Sustaining Lessons Learned in Work Design from COVID-19 Restrictions

Exploring sustained and enhanced lessons in work design and the challenges of sustaining them

By

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Abstract

After the covid-19 restrictions were lifted in Sweden, managers were faced with considerations such as how to proceed with work design and how to sustain the lessons learned from the pandemic, as well as potential challenges of doing so. The purpose of this study is to document lessons that have been sustained or enhanced after the restrictions were lifted and the challenges of sustaining those lessons to provide insights for managers who are working in settings that are still under covid-19 related restrictions. The study was conducted by interviewing nine managers working in Sweden from different industries. The interviews were semi-structured, and the data gathered from the interviews were done with thematic analysis. Multiple sustained lessons and challenges regarding work design in a post-pandemic setting were detailed in the documentation. This exhaustive documentation contains insights that may be beneficial for other managers seeking to sustain the lessons they have learned from the pandemic and enhance their work design after the restrictions are lifted.

Keywords: *Manager, COVID-19, Knowledge retention, sustaining lessons learned, Organizational resilience, Organizational learning, Remote work.*

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1 Introduction

COVID-19's emergence and rapid spread caused a major disturbance in the daily lives of billions of people all around the world. Management as a social practice was also significantly influenced by covid-19-induced large-scale changes. The global business and industry shutdowns established and ordered to contain the virus have created a slew of unique issues for employees and managers (Kniffin et al., 2021). Apart from economic turmoil, a substantial proportion of managers encountered numerous challenges when managing individuals from a distance (Howard-Grenville, 2020). More than 80% of the world's 3.3 billion employees were reported to be impacted by partial or full workplace closures (ILO).

The severe displacement of COVID-19 poses substantial challenges for management, but it also offers a wonderful opportunity for researchers. Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the challenges managers and employees encountered throughout the covid 19 (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021; Bhattacharyya & Thakre, 2020; Bolisani et al., 2020; Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022). Although the breadth of these challenges is broad, in this research, we will concentrate on those pertaining to work design, as COVID-19's most noticeable influence on the workforce is the enormous rise in people who work remotely (Madero Gómez et al., 2020). For the sake of this research, we will define work design as the "content and organization of one's work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities" (Parker, 2014, p.662). Before the outbreak, many managers and staff had minimal experience working remotely on such a wide scale, which made the sudden transition to working remotely even more challenging for them (Savić, 2020).

We conducted a systematic review of the identified challenges mentioned in relevant work design research. We believe it is critical to examine how managers addressed those challenges, what they learned while addressing those challenges, whether they intend to sustain or enhance the lessons they have learned, and what the challenges of sustaining those lessons are.

The future of work design will inevitably be influenced by changes experienced during covid as organizations might expect more people to continue to work from home post-COVID-19 (Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021). Apart from that, big crises like covid-19 can teach managers and organizations a great deal about organizational learning and resilience. It is important to explore what managers have learned from this crisis and how they sustain those lessons, and what some challenges of sustaining those lessons are. One of the reasons this exploration can have significance is that managers will be able to deal with future similar crises better if they have learned how to deal with sudden imposed changes in work design. Another reason is that by being more aware and knowledgeable of how work design may have a significant impact on the performativity of the organization, managers will be more driven to reassess the work design in their companies on a regular basis and not accept it as a given.

We will interview managers working in Sweden. After compiling and analyzing the data from the interviews, we will find what lessons are sustained or enhanced in the organizations and find connections between the themes to existing organizational learning and resilience frameworks. We will also identify challenges mentioned by the participants in maintaining management lessons learned regarding work design during the covid-19 pandemic.

1.1 Aim and objectives

It is imperative for managers to know more about what the future of work design looks like as work design is one of the competitive factors that can make an organization function better and as it changes rapidly due to external factors (Parker, Wall & Cordery, 2001). Many governments in the world have taken measures to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. One such measure was restrictions and recommendations to reduce gatherings of people in one place, such as the workplace (McLaren & Wang, 2021). As mentioned earlier, the future of work design would be heavily affected by the experience of covid-19 restrictions. There has been a lot of research on what challenges managers and employees have experienced. Still, there is a need for new knowledge when it comes to what managers intend to do in a future without any restrictions and what the future of work design will look like. This new knowledge can be of great importance for work design researchers and managers who do not want to fall behind their competitors. In some countries, restrictions have already been lifted, and many managers have had the chance to go back to the old way of doing things. We are conducting this research in Sweden, one of the countries that have already lifted all the restrictions related to covid-19 Krisinformation, 2022). Organizations in Sweden have had the opportunity to return completely to the workplace if they so decide. It is possible that in the near future, all the managers all around the world will have the chance to manage the old way. In this research, we will not be able to predict what managers will do and what the future of work design be like. However, the focus of this study will be divided in two parts. One focus is how managers in Sweden are sustaining or enhancing the lessons they have learned. The other focus is to explore what challenges they have faced if they have intended to sustain and enhance them. This information will shed some light on some of the significant factors in the future of design work looks like.

We believe that the restrictions have created learning opportunities and sustaining the lessons learned from those opportunities can be imperative for organizations. One reason to why it can be imperative is that managers might be able to reevaluate the work design in their organizations by systemizing the lessons they have learned during the COVID-19 restrictions. It might be claimed that it is a waste not to apply the lessons gained from the covid crisis, especially since there is a risk organizations and managers might just return to the old ways without contemplating the potential benefits they could have harvested. Furthermore, organizations can earn a lot of insights into dealing with future crises.

1.2 Research purpose and research questions

The purpose of this research is to explore what lessons learned in work design have been sustained or enhanced from covid-19 restrictions by managers in Sweden and what are the challenges of sustaining and enhancing these lessons. This research can enable managers in other countries who are still working under official restrictions to gain insights into how they can benefit from the lessons they have learned from management under covid-19 in a setting without any official restrictions. It will also enable them to observe the challenges of sustaining these lessons that managers in Sweden have experienced and prepare them beforehand to handle these challenges more effectively. It can also be beneficial for other managers working in settings without any restrictions since they will gain more insights about sustaining the lessons they have learned. These insights can be helpful since there might be some tendency for managers and organization's side to revert to pre-pandemic ways of working without incorporating any lessons from the pandemic.

To fulfill the purpose, the following research questions have been posed:

·   What lessons learned in work design have been sustained or enhanced from covid-19 restrictions?

·   What are the challenges of sustaining or enhancing lessons learned in work design from covid-restrictions?

1.3 Research delimitations

To fulfill the purpose of the research, this study will inevitably be delimited by several factors. First, we will only select managers who are technologically adept according to their own description. We intend to do this to filter managers who had a tough time adapting to the new changes in the work design and, therefore, might not have learned so much. The reason behind this is the fact that we are limited by time and need to focus only on managers who have had the chance to adapt better to the situation and have learned more about how to deal with the new working conditions. This will hopefully make our access to data about lessons learned quicker. We are, however, aware that managers who were not technologically adept could have important insights into how they were part of their organizational change. We believe that further research can be done on those managers. We are also aware that the managers we intend to interview will be managers with management experience in Sweden. Since Sweden had less strict restrictions (Juranek et al., 2020) compared to other countries, the lessons learned and the experiences might not be universal.

1.4   Outline of the thesis

We will begin by presenting a theoretical background starting with the definition of remote work, a brief history, and various views towards it. Then we will provide a systematic literature review of the work design challenges mentioned by both employees and managers during covid-19 restrictions. Then we will look at the theories and frameworks regarding organizational learning and organizational resilience. After that, we will present the methodology, how we designed our interview questions, how we sampled, how we collected the data, and how we analyzed the data. The ethics and trustworthiness of the study will also be discussed in the methodology section. Following that, we will present our results and what we found out when collecting data by interviewing managers. We will then try to connect them to our research questions and try to find meaningful connections between that data and organizational learning and resilience theories.

2   Literature review

This chapter aims to provide readers with the theoretical background of this study. Firstly, we describe what remote work is, a brief history, and various views of it. Second, we will explain the various challenges and lessons that organizations have experienced from working remotely during the pandemic. Finally, we will define organizational learning, sustaining learning, and organizational resilience. Then, we will describe how these are applicable to remote working environments within organizations.

2.1   Remote work

Remote work, also known as telework and telecommuting, is conducting work outside the employer's premises (Bailey & Kurland, 2002) and where the use of technology enables one to perform work from a distance, thus substituting commute back and forth to work (Mokhtarian, 1991). Technologies that enable remote work are computers and telematics technologies. The International Labor Organization defines remote work as the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to perform work that is not at the employer's premises. While many define remote work as being done from home, it encompasses working in a different location other than the employer's premises (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Given that remote work is not conducted on the employer's premises, it can be associated with physical and psychological isolation. Physical isolation means that one is physically removed from others, while psychological isolation is the feeling of not belonging or being disconnected from the group (Wang, Albert & Sun, 2020).

One of the early examples of remote work using ICT was in the 1970s during an oil crisis that caused concerns about gasoline consumption in large metropolitan areas where traffic congestion and commutes were common (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Another example from the 1970s was in the United States during the smog crisis in Los Angeles. Air pollution from vehicles was high, and to reduce emissions, people were encouraged to work remotely (Cappelli, 2021). Remote work is not a new concept; before the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it was not considered normal practice and could even be stigmatized (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). According to Chafi, Hultberg & Yams (2022), 3.2% of employees conducted their work remotely in the EU before the pandemic. These workers were primarily high-income and highly skilled, whereas most of them were in northern Europe. During the pandemic, many organizations shifted rapidly into remote work conditions. In the EU, more than one-third of the workforce worked remotely, while in the US, it was approximately one-half (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022).

