted to and experienced the mandatory remote work setting. This goes partly in line with Savić (2020, p. 104) who explains that the mandatory remote work setting led to employees having no choice but to switch and adapt to this new work setting, and find innovative ways of changing the way they work and live. However, we further found that not all employees could find innovative ways of working and living in this mandatory remote work setting, which resulted in a problematic work-life balance. Grounded in this, we argue that there are similar challenges in keeping a sufficient work-home balance in both remote work and mandatory remote work, but that employees' adaptation to the work setting will be affected depending on the remote work setting being mandatory or not.

Another finding in this sub-theme, is that the level of already established digital skills affected how employees could adapt to the increased usage of ICTs in the mandatory remote work setting. This goes partly in line with Liu, Van Wart, Kim, Wang, McCarthy and Ready (2020) and Outvorst, Visker and De Waal (2017) findings that communication in remote work is dependent on employees' skills and utilization of ICTs. However, we further found that the mandatory remote work setting increased the use and reliance of ICTs in organizations, which in turn increased the need for employees to have sufficient ICTs skills. Since employees did not have a choice but to adapt to this new mandatory work setting, it actually developed their ICTs skills. Grounded in this, we argue that ICT skills are needed in both the remote work setting and mandatory remote work setting in order to ensure a good quality of the communication, but that the mandatory remote work setting actually increases employees' ICTs skills at a higher tempo due to the fact that they have no choice but to adapt.

5.1.3 Freedom requires more discipline

In the sub-theme *More freedom leading to more responsibility*, we found that employees experienced more freedom to plan their days and balance their work-private life more efficiently in the mandatory remote work setting. This goes in line with previous studies that suggest that employees are more flexible to organize their working time with their family or private life better (Morgan, 2004; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Wojcák, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016; Fedáková and Ištoňová, 2017). Moreover, we also found that this newfound freedom came with a responsibility to structure and plan your

own work days efficiently. This goes partly in line with Pyöriä's (2011, p. 391) finding that employees need to be efficient in their time management in order to be successful in remote work. However, we further found that not all employees had self-discipline or the ability to structure their work days efficiently, despite it negatively affecting their work-life balance. Furthermore, we found that the ability to structure the work days is individual, which affects their ability to adapt to the mandatory remote work setting. Employees who did not have developed or could not develop structuring skills in this mandatory remote work setting, experienced a problematic work-life balance. Grounded in this, we argue that the mandatory remote work setting affects employees more negatively if they cannot find an effective way of structuring their work and balancing their work and private life, and therefore affecting their ability to successfully adapt to this mandatory remote work setting.

5.2 Are you there?

In this part, we discuss the findings in the second main theme from chapter 4 *Challenges in connection & collaboration* which contains three sub-theme; *Decreased, slower and weaker formal communication*, *Tunnel vision & hindered creativity and learning*, and *Difficulties in building and maintaining social connections*.

5.2.1 Remote communication leading to tension & misunderstandings

In the sub-theme *Decreased, slower and weaker formal communication* we found that communication and exchange of information got slower in the mandatory remote work setting. This goes partly in line with Pyöriä (2011, p. 392) who found that the information sharing is more difficult in remote work. However, we further found that employees needed to use more time on scheduling meetings and communicating with their colleagues than before when working in the office, that the formal networking got more limited due to the mandatory remote work, and that not getting the information that was needed to proceed with work tasks in time could create tension between employees. Therefore, the difficulties in information sharing in mandatory remote work could affect relationships negatively in this setting. However, we argue that these challenges were not due to the mandatory remote work setting since these difficulties were found in the more voluntary remote work setting as well. There are thus similarities in

how employees experience information sharing in both the remote work and mandatory remote work setting.

