How Swedish Managers are Managing in Remote Work

A Documentation of Managers' Experiences and Lessons Learned from
Working Remotely During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic in Sweden, restrictions and recommendations advised people to work from home, and due to this, many managers have been working remotely during the pandemic. The purpose of this study is to document managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the pandemic to provide insights for other managers on how to improve their remote work. The documentation was created by interviewing 18 managers from various industries, with semi-structured interviews, and their answers were then analyzed with a thematic analysis. The documentation displayed multiple experiences and learnings regarding online meetings, communication, culture, work environment, efficiency, and reflection. This comprehensive documentation represents insights that can be of value for other managers, who wish to improve their remote managerial work.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Manager, Management, Experiences, Lessons learned, Remote work, Digitalization.*

Acknowledgement

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) received information about the first known case of Covid-19 in Wuhan on the 31st of December 2019 (WHO, 2020a). Since then, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerable effect globally, with over 170 million confirmed cases, over three million confirmed deaths, and 223 countries affected (WHO, 2021b). Sweden had the first confirmed case of Covid-19 on the 31st of January 2020 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). There are over 1 million confirmed cases in Sweden up to this point, and over 14 thousand people have died due to Covid-19 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021a). The spread of the virus led to recommendations and restrictions, but Sweden has not experienced full lockdowns, which other countries have, such as France, Italy and Spain (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020). During the spring of 2021, the government of Sweden did not state the exact number of people that were allowed to meet, but recommended that people only should meet a "few" persons, depending on the individual's life situation. Furthermore, the government proposed that companies should encourage people to work from home and postpone conferences and other events to reduce the spread of Covid-19 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021b).

These restrictions have led to new ways of working and required remote work, but remote work could have various meanings in diverse contexts. Remote work can be defined as: "a flexible work arrangement whereby workers work in locations, remote from their central offices or production facilities, the worker has no personal contact with co‑workers there, but is able to communicate with them using technology" (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990, p. 530). Since the pandemic required a transition from working as usual at the office to start working from home with digital tools, Di Martino and Wirths (1990) definition of remote work will be used in the context of this study.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the following restrictions in Sweden have had a more significant impact on some industries than others (SCB, 2021). Organizations have faced new challenges, which have affected their way of working since they cannot work as they used to. Within these organizations, managers have had to face diverse problems and find solutions between restrictions, recommendations and the organization's interests. The authors, therefore, find it

relevant to interview managers and document how remote work has affected their daily work as a result of the restrictions and recommendations following from Covid-19 in Sweden.

1.1 Problem Statement & Contributions

The pandemic and subsequent restrictions in Sweden has led to new ways of working for managers, new experiences, and Daudelin (1996) says that managers' day-to-day experiences are rich sources of learning. To capture these learnings, reflection can be used since "reflection has the capacity to reinforce learning" (Ronnie, 2016, p.5). When reflecting, a person takes an experience, filters it, turns it, and makes connections to previous experience, and the process of doing this results in learning (Daudelin, 1996). However, the problem is how to capture these experiences and lessons learned since managers' interest in reflection can be questioned.

Mintzberg (1990) claims that managers dislike reflection, and they are instead strongly action-oriented, and Daudelin (1996) agrees by saying that action has a higher value than reflection within managers. Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) further state that "what managers desperately need is to stop and think - to step back and reflect thoughtfully on their experiences" (2003, p.57). They also continue by saying that "many business organizations face a similar problem—they know how to execute, but they are not so adept at stepping back to reflect on their situations." (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003, p.56). With these statements, it is debatable if reflection is an interest within managers or not, and because of this potential lack of reflection, there is a risk of missing valuable lessons learned from the pandemic.

This study aims to find and document the learnings from working remotely during the pandemic. This will be done by starting a discussion and reflection with managers regarding their perceived changes in their work, and experiences together learnings from working remotely during the pandemic. Today, managers have more than one year of experience working remotely, and these experiences can be seen as a solid foundation of their expressed learnings. Reflection can be created by having someone asking questions and listening (Daudelin, 1996). In this study, the topic guide (see appendix A) and the in-depth interviews, together with probing questions, will be utilized to create reflections, which will result in learnings. By documenting these experiences

and learnings, other managers can look into the findings and (potentially) get an understanding of how to improve their own work, when working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also in the future. Bolander, Sumelius and Werr (2020) are saying that the pandemic can lead to a change in mindsets regarding when and where work can be carried out, and there is "a shift towards increasing flexibility" (Bolander, Sumelius & Werr, 2020, p.6). It is, therefore, possible to argue that remote work will, to some extent, continue after the pandemic, and the documented findings can be relevant for managers after the pandemic as well.

1.2 Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to document managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the pandemic to provide insights for other managers on how to improve their remote work. To accomplish the purpose, the two following research questions have been formulated:

1. What has changed in managers daily work, by working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic?

2. What are managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.3 Research Delimitations

To fulfill the purpose and to be able to answer the research questions, this study will be delimited by some active choices, made by the authors. Companies included in the study will be small and midsize enterprises (SME) in Sweden, and the study will not look into schools, governments, sports organisations or NPOs. The European commission's (2019) definition of small and midsize enterprises is based on a company's number of employees and by turnover. The definition refers to medium-sized enterprises as less than 250 employees, and an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and small enterprises as less than 50 employees and an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 10 million. Enterprises with less than ten employees and an annual

turnover of less than EUR 2 million are referred to as micro-enterprises (Kommissionen 2003; Europeiska kommissionen 2019) and will not be a part of this study. In other words, the small and midsize enterprises in this study will have between 10 and 250 employees and an annual turnover between 2 million EUR and 50 million EUR. Since the study was conducted in Sweden, delimitations were made when choosing managers, requiring that participants needed to be managers that operate in the Swedish market. However, their companies did not necessarily need to be founded in Sweden or only operating in Sweden. Furthermore, since the study is conducted in a Swedish context, and the fact that working remotely is a recommendation and not a restriction in Sweden, experiences can vary compared to managers working in countries with lockdowns. The study focuses on managers' perceived changes in their work, experiences and lessons learned, but the pandemic is not over yet and the full consequences are yet to be seen.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

First, a literature review will be presented, including theories and models regarding management, together with a critical perspective. This is followed by an explanation of remote work and digitalization within the practice of management. The literature review will then end with definitions of experience and lessons learned, together with a review of similar previous research. Second, the methodology will be described and discussed, explaining the interview design, sampling strategy, thematic analysis, including ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study. Third, results will be presented with quotes from the interviews, explaining changes, experiences and lessons learned. Thereafter, the presented data and earlier presented literature will be discussed, and the research questions will be answered. The thesis will lastly end with a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

In the following literature review, theories, concepts and previous research will be presented and discussed. First, a selection of theories regarding management will be presented. It is argued that the descriptions of management are vague and that the understanding of the field is superficial (Mintzberg, 1971). In this study, relevant literature has been selected and interpreted, based on the author's judgement. The presented literature about management will then be discussed to create an awareness of the critical perspective. Second, remote work will be defined and discussed in relation to managerial work, followed by a presentation of digitalization and how digital development affects managerial work. In this study, remote work and digitalization are closely related, and it is, therefore, crucial to include them both in the literature review. Lastly, experiences and lessons learned will be defined and similar (to this study) previous research will be presented. The content in this literature review will be utilized in the discussion (chapter 5) together with data.

2.1 Management As Practice

Henri Fayol is seen as one of the first theorists that provided a general theory about management, and his contributions have been influential in the research field of management (Voxsted, 2017). Fayol (1949) divided the management practice into five functions and 14 elements, which describes managers tasks and crucial principles. The five functions consist of planning, organizing, giving orders, co-cordinaton and control. Three examples from the elements are equity, initiative and division of work (Fayol, 1949). Fayol's work can be seen as a theoretical framework for understanding management (Voxsted, 2017), and different researchers have produced and are presenting similar and varying conclusions in the field of management. Hales (1986) argues that managers perform both general and specialist work, together with technical and administrative. He also discusses the content of managerial work and how it differs between cultures and levels of management. Furthermore, there will never be one solution that works for all problems because humans will always want to develop (Kiechel, 2012). In this study, the presentation of managers' work will be based on Kotter's (1999, 2001) research, together with Mintzberg's research (2011).

Kotter (2001) argues that management is much about coping with complexity, and being a manager includes planning, communicating, creating structure, delegating responsibilities, staffing, and dealing with complex decisions (Kotter, 2001). Along with these functions, Kotter (1999) conducted a study by interviewing and observing 15 successful general managers to detect daily behaviours. The findings from his study explain behaviours that improve the interpretation of managerial work. Kotter's (1999) findings describe that managers are surrounding themselves with people almost all day. In his study, 25% of the managers' working time was spent being alone, and some managers spent 90% of their work time with others. Kotter also found that managers are working just under 60 hours per week, concluding that managers work long hours. Furthermore, in a perspective of communication, Kotter found that managers have wide breadth in their discussions, where they do not limit themselves to top-management concerns, and they also discuss matters not even closely related to business. Managers are also not limited to formal talking, their discussions contain humor and jokes, and instead of delegating to people and telling them what to do, managers try to influence them. Another finding was that "[managers] regularly engage in activities that even they regard as a waste of time" (Kotter, 1999).

In addition to Kotter's work (1999, 2001), Mintzberg's (2011) perspective of managerial work is also used in this study (see model 1.0). Mintzberg made an attempt to create a model with the purpose of not looking into what managers do but, by gathering existing research and descriptions, create a comprehensive model with a single diagram. The model represents a practical framework of different parts of managing, which can help managers understand their work (Mintzberg, 2011). Mintzberg's model is used in this paper since it is a comprehensive model which covers multiple dimensions. The model explains how managers' way of working and how different work tasks interact with each other within the different planes. Managerial work is central in this study, and Mintzberg's perspectives and Kotter's research (1999, 2001) create a foundation of an understanding.
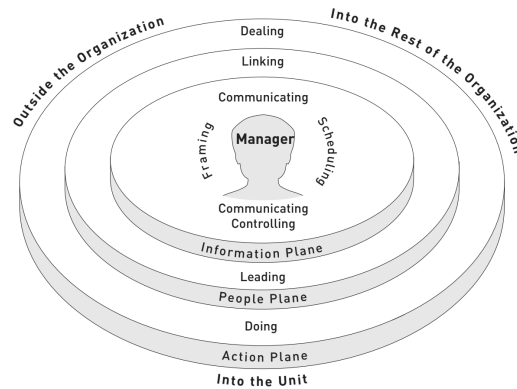
Figure 1.0 Henry Mintzberg's Model of Managing (2011, p. 48)

The model has a base with the manager in the centre, where the manager has formal responsibility for its surroundings. Three surrounding layers show how the manager works internally within the organisation and externally (see Figure 1.0). The manager in the centre of the model carries out two roles that interact with each other, framing and scheduling. According to Mintzberg (2011), framing is about what decisions the manager chooses to make and which particular issues they focus on, while scheduling is important because it brings value to the framing. The way the manager schedules the work might influence other persons in the unit because it shows what the manager is focusing on. The model is divided into three planes, information, people and action, which will be presented below.