Many studies have been conducted to identify challenges, benefits, and lessons learned from working remotely (Cappelli, 2021). One of the most widely mentioned benefits of remote work is that commuting is eliminated; there are fewer distractions from the office environment and fewer non-essential meetings. On the other hand, the most common challenge of remote work is distractions experienced at home and technological issues. However, these are likely to be mitigated with experience (Cappelli, 2021). Overall, there are many who perceive remote work to have positive benefits, which is why organizations are aiming to hire remote workers in the future (Cappelli, 2021). That is why many organizations adapt by utilizing new technologies. However, it will take time until organizations settle on the most practical for their specific situations (Ozimek, 2020).

According to Ozimek (2020), 32.2% of hiring managers report that they saw increases in productivity, while 22.5% reported that it decreased. The author argues that the rise in productivity will be beneficial in the long run to the economy if one part of the workforce can be more productive. Therefore, the author suggests that organizations will replace workers with those that can work remotely if they can perform the same tasks as those that can be done on the workplace premises. As a result, the net effect of selecting employees as such will have greater productivity.

Cappelli (2021), on the other hand, has more significant concerns over selecting individuals for working remotely. He argues that if some employees were to work remotely permanently, their potential for career advancement and opportunities would be more limited than those who do not work remotely in the same organization. Furthermore, this also puts higher demand for employers to manage two types of employees who experience work differently. Another way of working remotely is where employees choose on which days of the week they will work remotely, which Cappelli (2021) argues is more challenging to manage due to scheduling and coordination. While some companies have decided that certain weekdays are assigned for remote

work, it becomes an issue because the employees' agency is removed, and various work tasks on certain days are unsuitable to complete either from home or the office (Cappelli, 2021).

Several surveys have found that remote work is perceived to have been experienced better than expected (Cappelli, 2021; Ozimek, 2020). Surveys that have shown these do not explain whether remote work is effective or not. Still, it indicates that hiring managers perceive remote work as positive (Cappelli, 2021), while it counters managers who assumed that remote work would not be productive (Cappelli, 2021). The overall greater acceptance of remote work leaves much room for experimentation and learning opportunities from working remotely (Cappelli, 2021; Ozimek, 2020). It cannot expect remote work to solve challenges of work design, it is up to managers to determine how they wish to execute remote work in their organizations, and the outcome depends on them (Cappelli, 2021).

2.2   Challenges of working remotely

Multiple studies have been conducted to identify challenges that organizations have undergone during the pandemic. The number of challenges faced is numerous, but we were able to identify recurring challenges mentioned in multiple studies. To determine the recurring challenges, we have searched study reports which describe organizational challenges faced in the pandemic. From a selection of 11 reports, we have recognized that various challenges are repeatedly mentioned. Further search yielded similar content where the same challenges were described. Therefore, we have decided to settle with a selection of 14 reports in total as further search would likely have yielded the same or similar results. Thus, we have chosen to describe those challenges that were given the most frequent mention.

Before explaining challenges experienced by organizations, we need to define what challenges are. The Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) defines the word challenge as "A task or situation that tests someone's abilities." Given that prior to the pandemic, a minority of people worked remotely,Click or tap here to enter text. the rapid shift in working from home proved challenging because the new work design tested peoples' ability to adapt to a new situation (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Firstly, among the many challenges we have identified were those in knowledge sharing. For example, it was easy to miss the exchange of information that transpires in the office when working remotely (Bolisani et al., 2020). This was further complicated because accessibility to people became more limited. This limitation happened because people found themselves physically separated from each other where they could not rely on more subtle forms of communication such as facial expressions or body language to interact (Bolisani et al., 2020; Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021). Many employees felt a lack of feedback, attention, and motivation received from management, and on the other hand, managers experienced difficulties in knowing how employees feel in the workplace (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021).

Secondly, many have experienced difficulties in handling workload while working remotely. One indicator is that managers work longer hours. The study by Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen (2021) has found that the average workday is 48,5 minutes, or 8.2% longer than pre-pandemic times. One explanation is that the nature of managerial work is supervisory, which requires more communication (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022). Therefore, managers have found themselves having longer meetings remotely to compensate for the lack of face-to-face contact (Bolisani et al., 2020). While there are reports of more meetings, there are also reports that meetings are shorter and more efficient (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021; Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021). Challenges such as these present difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance (Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021) and the risk of experiencing burnout from an overwhelming workload (Smite et al., 2022).

Thirdly, remote work presents its own challenges in virtual collaboration, which affects organizational culture. Managers in various organizations have expressed concerns about building and maintaining organizational culture (Mangla, 2021). According to Bolman & Deal (2017), culture is what unites people in an organization and helps them achieve goals. Culture is the incorporation of knowledge, ideas, experiences, and conduct developed by participating in various social dynamics such as family, society, friends, religion, and organizations (Mangla, 2021). One challenge is that it is more difficult to build and maintain relationships in teams (Smite et al., 2022); one such example is that interactions over digital tools make colleagues more inclined to talk formally about work-related topics and less inclined for informal and personal topics which would commonly happen over a coffee break (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021). Virtual collaboration has presented various challenges to culture, which in turn were impediments to effective communication among team members who work virtually. People's ability to build trust was more difficult because non-verbal communication cannot be conveyed over digital communication tools (Mangla, 2021). Therefore, this has also influenced both managers' and employees' sense of belonging (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021; Raišienė et al., 2021). Leadership, in turn, faces more demand to inspire trust among employees (Mangla, 2021). Other studies show that there is a lack of inspirational work atmosphere at home and that some good ideas might be lost (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021; Raišienė et al., 2021). Another recurring contributor to influencing organizational culture is the lack of transparency and communication (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021).

Fourthly, coordination and organization are more complex because leadership over distance is difficult. For example, leaders find it difficult to stay in touch with employees, know how they feel (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021; Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021), and organize creative work over communication tools (Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021). In some cases, employees experience lack of concentration (Raišienė et al., 2021), procrastination of work tasks (Vasić, 2020; Wang, Albert & Sun, 2020), and unfamiliarity with technological tools for communication (Vasić, 2020). In other cases, employees have reported facing exaggerated expectations from management when working remotely (Raišienė et al., 2021).

Finally, there are studies reporting that many have faced mental health problems due to isolation (Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021; Smite et al., 2022). The study by Wang, Albert & Sun (2020) indicated that remote workers who are experiencing psychological isolation have a tendency to show lower commitment and emotional attachment to the organizations they are part of. On the other hand, physical isolation shows no indication that commitment is lower or that emotional attachment is lessened. That is because organizational members can still feel psychologically isolated even if they are in close physical proximity to their colleagues (Wang, Albert & Sun, 2020). Another issue in virtual work is that some tasks cannot be done from home or are inappropriate to do so (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021; Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021).

2.3   Lessons learned from working remotely

Studies have been conducted to identify what organizations have learned from the pandemic. From the literature, we were able to identify some of the following lessons learned. However, before delving into the lessons, it is worth mentioning that much of the literature we have studied has made vague distinctions between the challenges of working remotely and lessons learned from working remotely. In several cases, when reading the literature, we considered these two concepts, according to the authors' descriptions, to be synonymous while, in other cases, more distinct. That's why the lessons learned that are mentioned here do not necessarily have a one-to-one relationship with the challenges mentioned. Another point we would like to emphasize is that many of the lessons learned we found in the literature are considered too general. One reason we suspect why some of these lessons learned can be regarded as too general could be that managers do not spend enough time reflecting on their experiences; therefore, insight from experiences is not fully captured (Mintzberg, 2009).

Before presenting what lessons have been learned from the pandemic, we need to provide definitions of *lessons learned*. Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) defines the word *lesson* as "a period of learning or teaching," and the word *learn* as "gain or acquire knowledge of or skill in (something) by study experience or being taught." If organizations adapted to the crisis posed by the pandemic, it could be implied that they have learned something to overcome their challenges. Also, the pandemic was a long and challenging period for many people, but it could be argued that it was also an opportunity to learn new lessons. Thus, the challenging period of the pandemic proved to be a lesson for many people where they learned to adapt to the new situation of working remotely (Savić, 2020).

Firstly, lessons learned in communication are that managers and employees have become better at communicating and contacting people online. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between activating the camera and not doing so during a call (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021).

Secondly, a lesson learned is that organizations can reimburse employees with equipment to improve the work environment when working from home, thus improving productivity (Smite et al., 2022).

Thirdly, looking at cultural aspects of organizations, it was learned that building relationships online was a possibility, and it is important to involve people systematically. Another lesson learned is that it is crucial for employees to feel that they contribute (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021). According to Vasić (2020), employees feel more loyal to their organization when undergoing a crisis such as the pandemic.

Fourthly, one of the lessons learned in work dynamics is the importance of setting clear limits when facing expectations of one's availability because the boundary between home and office is blurred. Furthermore, some decisions are inappropriate to make from home, such as firing people, which are better done in the office. The pandemic has also proven how fast people can adapt to a new situation (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021).

Fifthly, people in organizations have developed a more humane perspective because of the pandemic, and it is important to identify those who require support (Allo & Ådnanes, 2021).

The following section will encompass organizational learning theories to understand why organizations have learned lessons from working remotely during the pandemic.

2.4   Organizational resilience

According to Evenseth, Sydnes & Gausdal (2022), organizational resilience is an organization's ability to expect threats, handle difficult occurrences, and adjust to change. According to the framework of Duchek (2020), organizational resilience is a process that undergoes several stages. One such process is anticipating, coping, and adapting. When anticipating, the organization should detect a crisis based on observations. To cope with the challenges posed to the organization, the problem should be accepted. When adapting, relevant solutions should be developed and executed (Duchek, 2020). After the organization has experienced a crisis and undergone all stages, the organization should reflect on the experiences to learn in case of future difficulties (Orth & Schuldis, 2021).