We found that remote communication can lead to more misunderstandings and hinder detecting body language and how colleagues are feeling. This results in the communication becoming more unclear and weaker in the mandatory remote work setting. This goes partly in line with previous research which found that there are more misunderstandings when communicating remotely (Gupta & Pathak, 2018; Van Wart, Roman, Wang & Liu, 2019; Gheni, Jusoh, Jabar, Ali, Abdullah, Abdullah & Khalefa, 2015; Darics, 2020). It also goes partly in line with Wojcack, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova and Polakova (2016, p. 35) who found that the lack of face-to-face communication, which includes non-verbal clues such as body language and postures, makes it more difficult for employees to understand the context of messages. However, we further found that cameras in remote meetings improve the quality of the communication, but that employees still experienced that physical meetings to be more optimal when communicating. This goes partly in line with Golden, Veiga and Dino (2008, p. 1418) finding that communication through ICTs can never fully live up to the richness of face-to-face communication. Therefore, we argue that there are similarities in how employees experience communication in both the remote work and mandatory remote work setting.

5.2.2 The one man show

In the sub-theme *Tunnel vision & hindered creativity and learning* we found that due to less and weaker communication in mandatory remote work they experienced tunnel vision, which negatively affected creativity, innovation, and learning. This goes partly in line with Pyöriä (2011) who suggests that it is more difficult for employees who work remotely to exchange ideas with colleagues and to ask for help with more complex work-related issues, and Maruyama and Tietze (2012) who found that due to lack of face-to-face communication the information sharing becomes more difficult, which in turn hinders employees to share and improve their work-related expertise. However, we further found that employees can find new ways of being challenged in their knowledge and work processes in order to prevent tunnel vision, and increase creativity and learning in mandatory remote work. Since the ideas exchange and expertise sharing between employees were difficult in both remote work and

mandatory remote work, we argue that tunnel vision is experienced to be a challenge in both work settings.

5.2.3 “The fun part of work is gone”

In the sub-theme *Difficulties in building and maintaining social connections* we found that informal communication had become limited and that employees missed these social interactions. This goes partly in line with Pyöriä's (2011, p. 391) finding that employees highly valued social relations at the workplace, which were negatively affected by the remote work setting unless there were organized informal meetings for the employees. However, we further found that employees experienced that having informal fika meetings with their colleagues helped with the social isolation, but that they still preferred meeting face-to-face. Another finding is that employees experience keeping and building social connections in the mandatory remote work setting to be more difficult. This goes partly in line with Maruyama and Tietze (2012, p. 463) who found that face-to-face communication is needed in order to develop strong personal relationships, which is not possible in the remote work setting. Grounded in this, we argue that there are similarities in how employees experience keeping and building social connections in both the remote work setting and the mandatory remote work setting. This can in turn affect relationships in both work settings.

5.3 E-leader-E-follower relationships

In this part, we will discuss the third main theme from chapter 4 *Shift in power and leadership preferences* which contains two sub-themes; *Increased autonomy leading to shift in power*, and *Change in leadership preferences*. We analyzed these findings with the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership.

5.3.1 Self-leadership & Reflexivity

In the sub-theme *Increased autonomy leading to shift in power* we found that the presence of leadership decreased in the mandatory remote work setting, and that employees gained more power due to the mandatory remote work setting in the leader-follower relationship. This goes partly in line with Schwarzmüller, Brosi, Duman and Welpé's (2018, p. 128-129) finding, that

employees have increased autonomy and influence in organizational decisions, and that leaders thus need to engage in these opportunities. Grounded in this, we argue that there were similarities in how employees experienced the increased autonomy and shift of power in both remote work and mandatory remote work.

Moreover, Schwarzmüller, Brosi, Duman and Welpé's (2018, p. 130) emphasized the importance of relationship-oriented leadership, which partly goes in line with the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership that we applied in order to analyze this finding. When looking at employees' increased autonomy and organizational decision-making from a relationship-oriented leadership, they found that the relevance of participative leadership increases (Schwarzmüller, Brosi, Duman & Welpé, 2018, p. 132). This goes partly in line with our finding when applying the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017), which is that being reflexive about employees' newfound autonomy could lead to a better understanding of their preferred level of managers' support in executing decisions and work tasks. This could positively affect the alignment between managers and employees, and therefore also affect the leader-follower relationships if leaders take these reflections into consideration when leading the employees. Therefore, we argue that the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership has gained further insight into how leader-follower relationships could be affected by employees' increased autonomy and decision-making in the remote work and mandatory remote work setting.