The information plane refers to communication and control. If the manager performs the job in a good way, he or she will become a nerve centre. Mintzberg (2011) mainly means that the manager is the best one informed in the unit. This information, and how it is communicated, can be used to make actions, not mainly by the manager, but by the people, the manager is leading. The manager is in charge and responsible for the controlling because if he or she do not take the responsibility, there might be confusion of who should.

The people's plan is about helping people get things done, not through information but rather to manage together with them, without getting too involved in what is supposed to be done but leading them to a specific end. Internally, it is about leading and trying to bring out the best from people, solve conflicts, and work with shaping the culture within the organisation. Outside the

organisation, it is about linking to people outside of the unit, including maintaining relationships with people outside of the unit or network with external supporters (Mintzberg, 2011).

The last of three planes is the action plane. Internally it is about acting on the inside, which means that a manager gets personally involved in the actions that are required for the unit to make and do things. It is neither about doing all of it by him or herself nor only sitting back and giving instructions. For instance, dealing with external partners such as suppliers and other managers inside the organisation can be dealing with on the outside. This dealing often adds credibility during negotiations. Further on, Mintzberg (2011) argues that the three layers, only together, provide the balance that managers need. Too much communication leads to a manager that does not get anything done, while a manager that does everything on his own ends up doing everything by himself.

In addition to the mentioned model, Mintzberg has discovered other findings of how managers work. In his book Managing (2011), he concludes some management characteristics that have been supported by other researchers, for instance, Kurke and Aldrich (1983). Mintzberg (2011) believes these characteristics will not change over time, but new technologies could impact the management practice, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Regarding the pace and activities in the practice of management, it is recognised as hectic and unrelenting. From arrival to departure, managers are constantly surrounded by people, calls, and emails. Compared to other people's work, meetings, emails, and the telephone are not left aside in the manager's work, and Mintzberg says, "these contacts are the work" (Mintzberg, 2011, p. 26). Furthermore, Mintzberg concludes that managers are strongly action-oriented as they like change, movement and flow. The action-oriented mindset, together with the pressure arising from the managerial environment, does not provide a good foundation for reflective planners development (Mintzberg, 2011).

2.1.1 A Critical Perspective of Management Research

This section aims not to disapprove or criticise the chosen concepts or theories explaining management but rather to create awareness around the critical perspective. To accomplish this awareness, critical reading can be used where the focus is the process behind and the significance of the work, instead of only looking into the description of the published research (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019).

The presented theories, models, and concepts are used to understand and set a theoretical framework. However, it is possible to perceive the literature review from different perspectives, and the critical aspect could be one. As mentioned, this study will focus on managers in Sweden, with Swedish cultures, structures and norms around them. Therefore, it can be discussed if the concepts and theories regarding managerial work from other countries than Sweden or Scandinavia can be applied in a Swedish context.

Mintzberg has conducted several studies in the management field in the USA, and several of his theories are built on his research. According to Hofstede (1984; cited in Tengblad, 2006), the most significant cultural difference between the USA and Sweden is the low masculinity level in Sweden. Furthermore, Swedes have a tendency to value consensus and dialogue deeply, and they also tend to prioritise human relationships before material rewards. Sweden is also a country that is seen as having less faith in authority but stronger beliefs in subjective well being, and dispersed responsibilities and trust are central features, compared to the USA (Tengblad, 2006). These are only some examples, and the presented literature in this study is mainly based on acknowledged references. Still, it is essential to remember and be aware of the context of research findings when looking at management, and Mintzberg (2011) confirms this by saying that management is a practice to learn since it is contextual.

Another critical aspect of the literature covering management is the time frame. Some of the references are older, build on each other and confirm each other. Nevertheless, society is changing with ongoing digital development (Schildt, 2020), and the pandemic has significant impacts on large areas in the present and will surely affect the future. Korica, Nicolini and Johnson (2017) conducted a study examining how the concept of managerial work has developed

over the last 60 years. They concluded that "despite Mintzberg's continued calls for inductive studies, the field continues to suffer from analytical overreliance on his categories" (Korica, Nicolini & Johnson, 2017, p. 168). They also state that managerial work is being analysed through unchanging dominant concepts, which challenge the development of novel insights. Since the conducted research within the field is deeply influenced by past findings, there is a lack of up-to-date foundations (Korica, Nicolini & Johnson, 2017). Even if

Korica, Nicolini and Johnsons (2017) conclusions can be discussed, it is still equally important, as the context, to remember the perspective of the time when generalising previous research into today's context.

2.2 Remote Work

With emerging restrictions and recommendations followed by the pandemic and the situation in society where people cannot meet up as they used to, it is necessary to find new ways of running business and collaborations, and remote work has become one solution. As previously mentioned, remote work is a flexible arrangement where workers have no personal contact with colleagues, the workplace is not the office or the usual facilities, and technology is used to communicate (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990). Working remotely is not seen as a new concept, but the practice has earlier not been widely used (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). However, working remotely became "the new normal" overnight, the numbers of remote workers increased (Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker, 2021), and organizations were forced to make some rapid changes regarding technology because of the Covid-19 pandemic (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). In their study, Nicholas, Hayden and Trendler (2020) argue that managers' roles and responsibilities changed dramatically during the pandemic, from trying to execute their ordinary responsibilities to instead focus on controlling costs and safety concerns.

Zheng (2020) argues that working remotely challenges managers to find other ways to communicate and support their employees since they are separated from each other physically. In many cases, this has added stress and challenges in terms of collaboration, therefore, managers' job to foster a sense of inclusion with their employees are critical (Zheng, 2020). In Parker, Knight and Kellers (2020) research about remote work, their results show that 40% of the

managers and supervisors express low self-confidence in managing remotely, since they are not practised in doing this.

When working remotely and especially working from home, advantages and disadvantages can be identified. Ipsen, Veldhoven, Kirchner and Hansen (2021) conducted a study where they collected data from 5748 professional and managerial workers in Europe, in the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic. They wanted to look into how people from European countries experienced working from home, and they concluded three main advantages and three disadvantages in remote work. The first advantage they found was *work-life balance*, where respondents explained that they don't have to waste time commuting, and can adapt their schedule to their life situation. The second advantage was *work efficiency*, where the workers experienced that they could focus on their tasks without distractions, and they did not need to waste time on meaningless tasks. The last of the three advantages was *work control,* and the participants expressed that they could take more control over their day and make their own decisions. Furthemore, Ipsen et al. (2021) concluded disadvantages with three clusters. *Home office constraints* were the first cluster, which explained how people spend less time interacting with others, and more fixed time in front of the screen. The second cluster of disadvantages was *work uncertainties*. Participants were struggling to find meaning in their work, and some had a hard time finding focus because the work situation was unclear. The last cluster explained the disadvantages in terms of *inadequate tools*. When working from home, there is a loss of (valuable) data, documents and work tools, which is needed to do work appropriately.

The definition of working remotely is connected to technology (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990), and previous research also connects remote work to computers and screens. It is, therefore, relevant to get an understanding of this area, which in this paper will be referred to as digitalization. This area is further discussed in relation to managerial work in the following section.

2.3 Digitalization

Digital development is impacting society and business at a higher speed than ever before, and has had so since the impact of the internet's acceleration at the beginning of the 1990s. In the 1990s, digitization mainly focused on data managers and IT departments, and nowadays, it is rather focusing on the whole business and our personal life (Urbach & Röglinger, 2019). The digital transformation makes it possible for organizations to build new capabilities with modern digital technologies (Schildt, 2020), and as a manager, it is essential to be aware of this change since it affects work and employees around them. The more aware managers are of this transition, the better control they can have (Cijan, Jenič, Lamovšek & Stemberger, 2019). Remote work has led to an increased demand for new ways of working and digital tools (Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker, 2021; Carroll & Conboy, 2020). According to Mintzberg (2011), organizations (and even the most international enterprises) prefer face-to-face contact to communicate more efficiently, and remaining local is a way of being better informed. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the pandemic has required new (remote) ways of working with digital solutions, and even before the pandemic, the discussion regarding the impact of the internet on managerial work existed.

Tengblad (2000) conducted in 2000 a study where the aim was to map out similarities and differences of executive behaviour, between a study made 1951 by Sune Carlson (cited in Tengblad, 2000) and his own. Tengblads' result showed that meetings were the dominating form of activity in both studies, and the CEOs total workload was as demanding in 2000 as in the 1950s. The differences, however, exposed a change where CEOs in Tengblads study utilized new electronic means of communication to a greater extent, compared to the CEOs in Carlson's study. The travels also became more frequent and longer (Tengblad, 2000). Tengblad concludes that "certainly the context of managerial work has changed more than its form and content (2000, p.38). Tengblad presents varying similarities and differences, but the one finding most interesting for this study is the use of new electronic means of communication. Tengblads article was published in 2000, and it is possible to argue that the modern digital context surrounding managerial work has developed since then. Maybe even to the extent that the form and content of managerial work and behaviour have changed.

Mintzberg (2011) is joining this discussion and mentions how management characteristics have been directly affected by the internet. For instance, it seems certain that the pace and pressure of managing, along with interruptions, increases due to emails and the action orientation also becomes magnified by emails. Everything is expected to be more immediate and faster, and you can achieve instant communication everywhere (Mintzberg 2019, cited in Berrett-Koehler 2019). He also mentions how the internet could increase the managers' external networks by the consequence of decreasing internal communication, due to the easiness of establishing new contacts and maintaining "old" with the internet (Mintzberg, 2011). Although email makes it easier to stay in touch, it is not the same type of contact as face-to-face interactions. The use of senses is reduced since it is not possible to feel the presence, see gestures or hear voices (Mintzberg 2019, cited in Berrett-Koehler 2019). On the other hand, Mintzberg furthermore states that managing, fundamentally, does not change, even if some practices of management are driven off the edge by the internet (Mintzberg, 2011) and some subject changes (Mintzberg 2019, cited in Berrett-Koehler 2019).

Another perspective of the discussion is "the data imperative" by Schildt (2020). Schildt says, contradictory to Mintzberg, that "... digitalization represents a more fundamental change in the core assumptions that underlie management practices" (Schildt, 2020, p.2). Based on diverse case studies and interviews, Schildt presents how digitalization and technological change rephrase organizational structures, culture, and management practices. Digitalization involves new norms and a new mindset of management and business, and by developing digital culture, organizations can leverage the possibilities of digital systems. Schildt also argues that the development of digitalization will lead to organizations becoming faster and more awake, but fundamentally they will remain the same. It also opens up for managers to have a more objective perspective when perceiving employees and internal processes (Schildt, 2020). However, the digital developments may have damaging effects on the cultural constructions of the company. Vital human relationships could be harmed by detrimental effects, and employees could have a harder time getting to know each other, which then could result in challenges when creating and implementing ideas (Schildt, 2020). He furthermore describes how digitalization requires a change in both individuals and organizations regarding attitudes and habits because digital development will significantly impact businesses in the future.