A study by (Evenseth, Sydnes & Gausdal, 2022) shows that organizational resilience is strengthened when learning among organizational members is prominent. An organization's ability to learn by receiving feedback and reflecting on the experiences is beneficial for organizations to remain resilient when disturbances such as the COVID-19 pandemic are affecting them (Orth & Schuldis, 2021). The authors suggest that managers should encourage a culture for people to learn and adapt, thus applying organizational resilience. The pandemic has forced many companies to restructure. It should be seen as a chance to learn how organizations

can be built to facilitate information flow in and out of the organization, rather than just restructuring to solve weaknesses in the event of a crisis (Orth & Schuldis, 2021). Many employees who were working remotely faced challenges in generating and sharing knowledge. Thus, they need to be aware that the crisis poses such challenges and recognize the importance of intentionally sharing the knowledge that they own. Finally, the pandemic should be seen as an example of why organizational learning and sustaining those learnings are contributing to maintaining organizational resilience (Blaique, Ismail & Aldabbas, 2022).

2.5 Organizational learning

According to Steenekamp, Botha & Moloi (2012), some researchers consider organizational learning to be the development and acquisition of knowledge. There are various definitions of what organizational learning is, but they share certain aspects that are common for them (Steenekamp, Botha & Moloi, 2012). One common definition of organizational learning is the process of creating, collecting, and expanding knowledge which is based on the experience and perception of individuals (Law & Chuah, 2015). Another definition of organizational learning is the change of knowledge that happens when an organization is undergoing various experiences (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). Members of organizations share and distribute knowledge across the organization, which helps it develop (Law & Chuah, 2015). When information is processed into knowledge, it has the potential to alter the behaviors or routines of organizational members (Orth & Schuldis, 2021).

When organizations face pressures such as threats of competition, knowledge, and skills become a strategic matter for many organizations (Law & Chuah, 2015; Steenekamp, Botha & Moloi, 2012). Learning, therefore, plays an important role in an organization's ability to reconfigure itself to respond to threats or disruptions, for instance, the covid-19 pandemic (Orth & Schuldis, 2021).

Bolman & Deal (2017) explain that organizations can be described in four different frames, and each frame contributes to organizational learning. The structural frame of the organization represents the various structures various members organize themselves to perform tasks. A member of a structure will learn the necessary knowledge to perform tasks depending on how the structure is formed. The human resource frame recognizes that the organization gains from having talented individuals in the workforce. That is why the organization should take measures to motivate their employees and train their employees. The symbolic frame of the organization describes how various organizations have diverse cultures. A member learns the available knowledge that exists in the organizational culture. The political frame describes organizations as political landscapes where various stakeholders are utilizing resources and making decisions in an environment of scarcity and competing interests. Various stakeholders in organizations affect each other; organizational members and managers can learn to navigate and manage the political landscape of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

One framework that describes organizational learning is based on three observations which are based on routines. Routines in this framework are procedures, strategies, rules, and technologies around which organizations are built. In this framework, routines capture lessons learned from history and are accessible to members of the organization (Levitt, B.March, 2011).

One type of learning is unlearning (Argote, 2013; Orth & Schuldis, 2021). To unlearn is to intentionally set aside or forget current knowledge and adopt new behaviors, beliefs, and routines based on new knowledge. By replacing old knowledge with new knowledge that is more suitable to the present context is a form of adaptation to the situation at hand (Argote, 2013; Orth & Schuldis, 2021). When dealing with a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations use the experience of past crises to handle the current one. Feedback received from handling the crisis, in turn, stimulates people to unlearn present practices and beliefs, thus creating new ones for future crises. By unlearning, knowledge obtained, spread, and used during a crisis is eventually stored in the organization's collective memory(Orth & Schuldis, 2021).

As described by the learning curve framework, various organizations learn at different paces. In this framework, learning is often represented by a graphical curve that illustrates the skill of completing tasks to the amount of time or experience dedicated to the task. For example, unit cost in production has been found to decrease the more units an organization produces (Argote, 2013).

Research conducted by Tortorella, Narayanamurthy & Staines (2021) indicates that organizations can not only learn but also improve their performance when employees are allowed to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic if proper management is conducted and organizational learning is promoted. Because of the benefits found from working remotely, it is quite possible that many organizations will continue to work as such even after the pandemic is over (Tortorella, Narayanamurthy & Staines, 2021).

2.6 Difficulties in learning and sustaining knowledge

Learning can, however, be challenging. The framework of Single-loop and Double-Loop learning illustrates how individuals learn and why it can be difficult to learn new things (Heorhiadi, la Venture & Conbere, 2014). According to the framework, single-loop learning is when knowledge is easily captured from learning opportunities without challenging the learner's values or beliefs, thus facilitating remedial action (Heorhiadi, la Venture & Conbere, 2014). With double-loop learning, opportunities for learning challenge a person's values and beliefs which can induce anxiety. Therefore, capturing knowledge and taking remedial action are impeded. However, it is possible for a person to change their values and beliefs (Heorhiadi, la Venture & Conbere, 2014).

According to Argote (2013), knowledge is not persistent and is susceptible to depreciation. For example, case studies found that the unit cost of production was higher after an employee strike than before. Argote (2013) also proposed three reasons why knowledge can depreciate, which are employee turnover, obsoletion of knowledge, and loss of documents. When knowledge depreciates, organizational productivity can be lowered, which is why organizations should take measures to minimize knowledge depreciation (Mariano, Casey & Olivera, 2018). For example, a gap can exist in the predicted and actual productivity if depreciated knowledge affects judgment when planning. In turn, this can lead to difficulties in capturing the desired market share and poor customer relations. Knowledge should be sustained in various organizational memories or repositories to avoid repeating mistakes from the past and reinventing past solutions (Argote, 2013). That is why it is important to take actions to sustain lessons learned to prevent depreciation (Mariano, Casey & Olivera, 2018).

Before the pandemic, most people had no experience working remotely, and the sudden shift to do so was experienced as challenging because they were required to learn to work differently (Ferguson et al., 2022; Tortorella, Narayanamurthy & Staines, 2021). To learn, organizations require the need and willingness to improve their present capabilities (Law & Chuah, 2015) so that they can adapt to ensure their existence (Bhattacharyya & Thakre, 2020), thus becoming more resilient (Orth & Schuldis, 2021).

2.7 Sustaining lessons learned

To facilitate double-loop learning, Heorhiadi, la Venture & Conbere (2014) propose leaders create a culture where individual employees will not face negative consequences if they articulate their own self-reflection. To sustain this type of culture, leaders should be involved and modeling a mental model of learning, creating a system that supports the mental model and place structures to receive feedback (Heorhiadi, la Venture & Conbere, 2014).

Lessons learned are stored in the organization's memory by a knowledge owner, which in turn it can be accessed by a knowledge seeker (Levallet & Chan, 2019). Memory exists in "repositories" such as individual members, technologies, routines, and groups (Argote, 2013).

Individual members can create and capture knowledge but are more unreliable in retaining memory. However, they can capture subtle nuances of knowledge and store them more readily than other types of repositories (Argote, 2013). Tacit knowledge is one example of subtle knowledge, and it is the type of knowledge that is not codified. Tacit knowledge is instead learned by working or through mentorship (Mintzberg, 2009). Individuals can transfer their tacit knowledge to other members; therefore, Argote (2013) suggests that transferring personnel is an excellent way of spreading knowledge across an organization. By spreading knowledge to several members of an organization, the knowledge exists in people's collective memory. The knowledge that is stored in the collective memory is less likely to be lost, for example, when

turnover occurs (Urbancova, 2012). Given that turnover is one of the problems of retaining knowledge, organizations should create conditions to retain individuals, such as motivating or incentivizing through favorable contracts (Argote, 2013).

Technology is an option for storing codified knowledge while also reducing the effects of knowledge depreciation. Technology does not entirely ensure that knowledge will continue to remain, but it does increase the likelihood (Levallet & Chan, 2019). Transferring knowledge through technology is more effective when also transferring individuals because they complement each other. This combined effect takes advantage of the individual capturing tacit knowledge and understanding technology. On the other hand, technology is reliable and can reach a large number of people (Argote, 2013).

Knowledge can be stored and maintained in routines (Tortorella, Narayanamurthy & Staines, 2021). Storing knowledge in routines makes it more likely to remain when employee turnover occurs (Argote, 2013). Routines can also be taught to others within an organization, which means that knowledge is spread(Levitt, B.March, 2011). Codified knowledge is more easily transferable through routines than the knowledge that cannot be easily codified. Therefore, to store knowledge in a routine more effectively, it should be codified (Argote, 2013).

Now that the pandemic is seemingly receding, restrictions to make people continue to practice social distance have been lifted in many places (Mulder & Fall, 2022); thus, they are no longer required to work remotely. Working on-site exclusively is no longer considered to be a universal solution for everyone. For example, many employees who believe their work can be completed remotely have higher expectations regarding flexibility, particularly when and where they can perform work (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022). For such reasons, many organizations employ alternative forms of work design, such as hybrid work design, which will likely continue in the future. Organizations should consider the lessons learned and what this means for sustaining themselves when they continue to utilize remote work in their work design (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022).

3   Methodology

For the purpose of answering our research questions, we will conduct interviews with managers who have experienced covid-19 related restrictions and the lifting of the restrictions in Sweden in order to determine what lessons in work design have been sustained and enhanced, as well as the challenges associated with doing so. To facilitate their reflection, we also collected a list of challenges in word design experienced from the literature that was provided to the managers before the interviews. The qualitative data from these interviews will be further analyzed and discussed in the thesis.

This chapter discusses the framework for the method utilized in this thesis. We begin with a description of the data collected through the systematic literature review of challenges experienced regarding work design during the pandemic. Then we present a description of the data collecting procedure along with the interview design to help the reader understand how the data was collected. Followed by that, we will touch upon our sampling strategy. Before presenting the data analysis, the process of conducting interviews will be outlined, along with a list of interviewers. Finally, we will discuss ethical considerations, reliability, validity, risks, and limitations of the study.