5.3.2 Affected remote relationships

In the sub-theme *Change in leadership preferences*, we found that the leadership preferences changed for some employees in the mandatory remote work setting. When applying the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership to this (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017), we moreover found various constraints in the alignments regarding their leadership preferences in the mandatory remote work setting, which in turn can affect the experiences of leader-follower relationships. These constraints included a limited possibility of building and maintaining a close and informal relationship, limited visibility, and lack of informal communication which were all partly generated from the mandatory remote work setting. As argued before, these challenges can be experienced in both the remote work setting and mandatory remote work setting. Therefore, we argue that these misalignments and constraints in the leader-follower

relationship can be experienced in both remote work and mandatory remote work. Since previous research about leadership in remote work have been largely focused on leadership traits and styles in order to identify which are effective in a remote work setting (Horner-Long & Schoenberg, 2002; Hambley, O'Neill & Kline, 2007; Wang, Liu, Lee & Chen, 2018; Sousa & Rocha, 2019; Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim & McCarthy, 2019), we further argue that our finding provides new insights into how leader-follower relationships are experienced in both the regular and mandatory remote work setting.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, we present our conclusions that are grounded in the discussion (chapter 5). We furthermore discuss what practical implications our conclusions have. Last but not least we encourage further research on employees' experiences of mandatory remote work and relationships in this work setting.

Grounded in our discussion, we conclude that there are more similarities than differences in how employees experience the remote work setting compared to the mandatory remote work setting. The main difference we found is that employees in mandatory remote work have no choice but to adapt to the new work setting. This in turn generates new challenges for the employees since their living situation, IT skills, and work structuring-skills or self-discipline can largely affect their ability to adapt to the mandatory remote work setting, and therefore also how they experience it. The main similarities we found between remote work and mandatory remote work is employees' experiences of hindered information sharing and communication, decreased negative presumptions about remote work, tunnel vision, and difficulties in keeping and building social connections. We further conclude that adding the theoretical concept of reflexive leadership led to new insights in the research about how leader-follower relationships were affected in both the remote work setting and mandatory remote work setting. We found that leader-follower relationships could be affected by employees' experiences of increased autonomy and decision-making in the remote work and mandatory remote work setting.

For the practitioners in the mandatory remote work setting, this study indicates that finding a sufficient working space at home, developing the needed ICTs skills and also having the ability to structure and organize the work days is crucial for the employees' adaptation to the mandatory remote work setting. Moreover, it is important to have the right technology and

ICTs, be extra clear in the communication, use cameras, and implement informal conversations in order to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations as much as possible in the communication. It is also important to create a space for employees where they can socially interact either online or in a physical and face-to-face setting in order to build and develop and maintain closer social relationships with colleagues and for employees to feel more connected to the team or organization. Furthermore, we suggest that being reflexive as both a manager and employee can help to better understand others' emotions, behaviors and circumstances that can be affected by the mandatory remote work setting. This in turn can help in increasing the alignment of the leader-follower relationship between managers and employees, which can result in stronger relationships in both the regular and mandatory remote work setting.

In order to draw more nuanced conclusions about employees' experiences of mandatory remote work and the relationships in this work setting, we encourage researchers to further explore this topic with in-depth qualitative research methods. Moreover, in order to gain a better understanding of how employees experience leader-follower relationships in the remote work setting or the mandatory remote work setting, we encourage more researchers to investigate these relationships with a relational leadership concept, such as reflexive leadership.

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Appendix - Interview Guide For Managers and Employees

Interview Guide for Managers:

We will begin with some formal things before the interview, such as GDPR and research ethics.