Schildt (2020) also discusses the consequences of the emerging digitalization, e.g. increased demand for agile work cultures, greater transparency and better structures. The cultural aspect was earlier discussed, but the two later ones are also of interest in this study. Before the digital transition, companies were limiting information sharing to reduce conflicts in the organization and to maintain hierarchical authority. After the transition, the transparency became radically increased in order to reinforce idea engendering and structure. Transparency can facilitate knowledge sharing between employees and also increase the feeling of contributing and involvement in success. Without transparency, coordination and identification of opportunities can become challenging. (Schildt, 2020).

2.4 Experiences & Lessons Learned

A documentation of managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic will be presented in this study. However, before doing so, a definition of experience and lessons learned is needed. According to The Oxford English Dictionary (2020a), can *experience* be defined as" the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or being consciously affected by an event". In this study, the state or condition is the remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding how remote work has affected managers in terms of experiences is needed before looking into their learnings. The definition of *learn,* "to acquire knowledge of a subject or skill in an art, as a result of study, experience, or teaching" (The Oxford English dictionary, 2020b), indicates in this paper that knowledge can be obtained through experience. The learnings can further be seen as a guide for future actions (Daudelin, 1996), which connects to the purpose of this study, which is to document experiences and learnings to provide insights for other managers on how to improve their remote work.

By looking into previous research, it is possible to understand further what experiences and lessons learned are. Different findings within the research field are presented below, with companies own research (e.g. McKinsey) and published articles in journals. Some are presenting lessons learned on a governmental level and while others present learnings for specific managers.

Some findings are also specific since they rely on lockdowns that have been in some countries, which were not experienced in Sweden.

Forman, Atun, McKee and Mossialos (2020) have in their article "12 Lessons learned from the management of the coronavirus pandemic" identified, as the title says, 12 lessons to learn from the pandemic. The authors are looking into the actions of individuals, governments and countries, consequences and facts. The lessons could be a guideline to decreasing the economic and social costs of the pandemic, and the findings could also be used in future crises. The vital lessons describe findings as transparency, decisive leadership, effective communication and accountability. Due to the fear of economic and political repercussions, alarms about the virus, in the beginning, were silenced, and transparency was reduced, leading to the exponential spread. Furthermore, the lack of transparency regarding the United Kingdom's scientific advisory mechanism undermined their trust. When looking at decisive leadership in different countries, it is possible to find a connection to successful responses. Regarding the lesson of effective communication, it is possible to find a lack of both communication and collaboration at high political levels. The lack resulted in uncoordinated responses, and coherent and unified answers were less to be seen. Lastly, the authors concluded that "accountability is critical for building trust and for sound inclusive decision making" (Forman, Atun, McKee and Mossialos, 2020, p.580). Even if the findings are mostly connected to a governmental level, they create an awareness of another dimension to the context, and it is possible to make parallels to actions on an individual level, which is relevant for this study.

Other findings that could be seen as contributing is Fahey's (2020), who has frequently talked to and been in contact with recruiters and hiring teams. He then summarized the experience and lessons learned from the pandemic and mentioned first how being proactive beats reactivity. Human resource professionals have been establishing new policies for the work-from-home. They have managed remote teams and developed different plans, but room for mistakes was opened due to the urgency of the situation. He also found that proactive planning can increase resilience in an organization, and it can also protect vital functions that are critical for business continuity. Another lesson is that videoconferencing should be seen as a tool rather than an enemy. Solutions to remote collaboration have been around for 20 years. However, the tools have

never been the first choice for office workers, but in times of lockdown, video communication was a need. Furthermore, HR managers have learned that it is possible to assess job applicants online, just as well as in person. Video-based structured interviews and situational questions are more revealing than a handshake. The last lesson is how HR managers are adapting to tech easier than expected. Adopting HR tech is easy if you have the right tools and support. Some even say they wished that they had done the transition earlier.

Another perspective of experiences and lessons learned is presented by Emmett, Schrah, Schrimper and Wood (2020). A survey was conducted between the 1st and 14th of March 2020, where they collected data from 800 US-based employees. In the data, 80 % of the respondents expressed that the crisis affects their job, but experiences and perspectives were widely varied. From the data, they concluded that employees working remotely are experiencing positive effects on their daily work. Compared to employees working with non-remote-jobs, employees working remotely experience an increased engagement, and they have a greater sense of well-being. Furthermore, the research landed in some overarching insights, which could be of value for leaders. For instance, by being present, action-oriented and completely transparent, it is possible (to continue) to build trust and affiliation. Additionally, work effectiveness and employee well-being are impacted by, not only safety and security, but also social cohesion, individual purpose and trusting relationships.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the framework of the chosen methodology, which was used in this thesis. First, a description of the data collection method with interview design will be presented to understand how data was collected. This is followed by our selection and sampling strategy, which will describe how participants were chosen. Thereafter, the conduction of interviews will be explained together with a list of interviewers before outlining the data analysis. Moreover, ethical considerations will be presented before ending the chapter with a discussion of reliability and validity, leading to a re-categorisation of four criteria. Throughout the whole chapter, advantages and disadvantages are discussed, together with the risks and limitations of the choices.

3.1 Data Collection Method

In this study, data was collected with interviews. In business research, this method is prevalent (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), and in this case, semi-structured interviews were used with a structured introduction. The introduction was structured to make sure every participant got the same information.

In the semi-structured interview, a topic guide was conducted to cover all the questions (see appendix A), and the choice of structure allowed the order of the questions to vary depending on the flow in the dialogue. Additional questions were also allowed and asked to explore and delve into the answers from the participants. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Because of the exploratory approach of the study, in-depth interviews were held because they can be helpful to "find out what is happening and to seek new information" (Robinson, 2002, p. 59). Furthermore, the semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed us to probe answers. By using probing questions, significance and depth can influence the obtained data, where the interviewees are encouraged to explain, elaborate and build on their responses (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

Interviews were conducted through synchronous online interviews where zoom and teams were used, and through telephone. Since the usage of zoom required downloading the software, the

participants were given the opportunity to send an invitation link through Microsoft Teams since we could not send invitations for Microsoft-team meetings. Positive and negative consequences could be identified for both online interviews and telephone interviews. Telephone interviews can be seen as convenient because different people can easily be reached regardless of the geographical area (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), and they also enable lower costs (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). On the other hand, during telephone interviews, it is not possible to witness any non-verbal behaviour, and the establishment of trust can be challenging to research, which could lead to reduced willingness to be involved in discussions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). As for electronic interviews, similar advantages and disadvantages can appear. The electronic interviews' benefits are long-distance removal, cost-effectiveness (because neither the authors nor interviewees need to travel), and people who are difficult to access could more easily be interviewed (Masoud & Varaei, 2018). One limitation is that there could be a risk regarding lack of interactivity, where it is not possible to reach the same levels of rich and spontaneous communication compared to face-to-face interviews (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Other limitations are the loss of body language, revealing subtleties of facial expression and intonation in the online interviews (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019). To decrease the negative consequences, the interviews were synchronous to make them more similar to face-to-face interviews (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019), and the interviewees were encouraged to be detailed in their answers because there was time for elaborations. Furthermore, participants were asked to give their consent to having the interview recorded, and all of the interviews were audio-recorded. By recording the interviews, we could concentrate on listening and questioning, and later on re-listen to the interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

The questions for the interview guide were first tested in two "pilot studies". In those pilot studies, the authors could practice, and the arrangement of questions was tested. When the pilot studies were conducted, some questions were clarified, and some new questions were added. The topic guide was fully completed before the interviews in the study were conducted (see appendix A).

3.1.1 Interview Design

An information sheet was created and sent to every participant before conducting the interviews (see appendix B). The participants could read about the authors, the study, key questions to reflect upon in advance, and ethical considerations.

During the interviews, the same structure was followed for every participant regarding the introduction. The introduction contained questions and details, such as asking for consent to record, repeating ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and asking if the participant prefered answering in English or Swedish. We explained that after the interview, a summary of the answers was to be sent to the participant to ensure answers were interpreted correctly and to allow the participant to edit his or her explanations. Lastly, we asked the participant to tell us if any questions were unclear, and there was no stress in answering them. We clarified for the participants that there were no right or wrong answers in this study, and we wished for perceived changes in their work, and their experiences and lessons learned. Following the introduction, the semi-structured interview began by first asking formal and informal background questions about the manager. What role or title the manager had, for how long he or she had been working within this role, what industry the company was operating in and central work tasks. These questions were asked to double-check if the participant fulfilled our criteria (see sampling strategy). When the background questions had been completed, questions regarding changes, experiences and lessons learned were asked (see appendix A).

3.2 Selection & Sampling

A convenience sampling method was chosen since it is one of the most efficient ways of collecting information quickly and effectively (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) and in this study, convenience sampling was used when contacting managers we knew. We also added judgement sampling when contacting managers we did not know, which is a type of purposive sampling. Judgement sampling is an effective method when searching for specific types of people who match certain criteria (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The participants we searched for needed to

fulfil the criteria of having a role as a manager in a SME, operating in Sweden. No specific industry, sector or area was selected. However, only one manager per company was interviewed to get the chance to interview managers in as many industries as possible. We believed that choosing multiple industries could increase the chances to gain and document valuable experiences and lessons learned. The last criteria were that all managers needed to have worked at the same company and in the same role before Covid-19 emerged. In some questions, we wanted the respondents to describe their experiences and lessons learned through the pandemic and compare the situation before the pandemic. That is why there was a need for the last criteria.

The choice of target managers in this study was because managers develop the capacity to create an organisational structure to accomplish their plans (Kotter, 2001). Therefore, their answers could have high credibility since they are in charge and supposed to control how the organisation copes with the changes (Kotter, 2001). An alternative would be to interview employees without management responsibilities and document their experiences and lessons learned. Nevertheless, since we chose to have a judgment sampling, prioritise first-hand data, and also because managers have experienced what we want to document, managers were seen as having expert knowledge, and might therefore bring good data and insights for the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Managers operating in Sweden were mainly chosen to facilitate the selection process. There were also different restrictions (because of the pandemic) in different countries, and it was essential to have the companies follow the same (Swedish) restrictions and recommendations to compare the data.

SME companies were chosen because, compared to larger enterprises, they do not have the same complete risk management teams or restricted capital and human resources, making them more exposed to external economic changes outside of their control (Glowka, Kallmünzer & Zehrer, 2020). However, micro-enterprises with a lower turnover than 2 million euros were not selected due to their smaller size regarding turnover and number of employees. Differences between SMEs and micro-enterprises would also become too broad, which would challenge the generalisability.

A framework for what we mainly looked for was the manager's role and how much the company's turnover was before contact was made. To find interviewees, different methods were used. We started by mapping out different industries and different management roles. Thereafter, we first tried to contact managers in our network before reaching out to managers outside our network. E-mail, telephone, Linkedin, and meetings in person were used as methods when searching for participants. These methods were efficient ways to contact potential participants, and there was a possibility to be accurate when targeting specific managers. When searching for interviewees outside our networks, google and "allabolag.se" were used. At "allabolag.se", we could select companies' minimum and maximum turnover to find SMEs and search for different industries. We then located the management team in the company and contacted managers.