3.1   Data collection method of systematic literature review

We employed keyword-searching techniques to uncover internet resources on the subject of challenges experienced regarding work design during covid-19. Google Scholar and LUBcat were the major databases utilized in the process of retrieving potential sources. We found the most significant material when looking for the following descriptors: remote work, remote work during covid-19, work design during covid-19, and remote work challenges during covid-19.

To establish the reliability of the sources, we gathered background information on the writers and determined if the content was reliable. To confirm the writers' legitimacy, we entered their names into the LUBcat database. We discovered that several of them had published numerous articles in the disciplines of work design and remote work. Additionally, we attempted to consider the citations of articles and leaned more heavily on those with the most citations. However, because there was little literature on the issue, we also examined academic texts authored by lesser-known authors.

We propose to utilize this literature review as a springboard for highlighting the work design challenges encountered during covid-19. By generating this list and providing it to the managers, we aimed to assist them in recalling and reflecting on their work design journey from before the restrictions, during the restrictions, and after the restrictions. We also attempted to find the lessons that their organization has retained by analyzing how they overcame the obstacles they encountered during the restrictions. If they were able to overcome these obstacles, they must have learned something, and if that lesson is still applicable or valuable, they may employ it.

We compiled a set of evaluation criteria for the data cited in this review.

1. Is the information genuine and verifiable? (Validity)

2. Has the data been incorporated into other studies?

3. Is the data derived from prior research?

4. Does the content include citations to well-known researchers on the subject?

3.2 Interview data collection method

After generating a list of work design challenges encountered during covid-19, interviews with managers were conducted to ascertain how those challenges were addressed, what lessons were learned, and how those lessons might be sustained or enhanced in the absence of constraints. For the sake of this study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a structured introduction. We employed a structured introduction to ensure that all participants received the same information. A topic guide was designed to cover all the challenges collected from the literature with questions that would make the participants reflect on their experiences during management under covid-19 restrictions. Participants were first given a list of challenges mentioned in the literature before the interview. They were asked to contemplate them prior to the interview and select the ones that they wanted to talk about.

The semi-structured design allowed us to ask additional relevant questions that were prompted by the answers given to us. This method suited the explorative nature of our research as we had the possibility to probe further into the participants' responses. Using probing questions, the significance and depth of the data obtained were augmented as interviewees were encouraged to explain, develop, and build on their responses as a result of these inquiries (Saunders & Thornhill, 2007). Additionally, the fact that not all managers had encountered all the challenges served as an additional impetus for conducting semi-structured interviews.

All the interviews were conducted over Teams, a proprietary business communication platform developed by Microsoft. We are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of online video interviews. The main advantage was being able to interview people from various locations without needing to travel, cost-effectiveness and being less time-consuming, and easier access to participants who have a tight schedule (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Since the topic of the research is related to remote work, online video interviews could also be more suitable as they can simulate the situation for the manager. The main disadvantage we were aware of was as compared to face-to-face interviews. There is a possibility of a lack of engagement in online video interviews compared to face-to-face and in-person interviews (Saunders & Thornhill, 2007). Furthermore, participants were asked if they agreed to have their interview recorded, and all of the participants were audio-recorded. We listened to every interview once it was done, and it made us concentrate more on the answers.

We also had two pilot interviews, in which we practiced how to conduct the interviews. Upon listening to the audio-recorded version of the pilot interviews, we noticed that some of our questions and how we conducted the interviews needed to be changed to collect more relevant information from the participants. The final version of our topic guide was finalized before starting the other interviews. Furthermore, it is imperative to note that some of the data collected from the pilot interviews will be used in our data section since they have important information that can be used to analyze.

3.3 Interview design

Before conducting the interviews, some background information (see appendix C) and a list of work design challenges (see appendix B) were sent to the participants. They were asked to reflect on them to help them recollect and reflect better on the lessons they have learned and the ones they have sustained and enhanced in their organizations. They were also asked to choose some of the challenges that were more relevant to them, and they had more experience dealing with them. We also asked them to ask us if they do not understand what some of the challenges mean or what we mean by them.

The same framework was followed for every participant in the interviews when it came to the introductions. There were questions and information in the beginning, such as asking for approval to record, reiterating ethical factors such as secrecy, anonymity, and voluntary participation, and asking whether the participant preferred to answer in English or Swedish. In addition, we indicated that a summary of the responses would be supplied to the participant following the interview in order to check that the answers were accurately interpreted and to allow the participant to revise their remarks. At the end of the interview, we also asked if some parts or some questions were not comprehensible.

After the introduction, we started by asking background questions on what their role exactly entails, how long they have been assigned to that role, and if they know themselves to be technologically adept. We also explained to them that by technological adept, we mean that they would know how to work with basic and essential remote work tools and if they did not have a problem transitioning from the work design before the pandemic to a remote setting in a technical sense. We asked the last question to make sure that the participant fulfilled our criteria in our sampling strategy. After the background questions were asked, we asked them which challenges they had chosen to talk about, and we asked the questions regarding those challenges (see appendix A).

3.4 Sampling strategy

We used a mixture of convenience sampling method and purposive sampling. We first started with the managers we knew who had a good knowledge of remote work based on our observation of their work and their self-declaration. This convenience method was used because it is an effective, efficient, and quick method of collecting data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). We also used purposive and authoritative sampling, both when contacting the managers we knew and the managers we did not know, and they were introduced to us, or they replied to our calls for interviews online. We did this because we believed that a random sampling procedure would be improper for investigating the central phenomenon of this study. The purpose of this study is not to develop a representative group and then make generalizations to other contexts; rather, the

objective is to learn from those who have a better understanding of remote work and can best assist in understanding the topic of this research.

According to Creswell (2008), the objective of qualitative research is not generalizing to a population but instead conducting a comprehensive examination of a central phenomenon, which is best accomplished through the use of deliberate sampling procedures.

We wanted to exclusively interview people who had a better understanding of remote work since we were not interested in the minor technical challenges of the transition to remote work, but rather we were interested in knowing the challenges of sustaining lessons learned from remote management during covid-19 restrictions. The people who had an easier time transitioning to remote work in a technical sense, based on our judgment, might have more to say about the lessons learned from the new work design rather than the mere preference of the traditional way of work design. We believe these managers have learned more lessons since they had a more effective remote work setting. On the other hand, technical challenges can be mitigated with experience over time, as mentioned in the literature review.

The criteria we had for looking for managers were having a role as a manager in Sweden in the same context before, during, and after the pandemic and self-declaring as technological adept when asked. We planned to only interview managers from Sweden since Sweden is one of the countries that has lifted covid-19 restrictions, and organizations have had the chance to work without any restrictions from the authorities, and the insights into what managers have been doing in this interval can be useful for managers in other contexts. We, however, tried to interview managers from diverse contexts and industries to increase the variety of the data we collected.

We decided to interview the managers as they are the ones responsible for structural change and changes in work design in organizations, and they gather more information about internal operations (Mintzberg, 2009). Our alternative was to interview both employees and managers since we believe that employees also can have a significant impact on how work design is formed, but we were limited by the time we had to conduct this research.

Various approaches were utilized to locate potential interviewees. We first started by listing the managers we knew and using our judgment to see if based on our previous observations, they were technologically adept or not, then we contacted the ones we selected to see if they had some time to be interviewed. We also posted calls for interviews on our LinkedIn pages and asked our network to repost them. After checking the managers from LinkedIn, who were interested in taking part in our research, we checked their profiles to see if they matched our criteria for our research participants. If so, we sent them the background information and the list of the challenges. In choosing our potential participants, we also tried to map out as many different fields and different industries as possible.

This sampling approach had the potential to introduce bias into the results. There was a risk with the managers we chose since we were familiar with them, in that they could be influenced by respondent bias and provide responses that they thought we would want to hear. In light of these biases, we determined that combining existing connections with new ones when selecting participants would reduce the likelihood of biases.

3.5 Conduction of interviews

We conducted nine interviews in total, eight of which lasted for approximately one hour while one lasted approximately 40-45 minutes. Teams were unanimously used for all the interviews. Both of us were present in all the interviews except for two, which were held in Swedish. Only one of the authors was present in those interviews because the other author does not have a thorough knowledge of Swedish. In the interviews that both of us were present, one of us asked the questions, and the other took notes. This role was exchanged between us a number of times, and we did not have rigid roles when it came to asking questions or taking notes. The individual taking notes also had the opportunity to ask questions if they thought of any. All responders satisfied the study's specified requirements and criteria.

Respondents were given a chance to choose between English and Swedish. As said previously, only two of our respondents preferred Swedish. The choice was given to respondents to ensure that respondents would have the chance to express their thoughts and experiences more fluently. The transcription of the interviews that were held in Swedish was translated by the author who knew Swedish, and the translated transcription was used for data analysis. By conducting interviews in the respondents' preferred language, we were able to boost the likelihood of obtaining more beneficial data pertaining to deeper insights and thoughts. On the other hand, we are also aware of how translation and interpretation risks were also involved. Due to this concern, translations were executed with deliberation and caution. To further ensure that the translations were accurate, we also showed the translations and the original transcripts to two Swedish native speakers. Both approved the accuracy of translations.

The managers are listed in the order in which they were interviewed in the table below. Their roles are described, as well as the industry in which they operate. In addition, the interview duration is provided, followed by a code for the respondents that will be utilized in the presentation of the data results.