Due to GDPR and research ethics, we need to ask for your consent for conducting and storing this interview. We will store the interview safely and confidentially, and also delete the recorded material after transcribing. We will only use the collected data from this interview for research purposes. We will not use the company name or your personal name in the transcript or thesis, so you will remain anonymous. We also want to inform you that you have the right to decide over your own participation and this data, which means that you can cancel your participation and revoke this data if you want to.

We just want to ask for your permission to record this interview. Do you give your consent to this?

Tell them the purpose of this master thesis

- Our purpose is to research managers' and their respective employees' experiences of remote work from a leadership perspective

Tell them the structure of this interview

- Background, introductory, themes, concluding.

Please be aware that some of the questions might sound repetitive. (we notice that we have internet problems, therefore don't be afraid to ask us to repeat the questions if you didn't hear it.)

Ask if the interviewee has any questions before we begin.

Pink - Questions for people who had office-work setting before at Alfa laval

“Start recording”

Background questions:

- Occupation/job title
- How long have you been at the company?
- How long have you been working with your current manager?
- How long have you been a manager at the company?
- Have you worked in a manager position before? If yes, how long?
- **Have you experienced both remote work and in-office work? In Alfa Laval?**
- How long have you been working remotely?
- How is your current work situation? Are you working fully remotely or partly in the office?
- Where do you conduct your remote work?
 - At home, summerhouse, café, etc.
- Did you choose to work remotely yourself or was it mandatory/involuntary due to Corona? If yes, ask the interviewee to elaborate on how it affected her/him.

Introductory questions:

- How does remote work affect your work-home balance?
- A more personal question (you can be how general or specific as you want to be); how does your living situation look like (family, partner, etc)? Are there more people in your home working remotely at the same time?
- What is a good leader according to you?
- What characterizes a good team according to you?
- How would you describe the organizational culture at your workplace?
 - Values, norms, etc.
- What kind of communication channels are you mostly using at your workplace?
 - Mail, meetings, calls, online, social...
 - **Did you use the same communication channels when working in the office, or did it change?**
- Can you please describe your typical workday in the remote work setting?
 - Do you have meetings, are you mostly having deadlines and work alone.....
- Which type of work/ways of working do you prefer?
 - Autonomous, group work...
- Do you feel like your preferred way of working is possible in a remote work setting?

Theme questions:

Remote work

- Do you prefer remote work or working in an office?
- **Did your work processes change due to remote work? If yes, how?**
- **How did you cope with switching to a remote work setting?**
- Are you experiencing any challenges and/or improvements when working remotely?
 - Work processes, productivity, work-home balance, etc.
- Did you receive any guidelines on how to work remotely? If no, then how did you manage to adapt to the remote work setting yourself?
- Do you feel that your needs and work preferences in this remote work setting are taken into consideration?

E-leadership

- How much time per week are you able to practice leadership parallel to operational/administrative work? Please include a percentage? (if less, how and in what ways did it decrease?)
 - **Has this changed due to remote work?**
- What do you feel is important when leading your team/employees?
- **How was your relationship with your employees/team when working in the office?**
- **How did you experience your way of leading when working in the office?**
- How is your relationship with your employees/team now when working remotely? Has it changed?
- How do you experience your way of leading when working remotely? Has it changed?
- How is the remote work setting affecting your employees/team?
 - **How did they react during the switch to remote work?**
- Do you experience any challenges and/or opportunities related to the relationship with your employees/team when working remotely?
- Do you experience any challenges and/or opportunities related to the relationship with your managers when working remotely?
- How do you experience the organizational culture when working remotely?

- Did the values and norms become weaker/stronger/change in a remote work setting?
- How do you experience communication with your manager and the team when working remotely (both formal and informal)?
 - Is it different from the office setting?

Concluding questions:

- Do you think remote work affects leadership generally?
- Would you prefer to work remotely or in the office, or a mix of both, in the future? (after the pandemic). Why?
- Would you prefer your employees/team to work remotely or in the office, or a mix of both, in the future? (after the pandemic)
- Any other aspects or comments you want to add that you want to elaborate on or discuss in relation to remote work and leadership?