This sampling strategy had potential risks with bias. By choosing managers we had a connection with, there was a risk of being biased where participants were chosen because of social connections. There was also a risk with the chosen managers we knew, where they potentially could be affected by respondent bias, by coming up with answers they expected we wanted to hear. Because of these biases, we decided to decrease risks by combining established contacts with new ones when selecting participants.

3.3 Conduction of Interviews

In total, 18 interviews were conducted, and 17 out of the interviews lasted between 50-70 minutes. One interview lasted for 40 minutes because of a tight schedule for that specific manager. Zoom and teams were used when conducting the interviews, except for one telephone call. Both authors participated in all interviews except three, where interviews were scheduled at the same time. In the interviews where both authors were present, one was taking notes and the other interviewed. All of the respondents fulfilled the criteria that were mentioned for the study. Our first intention was to collect all the interviews in English. However, some of the first respondents we interviewed expressed their wish to do the interview in Swedish. This was due to personal circumstances but also because they said they could express themselves in a better way in Swedish, compared to English, which would give the study more elaborated data. Therefore,

we allowed all the respondents to speak Swedish if they preferred, and this resulted in nine interviews in Swedish and nine in English. By conducting interviews in the language the respondents felt most comfortable with, we increased our chances of receiving more fruitful data regarding deeper insights and reflections. On the other hand, it also included a risk of translation and interpretation. Because of this risk, translations were done thoughtfully and carefully.

The table down below represents the managers in the order in which they were interviewed. Their roles are presented, as well as what industry they are working within. Furthermore, the interview length is presented, followed by a code for the respondents that will be used later when presenting the result of the data.

Role	Industry	Length of interview	Code for respondent
Construction Manager & Personnel Manager	Technical consultant in Construction & Civil Engineering	50 min	A
HR-business Partner	Construction, Design & Interior design activities	60 min	B
HR-manager	Retail	60 min	C
COO	Consultancy within IT	70 min	D
CEO	Banking & Finance	55 min	E
HR-manager	Chemical industry	60 min	F
Corporate Communication Manager	Metal industry	50 min	G
Chairman	Campsite Activities	60 min	H

HR-manager	Medical Equipment & Pharmacy	50 min	I
CEO	E-commerce	40 min	J
Client Engagement Director	Consulting within public sector & Real estate industry	60 min	K
Office Manager	Retail	60 min	L
Head of Sales	Automotive	60 min	M
PR and Communications Manager	Advertising	50 min	N
Deputy CEO	Financial industry	50 min	O
CEO	Wellness	55 min	P
COO	Consultancy	60 min	Q
Delivery Manager	IT	55 min	R

Table 1. List of interviewers.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews were directly base transcribed afterwards. According to Norrby (2014), base transcription is one type of transcription where there is less focus on how the participants answer and more focus on what they answer. These transcriptions only include answers in terms of words and not pauses, pronunciation or prosodic features. Using a base transcription method makes it possible to both save time and make the material more readable (Norrby, 2014). The base transcriptions were sent to the participants, and they were given seven work days to get back with corrections and adjustments before analysing the data. Out of the 18 interviews, five managers made adjustments in the base transcriptions.

To analyse the empirical data, an inductive thematic analysis was applied and used. This method used to analyse, identify, organise, and report themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clark (2006) state that the inductive approach allows the themes to be strongly linked to the data, and the identification of themes is not driven by the researcher's theoretical interest. Furthermore, it is argued that a thematic analysis could be a helpful tool when examining multiple perspectives of different research participants because it is possible to highlight similarities and differences and generate unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysing qualitative data is about observing and discerning patterns, and the goal is to construct meanings that capture the data essences and essentials (Saldana, 2020). To conduct the analysis, the three-step approach presented by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applied. Within the three steps, we constantly interpreted the answers from the participant when working with the data.

The first step was data reduction. After receiving corrections and confirmations from the managers of the base transcriptions, the analysis began. The first thing we did was code all the data individually, which was done by picking out the most central aspects from the answers. The coding was compared and discussed with the other authors' code for each respondent. The purpose of this coding was to reduce the data, to be able to focus on the most central aspects of it and draw meaningful conclusions, but also to make sure that none of the relevant data would be eliminated (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). When the coding was done for every question asked in the interviews, the code was divided into different clusters. To get more structure and organise the clusters, we looked through the clusters to find similarities and differences, and by doing so, the clusters were divided into categories. This was mainly done by colour coding, where each category got one colour each. When analysing relationships between the categories, more similarities and other differences were found, which led to merging some categories while others were divided. By this time, the categories had been developed to the extent that they were seen as themes.

After coding and categorising the themes, the second step was data display. The purpose of this step was to systematically to look through the themes to draw conclusions. According to Miles

and Huberman (1994), only extended and unreduced texts alone are a cumbersome display. Therefore, each theme was divided into a new document to better visually analyse fingings separately. During this step, quotes from respondents were utilised to dig deeper into their answers and get a better understanding. The process of doing the analysis was not linear. While analysing the themes, we realised some of the previous codings would suit elsewhere, and the order was therefore changed. This analysis worked as a foundation for organising the presented order of the data.

The third and last step was drawing conclusions. During this step, the research questions were answered, and this was mainly done with the help of making contrasts and comparisons between the outlined answers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.5 Research Ethics

To protect the respondents in the study, research ethics was considered, which refers to how the authors behaved in relation to the respondents that took place in the study. It also included how the data was collected, stored, analysed, and presented (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). We followed the key principles described by Bell and Bryman (2007) to protect the participating managers and to ensure accuracy in the results. Before the interviews, an information sheet was sent to every participant, which was a part of the transparent communication (Bell & Bryman, 2007) we aimed to research. In the structured introduction in the interviews, we asked for permission to record the participants' answers to ensure informed consent, and all recordings were deleted when the data analysis was conducted. The respondents were also given a chance to change, correct, and double-check that interpretations had been made accurate, before data was analysed. This was partly done to avoid false or misleading reporting in the findings, and partly to increase credibility. To protect the respondents, all of the participants' names, the organisations they represent and how long they worked there were anonymised.

3.6 Reliability & Validity

To establish quality in business research, criteria such as reliability and validity can be utilised. However, the relevance of these concepts has been discussed in qualitative research. Researchers define reliability and validity in various ways, but the general idea is that reliability concerns the results of the study and if they are repeatable, whereas validity concerns the measurements in a study and if the provided results represent what was intended to investigate (Bryman, Bell & Harley 2019; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The connotations to *measurement* in these concepts (reliability and validity) can limit their application in qualitative studies (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In this study, the purpose is not to measure; it is to document. The impact of the social context surrounding this study (especially Covid-19) challenges the usage of reliability, as it is defined above. To establish quality in this study, Guba and Lincoln's (1994, cited in Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019), re-categorisation of validity and reliability was used instead. They propose four alternative criterias which are specified for establishing trustworthiness and quality in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, cited in Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019) and these have previously been used in thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Definitions and how these were operationalised in this study will be presented below.

Credibility could be seen as equivalent to internal validity. To establish credibility in research findings, it is essential to ensure that the research is conducted "according to the good canons of practice" (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019, p.363) and existing rules. It is also vital to have the researchers' interpretations confirmed by participants, which can be achieved through respondent validation (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In this study, it was essential to conduct meticulous planning over the process. The topic guide was a support during the interviews to ensure we did not lead the questions or affect answers. The exact structure of introduction and close-up in the interviews were also rigorously followed. All of the interviews were conducted within two weeks to avoid disturbing factors, such as rapid or significant changes regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions in Sweden. Such changes could have affected the participants' answers. In other words, we intend to create a structure during our research to accurately measure and represent the study to reach the study's purpose (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). We also used respondent validity to make sure our interpretations were correct before conducting the analysis.

Transferability refers to external validity and can also be seen as generalizability. Since qualitative findings are related to contextual uniqueness, it is crucial to conduct a thick description, which is a thorough description of details in a context. This description will help the reader judge the study's transferability and if its findings can be transferred into new contexts (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In this study, a thorough description was conducted of Covid-19, remote work, digitalisation, and the Swedish take on it was elaborated in the best possible way. We also tried to incorporate various and several quotes in our presentation of data to show the diversity which reflected reality. Some quotes were also longer than others to make sure the reader understood the context surrounding the findings.

Dependability is Guba and Lincoln's (1994, cited in Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019) alternative to reliability. A clear description of the research processes and choices of methodology should be made to secure the study's dependability. By doing this, readers can examine and audit the process and the possibility of redoing the study increases. In this study, we aimed to do a clear, logical and well-documented method section by being open for feedback and looking at well-cited scholars.

The last criteria to achieve trustworthiness is conformability. Conformability is related to objectivity and can only be achieved when the three above mentioned criteria are established (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Accomplishing objectivity occurs to be impossible in business research. However, the researcher should display and explain how conclusions and interpretations were reached, to ensure he or she acted in good faith (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In this study, we cross-checked unclear statements with participants both in the interviews and also through email when needed. We also conducted the interviews together and then made individual codings to capture various perspectives instead of doing it together. As mentioned, we also explained to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers in this study, and we wished for their experiences and lessons learned to avoid confirmation bias. When analysing the data, we also applied an inductive approach that connects the themes to the data, not the researchers' interest (Braun & Clark, 2006).

4. Presentation of Data

In this chapter, data from the 18 interviews will only be presented, and in chapter 5, the data will be discussed with the earlier presented literature framework. The presentation of data is divided into two parts; "4.1 Changes in Managers Daily Work", and "4.2 Experiences and Lessons Learned". The sections were created by coding, analyzing and interpreting the data based on the most common findings, and the presented quotes within each theme are taken from the base transcriptions.

Section 4.1 contains six themes and answers the first research question, *what has changed in managers' daily work, by working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic?*. The six themes are creating a context of the perceived changes in managers daily work, and will be used as a foundation to understand managers experiences and lessons learned, later on. Section 4.2 presents the documented experiences and lessons learned from the interviewed managers, and answers the second research question, *what are managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic?*. This section includes eight different themes, where managers' experiences are followed by lessons learned for the five first themes. The remaining three themes present reflections, advantages and disadvantages, and a summary of further insights.

4.1 Changes in Managers Daily Work

To give the reader a better understanding of how remote work has affected managers, the first research question will be answered by explaining changes in managers' daily work. This context includes six themes*, Changes in Managers Work 4.1.1, Changes in Meetings and Communication 4.1.2, Changes in Internal Communication 4.1.3, Changes in Work Environment 4.1.4, Digital and Tech Changes 4.1.5,* and *Workload 4.1.6*. Interpretations of the data were made, and the themes contain quotes from the managers where they describe their perceived changes in their work. This context will provide the reader with a better understanding in the next part of the data presentation, where experiences and lessons learned will be presented.