Role	Industry\field	Length (min)	Code
Line manager	Automotive	54	A

Remote manager	Food packaging	44	B
Team leader	Industrial automation	58	C
HR business partner	Financial sector	56	D
Manager customer adaption	Automotive	55	E
Project manager	Telecommunications	54	F
Head of course administration	Educational services	55	G
Business area manager	Consulting	58	H
Application expert	Transport	59	I

3.6 Data analysis

All the audio files from the interviews were transcribed employing the intelligent verbatim transcription method in Microsoft Word. Intelligent verbatim transcription was only utilized when a word or brief phrase prevented a reader from comprehending an idea. In particular, we only strayed from verbatim transcription to intelligent verbatim transcription to change terms such as "huh" when they were overused, evident grammatical mistakes, and very infrequently inarticulate sentences when the manager tried to articulate an idea. This method was used to both save time and make the sentences easier to read for us and the readers (Bucholtz, 2000). The intelligent verbatim transcriptions were then sent to the managers to see if important information had been omitted or if there were any adjustments they wanted to make to the transcription. All our interviewees confirmed that the transcriptions were accurate and could be used as a representative of their experiences.

For the purpose of analyzing the empirical data, inductive thematic analysis was employed. This technique is used to analyze, detect, categorize, and report themes discovered within a data

collection (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2014). We chose this method as it fits the nature of exploratory nature of our research (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2014). This technique permits themes to be tightly related to the data, and the identification of themes is not driven by a specific framework.

The three-step methodology proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994) was used for the analysis of data in our study. Within the three steps, the data was constantly being interpreted by us. For the first step, we attempted to code all the data from the interviews individually. While coding the data, we focused on detecting and highlighting the most significant aspects of the transcripts. After coding was done individually, the results were discussed and compared with the other author to ensure all the important data has been captured and there is a census on what needs to be collected for the next steps and what can be omitted. During this step, we were able to reduce the data and capture the most relevant and critical aspects of each interview.

Once the coding was completed for each interview question, the code was split into distinct clusters. To acquire more structure and organize the clusters, we examined the clusters for similarities and differences, therefore dividing the clusters into different categories. This was accomplished mostly by color coding, with each group receiving its own color. When analyzing the links between the categories, additional commonalities and other differences were discovered, leading to the consolidation of certain categories and the division of others. At this point, the categories had matured to the point that they were recognized as themes.

At the data display step, we systematically analyzed the themes to be able to draw conclusions based on them. Each theme was separated into its own word document so that results could be visually analyzed independently. Throughout this step, respondents' quotes were used to delve further into their responses and gain a deeper understanding of their responses. The method for doing the analysis was not linear. During the time we were analyzing the themes, we noticed that some of the prior codings would fit better elsewhere; hence, the order was altered. This analysis served as the basis for organizing the order of the supplied data.

In the last step, we drew conclusions, and our research questions were subsequently answered by making contrasts and comparisons between provided answers of the interviewees (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.7   Research ethics

Throughout the research, we took every measure possible to ensure that research ethics were followed and the respondents were protected. When recruiting respondents for the interviews, we informed all possible subjects that they are free to choose whether to join and that they may withdraw from the research at any moment. We made sure all potential respondents were provided with all the basic information about the research by sending them an information sheet

about the purpose and outline of the study. Before conducting the interviews, we asked managers for permission to record an audio file from the interview. We also ensured them that the audio file would be removed after analysis of the data, and we followed that promise. We also informed them that their identities would be protected, and all the data would be anonymized. After transcribing each interviewee's responses, they were also asked to confirm if what we have collected is accurate and if there is private information included in the data that needs to be omitted. This was done in part to prevent inaccurate or misleading reporting of the results, increase the respondents' anonymity, and enhance the study's credibility.

3.8   Reliability and validity

In quantitative paradigms, Reliability and Validity are vital quality requirements, whereas, in qualitative paradigms, Credibility, Neutrality or Confirmability, Consistency or Dependability, and Applicability or Transferability are crucial quality standards (Lincoln, Guba & Pilotta, 1985). Since the nature of this study is qualitative, we also ensured the quality and trustworthiness of this study by following Lincoln, Guba & Pilotta's Evaluative Criteria. Since not all the criteria and techniques were applied to our research, we adjusted the criterion by picking those tactics that were systematically applied to our study.

To increase credibility, we endeavored to establish confidence that the outcomes were accurate, realistic, and convincing from the participants' perspectives by asking them to review the transcripts of their interviews. During the interviews, participants were asked if any question was unclear to them. In multiple cases, we made sure that what we understood from their responses was what exactly they meant when the response was unclear or vague to us or in cases when multiple interpretations could have been drawn from the responses. All the interviews were conducted in two weeks to make sure the factor of time did not affect the responses, especially since there was a risk of changes in the status of covid-related restrictions. We also drew on theory and perspective triangulation to connect the data with the existing literature to have a varied data source. This was partly done by collecting the challenges of covid-19 from the literature rather than asking the managers what challenges they faced during covid. We also connected the data from the managers and organizational learning and resilience theories. By doing so, we found clear connections that can be argued to support the study's credibility. During data analysis, we were aware of negative and deviant cases by looking for and debating the aspects of the data that did not support or appeared to contradict developing patterns or explanations. The deviant cases analysis technique was effectively used to refine, expand, and validate the patterns that emerged from our data analysis.

To increase transferability, we attempted to increase the generalizability or transferability of the results to various contexts or situations by collecting our data from diverse sources. However, as mentioned earlier, by no means were we aiming to generalize our data to a population. We documented what managers with the characteristics that were elaborated earlier had experienced

during the interval between the time of conducting the research when there were no official restrictions in Sweden and the time that the restrictions were lifted. The extent to which these experiences and findings can be applied to other contexts is a matter of examination of the context, which can be best judged by the audience. By describing and fully documenting the phenomena of the research and all of the procedures taken to perform the research in sufficient detail, we hope we have been able to enable the audience to assess to what extent transferability of the results to different contexts is possible. While aware of and documenting the differences in the conditions in which these data were collected from other contexts, we still did our best to collect our data from a diverse range of sources and internal contexts so that it could be better transferred to other external contexts. For example, we tried to cover as many fields and industries as possible.

To increase dependability, we endeavored to ensure the repeatability of this study's findings if it was conducted with the same batch of participants, coders, and setting. For this purpose, we compiled a comprehensive record of the data collecting procedure. Apart from the data collecting procedure, adequate information regarding the study's design, the objectives, methodology, and the overall organization of the study has been provided. This will enable the readers to have the possibility to evaluate and audit the procedure and repeat the study.

To increase confirmability, we attempted to Increase the likelihood that the results would be verified or validated by more studies. By following dependability, transferability, and credibility criteria, we guaranteed conformality to a great extent; however, to guarantee confirmability, we tried to maintain a reflective mindset at each phase of the study procedure. Although it is possible to be absolutely objective in business research, we were aware of our preconceptions, background, and position on work design. We attempted to stay neutral as much as possible while analyzing and discussing the data. However, to increase the transparency of the study, it is worth mentioning that one of the authors had a favorable approach to hybrid work design while the other had no significant preference.

4   Data and analysis

We will present the data from our nine interviews in this chapter. This data will be discussed and examined further in the discussion chapter. We present the data in two separate sections, one exploring *"sustained and enhanced lessons in work design from covid-19 restrictions"* and the other exploring "*the challenges of sustaining and enhancing work design lessons from covid-19 restrictions*". The data presented were generated by coding, evaluating, and analyzing the data based on the most common frequent observations. Each theme contains some quotes from the transcription of our interviews with the managers.

Section 4.1 entails seven themes and presents data for our first research question, *"What lessons learned in work design have been sustained or enhanced from covid-19 restrictions?"* These themes explain what lessons managers in Sweden have learned and possibly to sustained or enhanced for the period after covid-19 restrictions were lifted. Section 4.2 entails four themes and presents data for our second research question, *"What are the challenges of sustaining or enhancing lessons learned in work design from covid-restrictions?"* This section explores what challenges managers faced or still face while trying to sustain or enhance the lessons they have learned from the covid-19 restrictions.

Seven of the nine respondents explained that their organizations have implemented and will continue to work with the hybrid work design, despite the fact that there are no restrictions or legal obligations for them to adhere to. The remaining two explained that they reverted to work fully on-site.

The most prominent reason they chose to work with the hybrid work design is because of employee demand.

"Many have liked working remotely and want to continue working like that. I think many will become dissatisfied if they have to go back to the office" - Respondent I

Another reason to why hybrid work design is implemented is that demand for hybrid work affects competition between various companies.

"We were seeing a lot of our competitions going for hybrid, and we were afraid that we would lose our competitive advantage if we did not." - Respondent H

4.1   Sustained and enhanced lessons in work design

Lessons sustained described in this section are not necessarily identical or similar to lessons learned described in chapter 2. In chapter 2, the lessons learned are described according to what we found in literature from doing a systematic review of various academic reports. From 5 articles, we could reach saturation of recurring topics and decided to describe the lessons learned based on those topics based on 4 of those reports. Also, the lessons mentioned in the literature review come from articles in a setting where the restriction was still in place and relatively early in the pandemic. On the other hand, our research explored the lessons in a setting where there are no restrictions anymore, and a lot of lessons have been refined or enhanced rather than just sustained. That's why they may not be identical or similar to each other.

4.1.1 More efficient meetings

Some of the managers had experienced a challenge regarding lack of time in meetings during covid-19, as they had to have longer and more meetings to make up for the lack of face-to-face interactions. Some of the managers reported having *"meeting after meeting all day long"* (respondent H); this challenge prompted them to focus more on time efficiency during the meetings. One of the ways they solved this challenge was by preparing for the meeting beforehand and having a clearer agenda as to what needs to be discussed and who needs to be there. Managers are still implementing this lesson, although they do not have so much time pressure, because they have seen the positive results of preplanned meetings.