Interview Guide for Employees:

We will begin with some formal things before the interview, such as GDPR and research ethics.

Due to GDPR and research ethics, we need to ask for your consent for conducting and storing this interview. We will store the interview safely and confidentially, and also delete the recorded material after transcribing. We will only use the collected data from this interview for research purposes. We will not use the company name or your personal name in the transcript or thesis, so you will remain anonymous. We also want to inform you that you have the right to decide over your own participation and this data, which means that you can cancel your participation and revoke this data if you want to.

We just want to ask for your permission to record this interview. Do you give your consent to this?

Tell them the purpose of this master thesis

- Our purpose is to research managers' and their respective employees' experiences of remote work from a leadership perspective

Tell them the structure of this interview

- Background, introductory, themes, concluding.

Please be aware that some of the questions might sound repetitive. (we notice that we have internet problems, therefore don't be afraid to ask us to repeat the questions if you didn't hear it.)

Ask if the interviewee has any questions before we begin.

Pink - Questions for people who had office-work setting before at Alfa laval

“Start recording”

Background questions:

- Occupation/job title
- How long have you been at the company?
- How long have you been working with your current manager?
- **Have you experienced both remote work and in-office work? In Alfa Laval?**
- How long have you been working remotely?
- How is your current work situation? Are you working fully remotely or partly in the office?
- Where do you conduct your remote work?
 - At home, summerhouse, café, etc.
- Did you choose to work remotely yourself or was it mandatory/involuntary due to Corona? If yes, ask the interviewee to elaborate on how it affected her/him.

Introductory questions:

- How does remote work affect your work-home balance?
- A more personal question (you can be as general or specific as you want to be); how does your living situation look like (family, partner, etc)? Are there more people in your home working remotely at the same time?
- What is a good leader according to you?
- What characterizes a good team according to you?
- How would you describe the organizational culture at your workplace?
 - Values, norms, etc.
- What kind of communication channels are you mostly using right now when working remotely?
 - Mail, meetings, calls, online, social...
 - **Did you use the same communication channels when working in the office, or did it change?**
- Can you please describe your typical workday in the remote work setting?
 - Do you have meetings, are you mostly having deadlines and work alone.....
- Which type of work/ways of working do you prefer?
 - Autonomous, group work...
- Do you feel like your preferred way of working is possible in a remote work setting?

Theme questions:

Remote work

- Do you prefer remote work or working in an office?
- **Did your work processes change due to remote work? If yes, how?**
- **How did you cope with switching to a remote work setting?**
- Are you experiencing any challenges and/or improvements when working remotely?
 - Work processes, productivity, work-home balance, etc.
- Did you receive any guidelines on how to work remotely? If no, then how did you manage to adapt to the remote work setting yourself?
- Do you feel that your needs and work preferences in this remote work setting are taken into consideration?

E-leadership

- **How was your relationship with your manager when working in the office?**
- **How would you describe your manager's way of leading when working in the office?**
- How is your relationship with your manager now when working remotely?
- How would you describe your manager's way of leading in a remote work setting?
- **How did the remote work setting affect your manager? How did he/she react?**

- Did you experience any differences in your manager's way of leading when switching to remote work?
 - Office vs remote work setting
- Do you experience any challenges and/or opportunities related to the relationship with your manager when working remotely?
 - Both the relationship with own managers
- How do you experience the organizational culture when working remotely?
 - Did the values and norms become weaker/stronger/change in a remote work setting?
- How do you experience communication with your manager and the team when working remotely (both formal and informal)?
 - Is it different from the office setting?

Concluding questions:

- Do you think remote work affects leadership generally?
- Would you prefer to work remotely or in the office, or a mix of both, in the future? (after the pandemic). Why?
- Any other aspects or comments you want to add that you want to elaborate on or discuss in relation to remote work and leadership?