4.1.1 Changes in Managers Work

The managers have different experiences of the pandemic and how remote work has affected them. They have been required to readjust their work based on the restrictions and recommendations given by the Swedish government. The changes required new working tasks for some, and others expressed that they are doing the same tasks as before but remotely now instead:

"We made 162 actions to meet the restrictions e.g. keeping the distance" - Respondent H

"I was employed to create potential for growth and make sure we reach our big overall goals, but when the pandemic hit I instead had to work with crisis management. How do we secure we survive this crisis, for how long will it last, and how will it affect our employees" - Respondent L

"Remote work hasn't affected me that much, I'm doing the same things but digitally through teams instead. So based on what I do it's not a big difference. But there are some nuances, mostly by how I interact with individuals and the team" - Respondent R

4.1.2 Changes in Meetings and Communication

Meetings and general communication have changed since the managers started to work remotely. They experience fewer physical meetings and more online meetings, and some of the managers express a significant increase in the numbers of meetings, partly due to "back to back"-meetings:

"It's less physical meetings, and I don't think I have been in so many meetings, globally and nationally as I have been this year" - Respondent L

"Since you don't have to transport yourself, it's easier to have meetings immediately after the other. We have urged our employees to learn to own their own calendar, so they are making sure to have time to deal with other things" - Respondent C

One manager mentioned that their organisation has created a policy where they do not recommend employees to have back to back meetings:

"We have more meetings, and they are back to back, even the policy is not recommending back to back meetings" - Respondent F

Managers have experienced that people prepare more for meetings, and it is also possible, during meetings, to participate and simultaneously do other work-related tasks:

"Prepare even more because you have shorter time where you sit in the meeting"
- Respondent H

"During some meetings with many participants, there's many themes to cover that don't affect you, so you are standby, until some themes affect you, so I can sit with one screen with the meeting, and with another screen with something else which is really good. It becomes almost like extra time" - Respondent A

4.1.3 Changes in Internal Communication

As a result of not meeting or seeing employees, the managers focus more on internal online communication with employees. The managers support the employees more now by having more and shorter follow-ups:

"It's more of check-ups and check-ins, to maintain tempo and understanding challenges and workload the team faces" - Respondent D

"I also think I have been talking more to employees this year than I had before, because I used to discuss through managers. The employees call me and seek support and talk."
- Respondent I

4.1.4 Changes Regarding Working Environment

Due to the restrictions, managers work remotely, which means working from home and not meeting colleagues or customers in person. Some are working remotely full time, while others visit the office when they need to. Working remotely has required the managers to build offices at home with computer screens and other necessary equipment:

> "We work remotely from home, and I'm not able to see my colleagues physically. We closed our office for 95% of our workers, and have a team of 4-5 workers that run the office on a daily basis. Otherwise, we are not able to sit there and work" - Respondent I

> "I have worked a lot from the office because we have a rule that says one senior manager needs to be at the office" - Respondent O

> "We as a company have made sure it will be practical to work remotely. We have told the employees to bring home screens, computers, chairs, everything that they need"
> - Respondent A

4.1.5 Digital and Tech Changes

The managers mention a technical change where there is now a higher demand for technical solutions. They express how Covid-19 and working remotely are accelerating digitization, where managers have been forced into new technical environments. Meetings, kick-offs and communication are now online with the help of digital tools. Some managers also had to invest in new technologies, such as Microsoft teams and laptops:

> "When we started working from home, first of all we had to buy laptops for everybody, of course the salespeople had laptops, but a lot of people at the office were still on PC so they didn't have laptops" - Respondent M

"We didn't have our annual kick off physically, we engaged a tv-recording team, and did a classic winter studio show. We would never have done that if it wasn't because we couldn't meet, or maybe in a few years" - Respondent C

"You have been forced into new technical and digital environments that you would not have been forced into otherwise. You have been forced to learn new things, which on the other hand is good" - Respondent N

4.1.6 Workload

All of the 18 managers were asked if they had experienced a change in workload as a result of the transition from working at the office to working remotely. Eleven of the managers experienced that their workload has changed and has become heavier. Five expressed uncertainty whereas two said it hasn't changed:

"It has definitely brought a higher workload" - Respondent C

"The workload is still high because you need to be present in another way. But I wouldn't say it's higher" - Respondent M

4.2 Experiences & Lessons Learned

In this section, the second research question will be answered, in terms of experiences and learnings, with eight themes. Five of the themes are divided into two parts, where experiences together with quotes first are presented, followed by lessons learned with quotes, based on the managers' experiences. The themes are: *Online Meetings 4.2.1 - 4.2.2, Communication & Collaboration 4.2.3 - 4.2.4, Culture 4.2.5 - 4.2.6, Work Environment 4.2.7 - 4.2.8* and *Efficiency & Flexibility 4.2.9 - 4.2.10.* The manager's general reflections are presented in *Reflection 4.2.11,* followed by *Advantages or Disadvantages 4.2.12* which investigate if managers experience more advantages or disadvantages by working remotely. The chapter ends with *Summary of Further Insights 4.2.13* from the managers, regarding their experiences and lessons learned from

working remotely. Interpretations of the data were done and the themes contain quotes from the managers.

4.2.1 Managers Experiences Regarding Online Meetings

Managers have different experiences with digital meetings. Some challenges mentioned are that it's harder to say no to digital meetings, and managers also feel they are stuck in meetings all day. Managers do not feel the same energy in online meetings and it's harder to be seen and heard:

> "The meetings are more efficient and shorter, at first I loved it. When I analyse now, I realise it's maybe not a good thing. When you have physical meetings it's easier to say no to a meeting because it's not as important. When it's digital meetings, it's easier to squeeze it in. Because then I dont keep as efficient with time management as I did before" - Respondent O

> "You get very stuck in front of the computer and in digital meetings" - Respondent B

> "For some, this transition has been less good. There's almost no discussion at big digital meetings, it's just not natural. It becomes hard to be seen and heard, since it's so big meetings" - Respondent B

Furthermore, it is possible to schedule more meetings during a day or week since it is easier to squeeze in, and it's fewer unnecessary meetings:

> "Instead of having two bigger meetings a day you can have ten smaller meetings a day without changing rooms. You can move so many things at the same time" - Respondent J

> "Less unnecessary meetings, but everything else has become much more"
> - Respondent D

"When it's digital meetings it's easier to squeeze it in" - Respondent O

Some managers experience that it's much harder to have the same spontaneous coffee talks, and some experience it easier to talk with people in person, compared to calling. Instead of coffee talk, some managers have shorter follow ups, to see how people are doing:

"We have almost no cold talk, no coffee machine talk" - Respondent Q

"Weird, but it's easier to talk to someone at the coffee machine rather than call someone"
- Respondent M

"Been many parts where you have to adapt your leadership. I'm used to being able to put my hand on someone's shoulder and ask "how are you" now you can't do it. Different to see how people are feeling and follow up now. Shorter follow-ups instead of coffee breaks" - Respondent L

Working remotely with online meetings has led to more "business talk" and less "private talk" with colleagues and employees, but managers express a change:

"I think the meetings have changed character. In the beginning of the pandemic it was very effective, we joined a meeting "bang bang bang" and then on to the next one. But now, we try to start with some private talk, "how was your weekend, what will you do later". No matter what kind of meeting it is, there is time for some private talk"
- Respondent R

"In the beginning of Covid people were only efficient during meetings. Now, we let off the first minutes and people try to have the coffee talk at the beginning. Are you okay? How are you feeling?" - Respondent K

4.2.2 Managers Lessons Learned Regarding Online Meetings

One commonly mentioned aspect is the importance of trust and how it is tougher to gain trust remotely. Trust is not gained during meetings, but rather before, after and in between meetings. Related to this, managers have learned that decision making is challenging and requires more effort when working remotely, and some particular meetings are better to have face to face:

> "I think in an organisation, it's not when you sit in the meeting where you get trust, it's off the meeting, at the coffee machine. It's not about where you make the decisions but where you gain trust for decisions. At least strategic decisions are based on trust because there's always a risk. It's in the between talks when you build trust" - Respondent K

> "Things take more time to make decisions etc. When you have a meeting in person all the decision makers are in the room. When the person who has an idea presents the idea, he/she leaves the room and the rest discuss and then you make a decision. Now when it's digital, many people have meetings straight after this one. So you don't have time to discuss and need to find a new meeting to discuss" - Respondent O

> "Digital meetings have a tendency to be very efficient and effective which is really good, but you also have to work with the relationships and management meetings. For example, how are we going to solve this when we need to be creative, those meetings are better to do face to face" - Respondent M

> "I think I will have critical HR meetings in a physical meeting and not a conference like we have the interview" - Respondent I

Managers experience calendars fully scheduled with meetings, and managers can't assume people to maintain the same fast pace day after day:

> "There are many meetings in the calendar, you need more space in the calendar, and you can also question if all the meetings are necessary" - Respondent E

"Regarding back to back meetings, you can't assume everyone can keep up that pace, hour after hour, day after day" - Respondent F

"I'm bad at taking breaks from the computer. I need to think about schedule meetings with some space in between so I can take breaks" - Respondent B

One manager added a solution to this problem:

"If I see a person's calendar, I won't book back to back meetings" - Respondent F

Managers also block time in their calendars:

"I block time in my calendar so I can work, so I dont sit in this types of meetings all the time" - Respondent N

" I need to block my calendar for work" - Respondent I

Managers have learned that they are more efficient during online meetings, but the meetings require a clear agenda and a coordinator. Furthermore, it's important to remember that meetings should not be clinical:

"To be able to create a clear meeting structure, high demand on a clear agenda is required and a moderator that takes responsibility. You always have a colleague that thinks it's a little uncomfortable, and sits quiet behind the screen compared to if you sit around a table" - Respondent L

"Every online meeting becomes more efficient. Can have many more meetings and do more things, I have more time now than before" - Respondent J

"To have those five minutes for coffee talk is important, because the meetings tempt to be very clinical, and we people are not that clinical to be honest" - Respondent K

Managers also express learnings regarding prioritization and purpose:

> "Traveling and the big meetings, this will need to stop. You need to prioritize which meeting should be in person and online" - Respondent G

> "The purpose of the meeting have to guide who attends the meetings to create efficiency and commitment" - Respondent E

> "The purpose of the meeting is more delimited in online meetings, this is a concrete difference, instead of long meetings, where we collect a lot of different questions where we take one question separately and then the next one. You only invite the persons that need to attend the meeting for specific questions" - Respondent E

4.2.3 Managers Experiences Regarding Communication and Collaboration

Managers' experiences of communication in remote work is differing. Some are working with a heavy amount of emails, whereas some make more calls:

> "Instead of emails, you should be able to ask a quick question, throw over the table. Quick questions lead to quick answers. Then you do not need to spend time writing emails and drowning in emails" - Respondent B

> "The amount of emails was just overwhelming" - Respondent F

> "It's less emails, because you can quickly call people, instead of emailing everyone back and forward" - Respondent G

When working remotely and communicating digitally, knowledge sharing has become more important and managers are experiencing this more challenging:

> "We need to become better in sharing information and communication. This is harder now and it's more important now" - Respondent M

> "When you meet physically it happens very naturally, it is easier to remember things. With the digital, it is more challenging to remember all the info that is going out to everyone" - Respondent B

> "I made a decision this morning, and I had to email five people. In person I could have said it during a coffee break, now it's five emails or five phone calls, and you always miss somebody. The information sharing and the communication is tough"
> - Respondent M

Transparency also seems important and difficult, and some experience a lack of communication:

> "But in general we tried to give them clear goals and tasks, and be transparent about what was expected from them" - Respondent D

> "Been large problems with information to get information out to everyone that is involved. Hard to get transparency out" - Respondent K

> "We have made extreme mistakes, that would not have happened if we were at the office. Because there was a lack of communication through the web" - Respondent F

The creative processes are more challenging and there is also a higher risk of losing good ideas by working remotely:

> "The creative part where you need energy and discuss things with people has become more difficult" - Respondent L

> "The things we discussed, the small things around the coffee machine, the small ideas, I have an idea, what do you think. You don't ask those questions today, that's the big part.