This is an enhanced lesson that is learned from dealing with the challenge of not having enough time for meetings. We were concerned that we would not have enough time to speak – we had the tendency to overbook- our calendars became overwhelmed. Today is much better we have shorter meetings- we do not need an hour meeting like before- we are more pre-prepared compared to the old days before covid- our meeting routines are more efficient, we can improve even further, cut meetings short- be more purposeful in the meetings. - Respondent B

You also need to prepare the meeting agenda to organize the meeting in the right way. You need to have the relevant people for the meetings, and the right agenda for what shall be discussed. As an organizer you need to improve on the skills how to contribute to the flow of the meeting to still attract people to come to your meetings. - Respondent F

4.1.2 More digitalization of communications

Since covid-19 restrictions led to less face-to-face and on-site communication, managers and employees had to rely more on digital communication. Digital communication, in many ways, replaced on-site and more traditional communication, as managers and employees had to use more digital tools. This opened a learning opportunity for them to become more acquainted with digital communication and increase their knowledge and skills regarding information and communications technology. In many ways, managers saw some benefits in these tools and how they can be used together with on-site communication. They are now more focused on retaining digital communication and enhancing it. They have realized now that online communication can be faster, more convenient, and has a better outreach to a broader range of people.

"So it could be a 10 to 15 min walk for a meeting. If there is a Teams link included for the meeting, you can feel a bit lazy to walk between meeting rooms and take the option of meeting online instead. This is one of the reasons we are still doing this." - Respondent A

It seems managers have utilized digital communication tools to establish platforms to communicate both internally and externally in a hybrid work setting in combination with more traditional ways of communication.

"We are trying to see how we can implement more digital communication from the pandemic times, we will use them as an add-on to the old way." - Respondent B

One example could be seen in Respondent C's organization with the implementation of common platforms of communication with various stakeholders.

"Because of all these problems caused by the pandemic, it made us build groups online via Teams or Sharepoint. In these groups there are people from my own company but also other stakeholders such as customers. We all needed a common platform to be able to communicate."
- Respondent C

Although it seems that more digitalization has happened when it comes to communication, we can also see more digitalization in other aspects, such as the administration of employees.

In one case, we have respondent B, whose organization implemented a tool for the automatic administration of employees.

"We are trying to see how we can implement the good things from the pandemic times, we will use them as an add-on to the old way. We gained a lot of creativity by doing things digitally" - Respondent B

It is apparent that this experience has also led managers to be more focused on digitalization for the future too

"I really believe that when it comes to business continuity, we are pretty good prepared to continue with the business when it comes to processes and we have more digitalization, we took a giant leap towards digitalization and that will help us if another crisis affects work design" – Respondent D

More digitalization has also enabled organizations that have fully reverted to an on-site work design to allow employees to work remotely if deemed necessary.

"We still allow people to work remotely if they have a reason" - Respondent A

Overall, many respondents feel they are more adept and comfortable with using digital communication tools to collaborate remotely.

"Now in 2022 people are trying to adapt to this way of working, more and more are comfortable using the tools and the efficiency is getting better." Respondent F

4.1.3 Enhancing employee monitoring system

Several organizations have created digital platforms to monitor performance, task assignments, and completion of tasks. This was done because various people have different perceptions of what tasks should be done. Several managers have also felt that during the early stage of the pandemic, they lost control of work because of a lack of information that would otherwise have been gained through informal interactions. Such tools existed before the pandemic, but now they are utilized to a higher degree.

"You must have a better understanding of work and responsibilities because you do not need to walk around and ask people. It's clearer who is responsible for what." - Respondent B

During the later stage of pandemic restrictions, after managers and employees got more adjusted to remote work, many managers could see more distinctively how much the workload is done by whom. They realized that some employees were not doing much, but they could not notice that since there was not enough monitoring before they switched to remote work. Since they saw better results with more monitoring during the pandemic, they have decided to enhance their employee monitoring system to have better control of how employees are functioning.

"After we got more adjusted to remote work, we realized we need to increase our monitoring. That [new approach to monitoring] creates a larger demand than having the metrics or key indicators and so on. So that's something we have to spend quite a bit developing to get the good dashboard." Respondent E

"Most people work that way, if you control people when they are involved in project groups, if you are a resource owner then you notice quite quickly if they do not work then it is quite easy." - Respondent I

4.1.4 Higher awareness of the employees' mental health

During the pandemic, managers understood the impact mental health might have on the workplace. Consequently, they are now more concerned about the mental health of their employees. One of the reasons they paid more attention to mental health was because, during the pandemic, many employees saw a decline in their mental health, for example, due to isolation. They also realized that they cannot simply wait until an employee comes to them and expresses concerns about their state of mental health or that if a person is struggling with their mental health, they would necessarily express or show it vividly. They noticed that they should be more aware of their employee's morale by reading signals and predicting their mental state. Some managers report that despite the mental health challenges of covid not being so visible in the organizations, they are still paying more attention to employees' mental health than they did before the pandemic. They are much better at detecting mental health problems among their colleagues and reaching out to help them.

We solved it by being closer to colleagues and asking them about their work and workload. Try to find signals in the performance, being more observant of hidden signals. We were quite good at it, we had seminars and training for employees in self-leadership and how to work remotely. We are still concerned about our employees' mental health, and we will continue these measures - Respondent D

Even organizations which went back fully on-site still regard attention to the employees' mental health as an important lesson to be sustained.

"A lot of managers are more sensitive and more observant of the signals from their employees, it was a lesson learned that is still seen today." - Respondent D

One of the ways they are trying to be more aware of the mental health state among the employees is having more one-on-one meetings. This is a strategy a lot of managers implemented during the pandemic and still are continuing to do it.

I scheduled more one-to-one meetings with my employees. I also wanted to make sure they knew they could reach out to me if they wanted. We still have those meetings. It's less formal compared to before, more frequent checking – Respondent B

4.1.5 Improved Networking

Before the pandemic, managers were primarily focused on collaborating with people in their own general areas. During the pandemic, they found that digital communication tools can be used to build and maintain relationships with colleagues from company branches in other countries. Before that, they mostly had connections with the people they could see daily, but during the pandemic, since they did not have many daily face-to-face connections with their colleagues, they had the chance to explore their connections with people who they could not see daily on a face-to-face basis. This is still done today since the managers saw a lot of benefits in strengthening their connection with other people and has opened opportunities for new collaborations.

"We had colleagues spread over the world, before the pandemic we did not have the feeling that they are in different countries but during the pandemic, we actually became closer" - Respondent D

Managers also found that networking and building relationships can be done with the help of digital communication tools. However, there are challenges in facilitating the building of relationships that require some adjustments.

"For people I am familiar with it's easy to understand each other but other times it's harder to work with people that are unknown to me. To overcome this, I usually to spend time 30 to 60 min trying to build trust with individuals." - Respondent F

4.1.6 Closer connections within the organization

Before the pandemic, managers knew the significance of having contacts and close connections with colleagues. However, during the covid restrictions, they saw how crucial these contacts and close connections could be in a crisis.

"The pandemic has taught me to build relationships better or maybe it has "forced" me to focus on relationships in a better way." - Respondent C

Some managers seem to have more trust in employees than before the pandemic. During the pandemic, they realized how important it is to trust employees and how it can increase their performance and confidence. This made them reflect on how they can motivate employees better by making them feel trusted and having a closer relationship with the manager.

"With all said and done, the pandemic was good for workers, and it opened it up for employers to build trust with workers. I saw how workers are influenced when they saw they were trusted, I also realized I do not need to micromanage everything." - Respondent I

Some managers also noticed that it's unnecessary to see them every day to build up close relationships and connections with their employees.

"Get to know new people and build trust then we can meet face to face. Then after that if we work remote it will still be very efficient." - Respondent F

On the other hand, in some cases, managers acknowledge that some meetings should be done on-site, especially if they are personal.

"Meetings that are on a more personal level need to be taken on site rather than remotely." - Respondent I

4.1.7 More attention to organizational resilience

After the significant disruptions that covid brought, managers are now more aware that sudden changes can happen, and they need to be more prepared for the potential future disruptions. All our respondents claimed that they feel more confident in adapting to another similar crisis in the future after having undergone the difficulties of the pandemic and learning from them. If they need to change the work design again, they will likely do it more easily.

We haven't had a pandemic since early 1900s. So, this is how pretty much everybody works currently. There is no other choice than to, adapt and try to make it work. If it happened a hundred years ago it can happen again that is why we should be better prepared. - Respondent A

"This has opened the eyes for new things that we did not think of before. Old ways of working were revisited and improved. We realized everything is possible now, we should be more prepared if another crisis like covid happens" – Respondent I

"We already looked into how we and our employees could work remotely before the pandemic, that is why we have certain things in place in case something similar happens again" – Respondent G

4.2 Challenges of sustaining and enhancing lessons in work design

4.2.1 Coordination and decision making

One of the challenges of sustaining lessons learned from the pandemic is that in many organizations, some employees are at home while others are on-site at a given time. This can make coordination and decision-making harder; for example, some employees who are not physically present take too long to respond, which can delay decisions being made. Some managers expressed difficulties in synchronizing efforts to complete tasks, and it is time-consuming to keep all interested parties informed.

"The jobs are delayed more and hours in the projects are making the projects more costly. It is better to call several times per day to people who sit remotely rather than doing it the next day or mail to wait and see what someone says. If the person is not on-site the best thing is to call several times per day and speak verbally." - Respondent C

One of the respondents explained that these challenges were solved by having everybody in the organization take more initiatives and broader responsibilities. However, the respondent also acknowledged that there are challenges in keeping everyone motivated to continue their contributions in this manner. One such challenge is that employees might not have enough incentives or that loyalty to the company and other colleagues can diminish over time.

"It is easier to avoid meetings or Teams calls in when working hybrid, therefore it is a challenge to keep the lessons and good parts of remote work. It is up to the individual to do it and the organization must ensure that you are happy in order to continue to have a high work ethic or a sense of responsibility. Maybe it has something to do with loyalty" - Respondent C

Another respondent explained that these challenges were mitigated by better use of digital tools to help colleagues coordinate and synchronize tasks. This also provides greater flexibility for people to choose how they wish to split their tasks among each other and when they can work remotely or on-site.