Because of that, we risk losing good ideas. There is a risk of losing creativity, where an idea is not elaborated enough that you pick up the phone and discuss it with someone else. But if I had someone next to me, I would just have thrown out the idea. There is a business risk you lose good ideas over time" - Respondent L

4.2.4 Managers Lessons Learned Regarding Communication and Collaboration

Managers have learned that it's possible to build relationships online. They have also seen the importance and learned to systematically involve people and become clear in their communication. Another learning is that openness and transparency is beneficial:

"Relationships can be developed over video. It's a fantastic tool" - Respondent J

"Work even more clearly to include everyone in different types of workgroups/moments to find the dynamic in the team. We have worked a lot with clarifying roles during this year" - Respondent L

"That's one thing, getting everyone together, discussing goals, bringing transparency and being quite open about the problems and issues. I have learned that more openness and transparency is very good for the organisation" - Respondent J

They also learned that they should have had closer follow ups in the beginning of the pandemic, together with being more clear in their communication:

"We could have been more clear in our communication. When we didn't have the answers for the questions, we could have said that" - Respondent Q

"In the beginning we should have had closer follow ups" - Respondent O

One manager mentioned positive development and learning from the pandemic:

"We have developed a more humane perspective in our company thanks to the pandemic. We have become better at contacting each other and communicating, we were forced to do that" - Respondent C

4.2.5 Managers Experiences Regarding Culture

Managers have experienced that the demand to listen to employees is higher than before, and they are therefore trying to be as present as possible online. It's harder to see how people are feeling, due to the lack of "senses" online:

"Also, when you don't meet you need to increase your communication and meetings with them, you don't see them each day so you need to be more present" - Respondent M

"You don't meet and it's not that easy to intercept worries, problems or challenges. It's harder because you have a screen as a barrier" - Respondent D

"It is harder to actually support people remotely. Easier to sit in the same room and feel the person if they have a problem and support them whatever situation it is. Harder when you have a critical HR meeting, how are you really feeling? Have you been drinking? I can't smell their breath. The feeling doesn't go through the screen, at least I have a problem with how people really feel and how bad you really are in your welfare when it comes to psychology. When do I send you to a therapeut and when don't" - Respondent I

When working remotely, it's more difficult to maintain the "we-feeling" in the company. Some managers express they tend to prioritize soft values less and to capture soft and hard values when working remotely, structure is needed:

"The softer values become harder to handle" - Respondent L

"It requires much structure to get the spontaneity and to involve soft and hard values"
- Respondent E

"It has become harder to achieve the we-feeling, we miss this. The feeling of being part of a context has been harder when working remotely" - Respondent E

We tend to just work with the systems, and some are not working with the culture at all" - Respondent K

4.2.6 Managers Lessons Learned Regarding Culture

Culture is changing by working remotely, and it takes time to change behaviours because people are not used to working in this setting. Having the camera on or off in meetings makes a big difference and affects culture, but everyone is not aware of this. Using gallery view improves the feeling of being a part of something bigger:

"Our culture has suffered during the pandemic and what ruins the culture is the distance. We have value words, "The team before me", that's maybe hard to live up to during this situation because you don't see your colleagues. You can celebrate over zoom, but that's not the same thing. We try to solve this challenge by having zoom meetings, and I recommend people to have gallery view on, to see everybody else which create the feeling that you are a part of something bigger" - Respondent Q

"Some people don't show their faces at meetings and dont have the camera on. You need to see faces, and need to have the camera on" - Respondent K

Managers have also learned that soft values should not be underestimated, and it's important to make employees feel involved and that they contribute:

"In the beginning, I should have taken more time to involve more people in a systematic way, to make them feel that they contributed. And giving them time and place for them to be a part of change and progress" Respondent D

"You should not underestimate soft values internally, such as job satisfaction and we-feeling" - Respondent E

"When you sit in a room it's easier to sit down and have a flow, when it's digital it's harder, so as a manager you need to find new ways of interacting, for example by agendas. We were worried people would start to feel lonely. We needed people to start to feel involved" - Respondent O

The importance of culture before and during the pandemic was expressed by one manager:

"If you have a strong culture in the company, with strong teams, and if you invest in those teams, then there's no challenge that is too hard to overcome. You are more prepared to meet challenges. It's very important to invest in employees and the corporate culture. Culture for us has been a big advantage during the pandemic. Before the pandemic we worked with strong teams, relationships, and transparency. There was a team spirit, to feel you could be yourself and trust others, we kept building on this during the pandemic. So for me as a manager it wasn't hard to say: I trust that you will tell me if you have challenges" - Respondent R

4.2.7 Managers Experiences Regarding Working Environment

Remote work has changed the work environment, and managers have different experiences. Some experience lower stress and better work-life balance:

"I haven't felt that stressed this year, which has been very good for me. Of course there's much more healthy work life balance" - Respondent M

At the same time, some are experiencing negative outcomes, affecting work life balance and mental and physical well being:

"Harder to balance work life balance. Easy to lose time during the day and working over hours" - Respondent I

"I work all the time, and I'm always accessible, the laptop is always there"
- Respondent G

"Another disadvantage of working remotely is my back pain" - Respondent D

However, managers experience a positive development. Work life balance was hard in the beginning of the pandemic, but now many have adapted and developed a better structure:

"Had a consultant who did some training with us, to actually separate working life and separate life, for example take a walk before work. Same during lunch hours for example. When you are done, close the work and take a walk or whatever to be prepared for your life. Helped tremendously. I went from bed to bed, working the whole day, some days I wasn't outside the apartment at all. The working hours are better if there's structure. I learned to block my calendar for work hours and not just meetings. I'm more structured in work in terms of time management" - Respondent I

"We have tried to change our approach to both work and the private, that it's possible to combine. You can create a work life balance - I call it for life life-balance. To be able to combine both and make it work" - Respondent R

"Higher and heavier workload, in the beginning. Now we have learned to use the tools in a more efficient way. I work more efficiently now. When working from home, there's no colleagues to talk to, no coffee machine, we are using the time more efficiently now"
- Respondent G

An advantage from working remotely is the increased acceptance to work from home, one manager expressed they had a policy before the pandemic but it didn't work:

"We have now seen the advantages of working from home, but it was harder when we introduced the new policy of working from home. I took the idea with me when I started here, but no one wanted to take advantage of it, even if it sounded good. People were afraid that they would be perceived as lazy" - Respondent L

4.2.8 Managers Lessons Learned Regarding Working Environment

During the pandemic, managers have learned that it's important to set clear boundaries, since people are expecting them to always be available:

"This pandemic is a good alarm clock. We have been nuanced. It is more acceptable to say "now we go home", "now we close down". To be there when needed, but be good at closing down. The whole organization has become better at this. This will be taken with us to the future. Everyone just eats your time if you are available 24/7, you need to respect yourself a little. It is kind of a wake-up" - Respondent C

"The expectancy of being available, people are expecting you to answer within 5 minutes and being available" - Respondent D

Managers have learned that it is not appropriate to make some decisions from home:

"You kind of feel all the time you are working, you hire someone from your bedroom, you fire someone from your bedroom. This kind of work can not be done from home"
- Respondent F

Working remotely leads to challenges regarding "on work training":

"When you are in the office and you overhear everybody, for new people joining the company it's job training. You can hear the manager or colleague discuss problems or sales or whatever. When everybody works from home, you don't hear that you get more into a silo. You need to handle it" - Respondent M

4.2.9 Managers Experiences Regarding Efficiency and Flexibility

By working remotely, the managers have become more flexible and efficient. Managers' focus has also increased due to fewer distractions. It is also possible to work from wherever, which opens up new possibilities regarding recruitments:

"Today I have more time on focus assignments where I need sharp focus. I try to go to the office once a week, everytime I go to the office and get home I reflect. I realise I haven't done anything at work, because I talk with people" - Respondent Q

"We don't have physical meetings often to decide on things, so working processes are quicker. No face to face meetings, all is digital, having meetings and using the chat. Working processes are getting quicker. You are more efficient when working digitally"
- Respondent G

"Also in the way of working, working from home, you can be more flexible" -
Respondent G

"This opens up an opportunity for recruitment. We have recruited in different ways. The city we operate in is a middle size big city, not sure the competencies are available on the local market. Maybe there's a chance that specialists in other cities can think about working for us and be at our office once a month" - Respondent L

An example of increased efficiency was explained by two respondents:

"More of meetings, there are a lot more meetings, quicker to change from one meeting to another because I don't need to transport myself to different rooms or buildings" -
Respondent I

"Digitalization has helped me. Last week I was in Australia, then Denmark, then France, moving all around the world thanks to digital tools. Instead of spending time on traveling I can do other things" - Respondent M

Managers had before the pandemic talked about becoming more digital, and the pandemic accelerated the development:

"We have digitised everything at our firm. We were not afraid of digitising, we have been thinking about doing it but haven't done it. The pandemic forced us to do it"
- Respondent O

"We were forced to change, we needed to adapt" - Respondent G

4.2.10 Managers Lessons Learned Regarding Regarding Efficiency and Flexibility

Multiple managers expressed how working remotely and digitalisation connects to speed, efficiency and some are being more proactive and some less. Meetings are also shorter now, compared to face to face meetings. When working remotely, it is easier to adapt the working schedule, and digital meetings allow easier weeding out:

"Speed, flexibility, short meetings, you would not have these short meetings face to face. Also in the way of working, working from home, you can be more flexible" -
Respondent G

"But also able to be more reactive, answering to emails, getting offerings out etc. As soon as I get a prospect I can answer immediately, before "can I get back to you next week, I'm traveling". Now I'm much more present and involved with the sales guys" -
Respondent G

"By working remote, the first weed out to get to know each other is easier" -
Respondent L

"I'm not that proactive anymore, you lose this kind of proactiveness." Respondent F

However, managers challenged the meetings efficiency:

"More effective, it maybe sounds good, but it's maybe not effective, it has been more of just making faster decisions. I'm not that proactive anymore, you lose this kind of proactiveness" - Respondent F

"Time efficiency is positive, sometimes meetings it's a little bit more efficient. But on the other hand, it's rather more quantity than quality" - Respondent N