"Each meeting is now booked in a Teams link, then you notice who is at home or not. We do not have to see each other every day, we see each other often enough in the office and that makes the challenge of coordination in hybrid much easier to deal with." - Respondent I

4.2.2 Digitalization not fully utilized

For several managers sustaining of the lessons learned was centered around digitalization. They observed some risks of digitalization not being fully utilized due to employees' lack of technological aptitude, and therefore the lessons wouldn't be sustained.

"Keeping the lessons of pandemic is closely tied to more use of technology for us, however we are not sure if we can fully use those technology, some employees have still difficulty working with them" - Respondent A

"Although we have made a lot of progress in digitalization both during and after the covid, we still have some problems with some employees who do not fully use them although they know how to, especially the older ones" Respondent C

4.2.3 Conflicting preferences of work design

Some employees and some managers opt for a hybrid work setting now that the restrictions have been lifted, and some others want to revert to being fully on-site. People in the same organization (particularly powerful managers) hold differing viewpoints or beliefs, which can lead to conflict and make it difficult to strategize to sustain the lessons acquired or to consider if there even exist lessons that need to be sustained.

"There are some leaders who were very anti-remote work, but it is more their own perceptions of what employees should do. One person, who was a top leader from above, wanted people to return to the office after the restrictions were lifted, another top leader wanted to do hybrid" - Respondent I

"Some of our employees want to go back on site because they think that it is much better, some others prefer hybrid and remote, even managers have different opinions, and we see a lot of clashes" - Respondent B

"I heard from some colleagues they have some difficulty to stay at home alone, some are eager to go back to the office to see other people. Working from home is not suited for everyone, some

want to see each other face to face. Hybrid way of working might be a good way forward." -
Respondent F

4.2.4 Lack of willingness to experiment

Managers have shown different levels of willingness to experiment with implementing changes in work design during the pandemic.

Some respondents faced challenges during the pandemic when restrictions were active and did not find a solution for the challenges. The following respondent didn't express any willingness to experiment; rather, the respondent and their organization reverted to the work design as they experienced it during the pre-pandemic times by working mainly on-site.

"A lot of my employees, including myself, were working. Would not say we were working from nine to five, instead the work was split up over the 24 hours of every day, so, you could be contacted late in the evening" – Respondent A

"Have you found a solution for that?" - Interviewer

"The solution came when the pandemic was over" - Respondent A

On the other hand, some other respondents showed a willingness to experiment despite being conscious of the challenges of working with a new work design.

"We will continue working remotely but we will look more on hybrid working and see what works in hybrid and what not and the only way to see if it works is to experiment with it" - Respondent B

"I think that people will continue to work hybrid even if it poses some challenges." – Respondent E

5   Discussion

Most of the respondents we interviewed explained that they would continue to work with the hybrid work design. According to some of our interviewees ' observations, that many companies in Sweden are going for hybrid work despite the restrictions lifted.

This trend can be traced to the demand from the employees to work remotely, which in turn pressures employers to take competitive measures to attract employees to work for them. This is also supported by data from interviews, and theories included in the literature review, where it was explained that many no longer consider working exclusively on-site as a universal solution

to conduct work. Much of the workforce has higher expectations from employers as to where they should be allowed to work (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022). That is why many employers implement remote work into the work design.

We found out that hybrid work was implemented to accommodate those who want to work remotely and those who wish to work on-site. It is a compromise that combines both forms of work design. This is also supported by Chafi, Hultberg & Yams (2022), who explain that hybrid work combines the benefits of both types of work design.

It could be observed that for respondents whose organizations decided to have their workforce work on-site, remote work is more acceptable than in pre-pandemic times. People were allowed to occasionally work remotely rather than exclusively. All respondents agreed that the pandemic proved that tasks could be completed even when the majority were working completely remote, which is why we think that acceptability has grown. Remote work is more widely accepted among people, and many believe that it provides greater flexibility to perform work tasks (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022). That is why it can be regarded as an enhancement to working exclusively on-site. Therefore, we can consider this a lesson learned that is still applicable today.

5.1   Applicability of lessons

Whether people work remotely or not, we have observed that many skills learned from working remotely can be transferrable to non-remote work. For example, managers are better at planning and preparing meeting agendas to make each meeting more time-efficient regardless of meetings being held online or not. Furthermore, we have also found that lessons learned from the pandemic enhance pre-pandemic work design and post-pandemic work design. As shown in several sections of the data and analysis chapter, pre-pandemic work design is enhanced. One example shows that there was an increase in digitalization. Another example is that several companies have created platforms for coordination and administration which is usable in any case, whether organizations are working remotely or not. One reason some lessons are still retained even if some organizations have chosen to work on-site can also be explained by single-loop learning. As explained in the literature review, this type of learning is easy because values and beliefs are not challenged; remedial action can be easily applied to a challenge, thus facilitating learning (Heorhiadi, la Venture & Conbere, 2014). The pandemic has stimulated organizations to identify flaws in their work design or inspired them to improve it without challenging peoples' values and beliefs which in turn made it easier to learn. That is why some lessons are still retained in the organizations, regardless of their present work design. Another explanation to why some of these lessons are still retained can be explained with the theory of unlearning. It is possible that the lessons learned are currently considered to be best practice for organizations and superior to old knowledge that was prominent in pre-pandemic times. We would speculate that these current lessons learned will be unlearned when new and better practices appear, but until then, they will be retained.

It was presented earlier that most of our respondents' organizations transitioned to hybrid work. However, this was not easy for many, as mentioned by the respondents and presented in section 4.2. However, it can still be seen that people are adapting to the new status quo in work design. The initial transition to hybrid was not easy because people were not used to this way of working. For example, in section 4.2.2, we presented data that indicates that digitalization might not be fully utilized. As the framework of the learning curve describes, various people or organizations, in this case, are learning at different speeds until they become adept in a certain skill or situation (Argote, 2013). As organizations adapted to working remotely and on-site, many consider both these options to be equally good. Many managers are framing hybrid work as an ongoing process of learning. There is a likelihood that they were perceiving some form of knowledge depreciation in pre-pandemic work design, which is why they are in the process of learning to replace the old knowledge with new. That is why it can be argued that lessons learned are sustained and will continue to be sustained and developed further in the future.

5.2   Professional networks and connections

In the data section 4.1.5, it was described that managers are utilizing communication technologies to network with people to greater extent than before the pandemic. According to Mintzberg (2009), in pre-internet times managerial characteristics were put in practice mainly through face-to-face interactions. Communication technologies that utilize the internet, is enhancing professional networks worldwide (Mintzberg, 2009). It can be argued that managers and organizations had this possibility in pre-pandemic times. Therefore, this perceived change where people network across the globe existed in those times too. However, the respondents reported that networking improved during the pandemic. This phenomenon could be explained from the fact that challenges of remote work stimulated organizations to find solutions. As such, they found new ways to utilize communication technologies. One such discovery is that they can network with more people, and managerial characteristics such as monitoring, or networking have become reinforced because people are more familiarized with communication technologies. Likewise, the new knowledge from discoveries made of working remotely, it can be concluded that networking has been improved, which in turn is an enhancement to work design that is sustained.

Mintzberg (2009) explains that one of the managerial roles is to strengthen the organizational culture, to ensure that people are trusted to perform. Remote work has been known to challenge cultural aspects of an organization as explained in the literature review. However, the data section 4.1.6 explains that connections within organizations have been improved. For example, managers reported that trust increased between themselves and employees. Organizations have undergone various challenges, such as employees' mental health, which resulted in enhancing deeper communication between management and employees. Also, as abovementioned,

communication technologies have improved interpersonal connections in professional settings. Therefore, more trust is built between employees and managers.

5.3   Resilience

The literature argues that an organization's ability to learn is tied to organizational resilience (Orth & Schuldis, 2021). In section 4.1.7, it was presented that the respondents feel more confident to adapt to any future disruptions such as the pandemic which is tied to organizational resilience.

Apart from the fact that our respondents expressed more confidence that they be able to handle possible future sudden disruptions in work design in the future. Furthermore, by revisiting the old work design, they have enhanced their work design and made it more efficient. Therefore, it is better for organizational resilience in general, not only for crises but also for incremental changes. This could not have been done without reflecting on all the stages of the organizational resilience framework suggested by (Duchek, 2020). One example of how organizational learning affects organizational resilience is how organizations that had already been more digitalized before the pandemic had a relatively easier transition to fully remote work design during the restrictions. These organizations also seem to cope easier when it comes to sustaining and enhancing the lessons learned from work design during the covid-19.

Respondent G explained that before the pandemic, they already had experience with remote or were exploring ways to implement it as part of their work design. Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder (1993) explain that organizations are better equipped to adapt to change if there is a sense of readiness. For our respondents, it can be argued that they felt a readiness to change. For example, respondent G had prior experience with remote work, and respondent H had already explored the possibility of adopting remote work and therefore felt more ready for such change. In the literature review, we explained that organizations become more resilient the more they learn (Orth & Schuldis, 2021). Our respondents have shown that prior learning in remote work or willingness to learn has enabled them to respond to a crisis such as a pandemic.

5.4   Communication & coordination

Some of our respondents claimed they experienced communication and coordination issues when it came to remote work. According to respondent C, this was solved in their organization by having individuals take a broader responsibility and higher initiative to help colleagues. According to the literature, these learnings are stored in the transactive memory systems, where the collective memory of a group possesses the same knowledge or learnings. Respondent C recognized that these learnings could be lost because sustaining these relies on individuals being motivated and having the drive to take the initiative and broader responsibility. Furthermore, the same respondent speculated that it might be related to loyalty to the company and colleagues.