Furthermore, managers have learned the importance of structure:

"It is even more important with clarity now. All of this requires much more structure" - Respondent E

"I'm more structured in work in terms of time management" - Respondent I

"It has a higher demand on you as a leader to be structured" - Respondent J

4.2.11 Managers Reflections

When managers are looking back at the start of the pandemic, they realise that they had a too optimistic mindset, they thought the pandemic only was gonna last for a while:

"We all thought it wasn't going to last for so long. All of a sudden me and my husband were forced to work from home and I said we have one week of working from home together, let's do the best out of it. We all thought it would last for a much shorter time than it did" - Respondent M

"We followed the development, we were optimistic. We moved leadership training from March to May 2020, then May to July, all the time two months forward" - Respondent B

"You have always thought that there were only two months left, as the politicians said. The spread of the virus has gone up and down, which has made it more difficult. If you knew from the beginning how this was gonna last, you would have laid down and given up or started dealing with certain strategic things from the start and done certain things better" - Respondent L

4.2.12 Advantages or Disadvantages

All managers were asked if they experience more advantages or disadvantages by working remotely. Eight managers experienced more advantages, seven managers couldn't decide and weighted both pros and cons as equal, whereas three experienced more disadvantages:

"Advantages, absolutely" - Respondent J

"Super hard question. 100% remote work is bad, but 100% face time culture at the office I wouldn't like to go back to. If we could have a hybrid where that suits you that would be much better when we can sociale at the office. A balance would be the best" - Respondent Q

"It goes without saying, disadvantages" - Respondent N

4.2.13 Summary of Further Insights

At the end of the interview, there was possibility for the managers to express further insights, and managers expressed that they will use experiences and lessons learned, in the future:

"People have been absolutely amazing at adapting to a new situation here. That is learning, isn't it. Think about all the other situations we can adapt to. This is shown on a

large scale we have the possibility to change. I think that's an amazing experience for everybody. I mean, if people can change this in one year, why couldn't we do the changes that are required to fix the environmental issues?" - Respondent K

"Well, I have always loved change, but this makes me love change even more. Like, change is so good. It helps the firms in so many ways. That's gonna help us make change decisions and refer to this" - Respondent O

"I hope I remember this time" - Respondent F

Another insight that have been reinforced for the managers, is the importance of structured work and prioritize what's most important:

"Continue to create visibility, transparency, accountability among the different team members" - Respondent D

"Not just being like a firefighter. The lessons are learned when it comes to taking your time and thinking" - Respondent D

"I think I will structure my everyday life more, then it will hopefully be more focused on the right things. It is easy as a manager to run into things that are burning the most, but maybe not on what's actually most important. It's important to reflect, I need to prioritize how I can help my colleagues do a better job" - Respondent R

The managers also reflected upon their experiences and lessons learned by remote work and how they will value it in the future:

"We don't need to meet to do the daily business" - Respondent K

"Some work tasks are more suited for some situations than others, some are better to do at home, while others are better to do at the office, it will become more flexible. This requires more demands on structure" - Respondent E

"Will stop going into the office when I have things I have to deal with. Will be in the office when I have physical meetings. Won't go to the office just to go to work. I need to have the right reason to be there" - Respondent J

"If I know I have a lot of external meetings and no one is at the office, why should I travel to the office and spend two hours commuting when I can be at home? Then I can leave my kids at the school and when they come home I'm home. I will take that with me. That I don't need to be present at the office all the time if I don't have office related questions or meetings" - Respondent M

Managers experience that more control, which rather means caring, is needed to help and support employees in their daily work. Managers have learned how important it is to employees to let them show what they have done and achieved. Some have also expressed that it's easier to see who needs more support and how individuals perform:

"Looking back, we could have a closer follow up on how people were doing and what they actually did. Not because we want to control them, but because people want to tell us, because that makes them feel good" - Respondent O

"Come back and follow up, not follow up as controlling, coming back as caring, how is it going with your assignment? What can I do for you?" - Respondent Q

"I maybe don't have to be so updated, but if I know my colleagues are feeling well, and that they can trust that I can help them, it creates a sense of security in my leadership" - Respondent R

"It has also become more obvious, each individual employee and how they actually work. Especially with support staff, I'm not their manager, but it's easier to see who's slacking and who needs help when people work from home" - Respondent O

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the analyzed and interpreted data will be discussed with previously presented models, theories, and research to answer the research questions: *1. What has changed in managers daily work, by working remotely during Covid-19?* and *2. What are managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during Covid-19?*. The purpose of this study was to document managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the pandemic, to provide insights for other managers on how to improve their remote work, and there were both differences and similarities in the managers' answers. Mintzberg (2011) says that management is contextual, and this could be one reason why the experiences varied between the managers. Even if all of the participants in this study were managers, they are working in individual, unique and varying contexts, and it is vital to have this in mind when interpreting and drawing conclusions.

5.1 Changes

Before looking into experiences and lessons learned within the interviews, the managers were encouraged to explain and define how working remotely has changed their daily work. The findings from this section, 4.1, also answered the first research question, which was vital to understand the experiences and lessons learned.

In general, managers experience that they do the same tasks now, but they solve problems and work differently when working remotely. This finding connects well to Mintzberg (2011, 2019), who states that the fundamental functions of management do not change with digitalization, but some subjects can change. However, some managers also describe how fundamental functions have changed by working remotely since they need to face a new technical environment. This finding connects to Schildt (2020) who, compared to Mintzberg (2011), says that digitalization and technological development changes management practices and organizational structures. In general, more managers' descriptions of change connects to Mintzberg's (2011) conclusion. One subject that has changed in managers' daily work is meetings, where there have been more meetings because they are back to back, and there is a need for more preparation for meetings.

There are also more checkups and check-ins. Another change is the work environment, where most managers work from home, with equipment from the office. Working remotely has also changed the need for technical solutions. The changes regarding the work environment connect well to the definition of remote work, which says that workers do not work at the central office and technology is used to communicate (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990). Some managers also perceived changes in workload. Even if there was no possibility to state the exact amount of work hours for the interviewed managers, eleven out of 18 managers expressed they are experiencing a higher workload than before. This could be connected to the fact that managerial work is defined as hectic and unrelenting, and emails and telephone calls are never left aside in managers work (Mintzberg, 2011).

5.2 Experiences & Lessons Learned

After identifying the changes, managers described and explained their experiences and lessons learned from working remotely, which answer the second research question. Various themes were identified, as was shown in the presented data. These themes and findings will not be discussed separately in chronological order as they are presented. Instead, themes will be connected, different findings will be compared, and data will be related to content from the literature review.

Managers in this study expressed different consequences, both positive and negative, of working remotely. One negative consequence managers experienced from working remotely is that organizational culture has been suffering. Managers face new challenges in creating and maintaining culture when working remotely, because of the distance. Organizations and managers are in some ways working entirely different from before, and the managers experience that culture has been negatively affected since culture is "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 4). This finding does align with previous statements from the literature review, which says that digital developments could have damaging effects on culture (Schildt, 2020).

On the other hand, one positive consequence of working remotely is the increased efficiency, which a predominant part of the managers experienced. Even if the managers miss being at the office, seeing and talking to colleagues, and having coffee talks, they express a higher perceived focus where they can do their tasks properly and more efficiently because there is less distraction. As earlier presented, Mintzberg presents in his model three levels which describe how managers work. Managers balance and intertwine these levels in their work when they are, for instance, communicating and supporting. By working remotely, managers can (to some extent) more easily now decide and focus on tasks that are more connected to some planes, which makes them more efficient. One reason for this efficiency is that managers are less disturbed, and there are fewer distractions around them when working remotely. Kotter (1999) stated in 1999 that some managers surround themselves with people 90% of their time, which is not the case anymore in remote work. Kotter (1999) also found that managers spend time on activities that are a waste of time. Nowadays, working remotely, managers can more easily choose and prioritize what to spend their time on, and the purpose of the meetings will be more central and essential. However, even if the managers feel that they are working more efficiently and can put more time on "the right" tasks, decision-making has become harder to complete when working remotely and online. The managers explain that the difficulty in decision making is partly due to the challenge of creating and maintaining trust when working remotely. As will be further elaborated below, the lack of private conversation in meetings also affects the creation and maintenance of trust, which is affecting decision-making.

It is possible to identify patterns in the managers' answers, where increased efficiency and challenges in decision making relate to stress. As earlier mentioned by Wang et al. (2021), working remotely became "the new normal" roughly overnight. Ipsen et al. (2021) found that working remotely brought both positive and negative consequences. When analysing the data, there is a possibility to conclude that these different consequences and the quick transition have led to different experiences of stress. Some managers experience less and more stress now, while others experienced more stress only at the beginning of the pandemic. The decreased stress could be related to the decreased travels among managers. Nowadays, managers work remotely, which means that they do not have to travel for meetings. Managers, therefore, experience less stress because they are not dependent on departments and arrivals of trains and flights. Managers can

instead put more time, and focus on being present and available for the employees and customers. However, some managers expressed higher stress levels in the beginning of the pandemic, because of the uncertainty around the situation and the adaptation, where there were new things to learn besides dealing with the usual work. As soon as managers figured out how to cope with the changes and the uncertainty, the stress became lower.

Meanwhile, some managers in the study experience an increased stress level, which has not been reduced during the pandemic. This is possibly due to a higher workload and more administrative tasks such as answering emails and challenging communication. This finding connects to the work of Parker, Knight and Kellers (2020), which says that managers are not used to working remotely, and they have not practised doing it.

Varying stress levels are not the only thing that managers have experienced during the pandemic. As time has passed, managers have made some changes in their work. When looking into manager's communication and especially meetings, changes have been made, and some key learnings are possible to identify. In the beginning, managers experienced more meetings than ever, and there were also very long meetings. During the pandemic, by working remotely, managers learned that meetings in remote work require more structure, more preparation and do not need to be that long. Nowadays, the importance of the meeting's purpose is controlling where to meet (physical or online), how long the meeting should be and who should participate. Managers also learned that meetings, in the beginning, were very clinical, and there was only a focus on business and decision making rather than "soft values". However, managers have now changed their structure of meetings, where they now structure spontaneous talk in the beginning, and at the end of meetings. "Coffee-talk-meetings" are also more common now since the managers have learned the value of informal and private talk. These learnings and changes can be explained by Tengblads (2006) findings, where he mentions that Swedes have less faith in authority but stronger beliefs in subjective well being, and relationships are prioritized.

Mintzberg's model (2011) explains that the information plane is one of the three main "functions", and by working remotely, becoming and maintaining the nerve centre is challenging. The lack of spontaneous talks makes information sharing more difficult. Before, you

could easily share information in the lunchroom or hallways, but now, you have to contact people individually. Schildt (2020) argues that transparency in companies facilitates knowledge sharing and idea engendering. Emmett, Schrah, Schrimper and Wood (2020) also states that being transparent is a way to build trust in remote work. However, managers mention this as challenging, giving everyone the right and exact information and remembering to give it in a structured way. The struggle with information sharing also challenges transparency. Managers find transparency and information sharing more challenging and more critical when working remotely.

Due to the difficulty where the managers are not the nerve-centre to the same extent by working remotely, managers state that they need to find new ways of communicating and following up on employees' work to support them. Mintzberg (2011) refers to this as people plane in his model, where managers help and support employees to get things done. Managers in the study mention how this aspect is even more important now, where it is not about controlling but rather, as Mintzberg says (2011), support. Digitalisation could help the manager become more objective when perceiving employees (Schildt, 2020), and managers in the study confirm the same insight. When working online remotely, it is easier to see who is falling behind and is not performing and needs more support. At the beginning of the pandemic, managers were concerned about how employees would perform and if they would be able to do their tasks without the manager's physical support. The longer into the pandemic the managers were going, managers experienced and learned that employees were performing well, and the managers needed to influence, support and motivate employees instead of controlling them. This finding connects to Kotter (1999), which states that managers should influence employees instead of delegating. One important aspect is that the employees also want to show what they have achieved, to feel that they contribute. Managers have supported employees with many but short check-ins and follow-ups, which has worked well for both manager and employees. Previous research also states that well-being is related to the individual purpose (Emmett et al. 2020), and if you do not have the employees feel that they are contributing and involved in success, coordination can become challenging (Schildt, 2020).

Individual purpose connects to another important finding in the data where managers talk about well-being and work-life balance. Previous research by Emmett, Schrah, Schrimper and Wood (2020) says that employees' experiences of working remotely are varied, but it is possible to conclude that working remotely is positive. Employees experience an increased engagement, and they have a greater sense of well being (Emmett et al. 2020). Their findings are about employees, but in this study, similar findings have been made regarding managers. In this study, the opinions and experiences also varied. Eight managers expressed more advantages in remote work, three managers expressed that there were more disadvantages, and seven could not decide. Those who experienced advantages said that Covid-19 has been like an "alarm clock", where they have become better at "closing the office door" and separating work from private life. As one manager said, they have created a life-life balance where work and life should be in harmony. In the list of disadvantages, managers mentioned how the lack of senses in communication is reduced when working remotely. Due to decreased physical interactions, the need for communication is increased. However, managers experienced this as challenging because the screen is a barrier, and there are fewer senses involved in the communication. This is also confirmed by Mintzberg (2019, cited in Berrett-Koehler 2019), who says that the use of senses is reduced when working online, it is easier to stay in touch, but it is not possible to feel the same presence. Another disadvantage is the experience of a worse work-life balance. Some managers are doing sensitive work from their bedrooms, and people expect managers to be available all the time and deliver fast answers. As mentioned in the section describing changes, some managers also experience a higher workload. These findings are possible to connect to Kotter (1999), where he found that managers in general work just under 60 hours per week.

During the pandemic, managers experience that they have learned new things and experienced the value of reflection, prioritisation, and structure. They mention how it is essential not just to be a firefighter and run to the things that are burning the most, but rather to reflect and prioritise what is most important to focus on. This finding is particularly interesting since it was mentioned already at the beginning of this paper how managers dislike reflection (Mintzberg, 1990) and how action has a higher value than reflection within managers (Daudelin, 1996). From the findings in this study, it is possible to argue that some managers have learned the importance of reflection and will reflect more in the future.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to document managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the pandemic to provide insights for other managers on how to improve their remote work. Managers had similar and different experiences together with lessons learned, which was shown in the comprehensive documentation. It can be seen in the data presentation (chapter 4), and the discussion (chapter 5) that fundamental concepts (what managers do) are still the same, but how managers are working have changed in remote managerial work. Managers first expressed perceived changes in their work (section 4.1) which was clustered into six themes, explaining how there are more meetings and more check-ins and checkups, and there is a need for more preparations for meetings. Managers are also working from home with tools and equipment from the office, increasing the demand for technical solutions. Some managers also experience a higher workload.

Furthermore, managers have multiple experiences and lessons learned (section 4.2), and in this study, they were "themed" as online meetings, communication & collaboration, culture, work environment, efficiency & flexibility. When conducting meetings online, it is possible to have them shorter and more efficient, but it is important not to have them clinical. The structure and setup of meetings in remote work are also crucial. Managing culture in remote work is challenging, and softer values are harder to capture. Managers need to make employees feel included, and this could be done with increased transparency. Managers have differing work environment and work-life balance experiences, but to achieve a good balance when working remotely, it is vital to set boundaries. Managers experience higher efficiency and focus when working remotely, and the flexibility will be brought into future work. However, it is essential to not only focus on quantity but also the quality, when being efficient. Communication and information sharing is perceived as more challenging when working remotely, and clarity and preparations are crucial. Lastly, managers have reflected upon their expectations and concluded that they were too optimistic at the beginning of the pandemic.

Managers also concluded their critical takeaways in terms of experiences and lessons learned to bring with them in the future. These were mainly concerning increased reflection, where managers aim to learn from this pandemic and not just be a firefighter. The purpose of meetings

and tasks will also have a greater impact on travels, meetings and office versus remote work. Managers have also, by working remotely, learned the value of spontaneous talks and coffee machine talks, where trust and relationships are built, which is vital in business.

The purpose of this study has been fulfilled since the two research questions: *1. What has changed in managers daily work, by working remotely during Covid-19?* and *2. What are managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during Covid-19?*, have been answered with analysis and discussion. The presented findings and answers to the research questions represent insights that can be of value for other managers. Managers can look into the documented experiences and learnings and potentially get an understanding of how to improve their own remote work. It is said that working remotely is the new normal (Wang et al. 2021), and the value of the study's findings relies on the possibility that remote work will continue, to some extent, after the pandemic. Out of 18 interviewed managers, eight experienced more advantages than disadvantages of working remotely. The seven managers who could not decide said they preferred a hybrid of how they worked before the pandemic and remote work. Also, it is possible to find numbers (published before the Covid-19 pandemic) showing a constant increase of workers who work from home, and estimates say that this increase only will continue (Molla, 2019). These numbers, and the findings from this study, together with Bolander, Sumelius and Werr's (2020) words, saying that the pandemic can lead to a change in mindsets regarding when and where work can be carried out, can be seen as evidence that remote work will continue.

6.1 Trustworthiness of the Study

It can be argued if the results from this study can be trusted. In the method section, trustworthiness was discussed with the help of Guba & Lincolns (1994) concepts, and further insights can be added to the discussion of the study's trustworthiness.

Since the data was interpreted, there was a risk of misunderstandings, but to decrease this risk, respondent validity was used. The base transcriptions of the interviews were sent to all the respondents, where they got the chance to make changes, and the authors, therefore, argue that

the transcriptions and followed interpretations were valid. The fact that all interviews were conducted within two weeks also supports the validity. All managers faced the same restrictions and recommendations because no significant changes occurred during the two weeks. There is, however, one limitation that could affect the results. The authors assumed that the managers started to work remotely (frequently) during the pandemic, but Kossek and Lautsch (2018) say working remotely is not a new thing. Therefore, there is a possibility that some of the managers already had experiences of working remotely before the pandemic.

Nevertheless, managers in this study have had the same position before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this sense, the managers have experienced all the different stages within Covid-19, and they can also compare remote work to how they worked before the pandemic. When collecting data, the intention was to interview as many managers as possible during the study's timeframe. When reaching the last managers scheduled, the data collection became saturated because the answers became repeated and similar. This was also a reason why 18 managers were interviewed and not more. Another fact supporting the study's trustworthiness is that the managers had passed the "optimistic mindset" stage when being interviewed. They expressed that they had been optimistic at the beginning of the pandemic and did not think it was "gonna" last for this long. When interviewing, the managers had realized that they had to cope with this situation and the uncertainty around it.

6.2 Future Research

Within this study, a documentation of different managers (who are working in different industries) experiences and lessons learned have been conducted. This decision has its limitations, where the findings represent a wide range of answers, and the answers come from a broad group of people. To overcome this broadness, the authors suggest further research where similar studies investigate more narrow and deeply into what is going on in the organizations. This could be done by looking deeper into one of the themes from this study, e.g. "culture", or "efficiency & flexibility". It is also possible to look into one specific industry or into one type of manager, e.g. only CEO's or HR managers experiences and lessons learned. Another example of

further research could be to focus on employees and investigate how well the manager's perception of his or her remote work aligns with employees' experiences.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix A: Topic Guide for interviews

Introduction
- ❖ Allowance to record?
- ❖ Repetition of ethical considerations.
- ❖ English or Swedish?
- ❖ We will send a summary of your answers, to ensure we have understood and interpreted them truthfully.
- ❖ If any question is unclear, please let us know and there is no stress answering the questions.
- ❖ Explaining the purpose.

Background fact
A) What is your current role?
B) For how long have you worked in this role?
C) In what industry are you working within?
D) What are your most central "work tasks"?

Experiences
(1) Compared to before Covid-19, what has changed in your daily work as a manager?

(2) What is your experience regarding how your organization has adapted to the restrictions?

(3A) How has working remotely affected your " tasks" as a manager?

(3B) How has working remotely affected your way of working as a manager?

(3C) Has this transition (from working at the office to working remotely) required a heavier or lower workload?

(4) What have you done on a personal level to adapt to remote work?

(5A) Have you experienced advantages with the transition? In case of yes, what advantages?

(5B) Have you experienced disadvantages with the transition? In case of yes, what disadvantages?

Lessons learned

(6) As manager, what are your lessons learned from working remotely?

(7) If anything, what do you wish you had done differently during the past 12 months?

(8) How will your lessons learned affect your daily work as a manager in the future?

(9) Regarding the digital impact (occurring from working remotely) on your work, what (if there are any) future actions are required to improve and optimize your work?

(10) What are your main takeaways that you will bring with you when the pandemic is over, in your daily work?

(11) Do you have any other inputs or experiences you would like to share?

8.2 Appendix B: Information to participants

Hi,

We are two students studying a masters in management at Lund University, where we are doing a thesis project as the last part of our education.

Since Covid-19 started, we have seen a fast development of digitalisation, which has created new demands for *how* managers work. We, therefore, find it interesting to look further into this situation, where we hope to find lessons learned that could bring value for managers operating in a more digitised working environment.

More specifically, the purpose of this study is to document managers' experiences and lessons learned from working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic, to provide insights for other managers on how to improve their remote work.

The interview will be conducted online and will take approximately 60 minutes. We ask for your permission to record this interview, to later on listen to it if needed. We would appreciate it, if you could reflect upon these questions before the interview:

- Compared to before Covid-19, what has changed in your daily work as a manager?
- What advantages and disadvantages have you experienced with the transition?
- What are your lessons learned from the digital transition during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Ethical considerations

- ❖ Full confidentiality is guaranteed regarding participants personal information, the company and the answers. There will be no possibility to connect the answers to the manager since all the respondents will be anonymised.
- ❖ Participation is voluntary. During the interview, the manager has all rights to end it whenever, and no questions are mandatory to answer.
- ❖ Since the study will be conducted through an inductive approach, there will be no intention to affect the manager's answers, but rather to have open questions to listen and understand the honest answers.