Bolman & Deal (2017) describe that organizations have four aspects; two of them are the human resource frame and the symbolic frame. Some of the organizations that we observed were better at sustaining and enhancing lessons learned, took measures to make their employees satisfied in their profession, and being more aware of employees' mental health to continue to do excellent work, which can be traced back to human resources framework (Bolman & Deal, 2017). From the employee's side, we observed that they regarded broader responsibilities and more initiative as opportunities for improving one's competence. From the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017), we noticed organizations that foster a culture and sense of belonging where members are happy to help each other to improve loyalty.

An alternative way to solve the coordination and communication was through digitalization and routines. For example, in respondent I case, they utilize calendars and communication tools to book meetings and which day members will work in an office or on-site. According to respondent I, it is enough to meet on-site a few days per week, which works perfectly well. In the literature review, it was mentioned that technology and routines are knowledge repositories that knowledge seekers can rely on to accomplish their tasks, which can be observed in this case.

5.5 Culture

Another reason some managers reported more learnings than others could be personal values and beliefs regarding remote work. Our finding in section 4.2.3 describes that various people can have conflicting preferences, values, and beliefs regarding work design. This finding confirms that people have different values and beliefs regarding work design and influence how it is or is not implemented. Organizational culture is one of the main aspects in what values and beliefs members of an organization have, which can either facilitate learning or bring about organizational inertia (Bolman & Deal, 2017). One inertia to sustain lessons can be organizational culture itself, especially if it favors old ways of working and dislikes change (Tsai, 2007). As mentioned in the introduction chapter, one of our concerns is that lessons learned from the pandemic might not be sustained.

We described double-loop learning in the literature review, where one's ability to learn depends on how well one can respond to problems that challenge views and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The ability to unlearn could also be applicable to our study. As mentioned in the literature review, unlearning is setting aside or discarding knowledge and replacing it with new knowledge (Argote, 2013; Orth & Schuldis, 2021). Therefore, it is a form of learning, and it is applicable to beliefs as well (Orth & Schuldis, 2021). We cannot precisely state precisely what values and beliefs our respondents or their organizations have regarding remote work and work design. Therefore, the following paragraph explores several possibilities that managers experienced to their values and beliefs. There are several possibilities for discussion that can be applicable with the theories of unlearning.

One possibility is that managers who reported more lessons learned did not experience any challenges to their values or beliefs. Another possibility is that they felt challenged but were able to better cope or changed their values or beliefs entirely after having felt challenged. It is also likely that these managers were more open to unlearning old aspects of work design and their own beliefs to replace them based on new knowledge. Managers who reported fewer lessons learned were probably less able to handle their values and beliefs being challenged, thus capturing fewer learnings. It can also be speculated that these managers were less inclined to unlearn what they already knew and, therefore, not learn new lessons. As mentioned in the literature review, learning can be facilitated if it is encouraged by organizational culture. There is the possibility that respondents who reported more lessons learned might have such cultures.

5.6 Experimentation

For respondents who expressed more willingness to experiment with work design toward remote work, we found that their organizations had learned more and sustained more lessons in their organizations. Those who were less willing seemed to revert to the old work design and did not report as many learnings. Therefore, we believe that willingness to experiment might affect organizations' ability to learn new lessons. As expressed in the literature review, the pandemic has presented various challenges in remote work design but also learning opportunities (Cappelli, 2021; Ozimek, 2020).

The difference to why different organizations display different levels of willingness to experiment can be explained by theories of growth mindset. Dweck (2014) describes that people who possess a growth mindset display a greater disposition to learning and regard challenges as opportunities. Similarly, de Castella & Byrne (2015), who conducted studies on students, found that those who regard schoolwork as growth opportunities tended to achieve more tremendous academic success. Instead, students who focused on achieving results and did not regard schoolwork as an opportunity for growth were less motivated to study and did not perform as highly (de Castella & Byrne, 2015). Similarly, managers who were aware of challenges from working remotely expressed willingness to experiment with remote work despite hardships is an indicator of higher growth mindset. In contrast, managers that did not express any willingness to experiment with remote work regarded challenges of remote work as obstacles rather than exploring options to solve the challenges. This in turn is an indicator of lower growth mindset. For example, in one case, the organization was not fully able to deal with the challenges of remote work during the pandemic. The solution for these challenges was to revert to the pre-pandemic work design.

Overall, these findings indicate that willingness to experiment is linked to theories of growth mindset. The higher growth mindset an organization has the more lessons can be captured.

5.7　Critical view of our study

We could not find many challenges of sustaining lessons learned. This could be because there were simply a few challenges. We opted for managers who were already more technologically adept and more in tune with remote work; we failed to explore the challenges that other managers might come across. Since our respondents were technologically adept, the fact we could not find many challenges might be because of single-loop learning, in the sense that the challenges of remote were not perceived as difficult. Therefore, any corrective action was easily taken, and the learnings were sustained.

It can also be because all managers we interviewed were working in Sweden. Sweden has a flatter organizational structure (Rehnstrom et al., 1989), is more technologically advanced (Fey, de Koning & Delios, 2006), and its government had introduced fewer restrictions than a lot of other countries (Cohen, 2020). These factors might also have a role in why we could not find many challenges of sustaining lessons learned.

It can also be said that a big part of the challenges we found for sustaining lessons learned can be read as and applied to challenges of hybrid work. This is because most respondents saw sustaining and enhancing lessons learned mostly doable through doing hybrid work. The pandemic forced people to utilize a new work design and work accordingly. In this case, the majority found that hybrid work design works best for their purposes. Regardless of what work design they utilize, challenges of sustaining lessons learned they mentioned to us would become challenges of continuing to work in the new work design. Given the definition of work design in the introduction chapter and the description of knowledge repositories in the literature review, it can be argued that work design itself is a repository of knowledge and lessons learned. Therefore, challenges to the work design can be regarded as challenges to sustaining lessons.

We received data indicating that monitoring employees increased while other data suggests that trust increased for employees. This would seem contradictory because it can be argued that more monitoring is an indicator of low trust. Overall, we can see that various organizations had diverse ways of solving their difficulties, leading to different outcomes. All our respondents used digital communication tools such as Microsoft Teams which is known for having built-in functions to monitor employee activity (Arnold, 2021); therefore, the possibility to monitor exists for all managers. However, some respondents have taken extra steps to develop tools for monitoring. The data is unclear whether there is a low level of trust between management and employees in organizations that chose to increase the monitoring. The data is, however, clear that various organizations experienced the pandemic differently. For example, this can also be seen in the fact that the managers chose different items from our list of challenges. Depending on how the problem was presented to an organization under their own circumstances, they have found that in some cases, it is necessary to take more steps to monitor employees.

The hybrid work design has posed challenges for completing work tasks. However, challenges do not seem to be major enough to hinder lessons learned from being sustained in most cases. Many companies decided to implement hybrid work design as a compromise to accommodate all employees. However, some companies decided to work fully on-site, allowing their employees to work remotely for certain occasions despite the demand and pressure of remote work. In cases where they did not see the pandemic as a learning opportunity, they perceived the challenges as difficult, which is why the problems for them were solved when the restrictions were lifted. Overall, the data and relevant theories such those of growth mindset, indicate that the challenges of hybrid work are not perceived as existentially challenging if they are regarded as learning opportunities.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore lessons learned in work design from covid-19 pandemic restrictions that have been sustained or enhanced and the challenges of sustaining them in the Swedish post-pandemic restrictions context.

This study hopefully provides insights for managers who are working in countries that are still facing pandemic-related restrictions. It can also be of some value for managers working in contexts without restrictions. Whether managers work in a context of restrictions or not, this study aims to provide a better understanding of tackling challenges of sustaining and enhancing the lessons they might have learned from the pandemic. Managers shared comparable and dissimilar sustained lessons and challenges that have been documented in detail in Chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5.

In this study, we observed that the majority of organizations that we contacted in Sweden adopted the hybrid work design after the pandemic restrictions were lifted. For them, it was the primary way of sustaining and enhancing the lessons learned from the pandemic. For respondents who decided to work mainly on-site, we could find lessons from the pandemic were sustained and enhanced but not as much as organizations that made considerable changes to their work design, such as hybrid. Overall, we noticed respondents sustained lessons learned because the challenging setting of the pandemic forced them to identify ways to revisit and improve their old work design before the pandemic.

One of the lessons we identified was that managers have more efficient meetings by setting a clear agenda before the meetings start. Another important lesson that can be seen is the increased usage of digital communication tools and more focus on digitalization. More digitalization has enabled managers to employ a better monitoring system that was felt necessary after experiencing the pandemic restrictions with the changes that managers perceived when it came to how much work is done by whom. Another lesson that has been enabled through more

digitalization is improved networking. The managers noticed the importance of networking outside the organization during the pandemic when they realized they could network with more people. Connections made by networking outside the organization were not the only connections that were improved. The connections within the organizations were also enhanced, and managers now have closer connections with their employees. This includes more contact with the employees and having more trust in them. The significance of the employee's mental health is also better understood by the managers now, and they attempt to be better at reading the signals and care more about their staff's mental health.

Regarding the challenges of sustaining the lessons learned, we could not identify many challenges as explained in the discussion. An explanation could be that simply there are not many challenges of sustaining the lessons learned. But we are also aware if our research design had been different, we might have been able to identify more challenges. It can also be argued that since many managers are trying to sustain the lessons through hybrid work, these challenges can also be interpreted as challenges of hybrid work in general.

Coordination and decision-making were challenging for the retention of lessons learned and enhancements to work design because organizational members are not physically in the same location. By having different members at different locations, decisions might be delayed and coordination made more difficult. Another crucial challenge is the incomplete implementation of digitalization. Since digitization was the focal point for the retention of the acquired knowledge, insufficient digitalization can be a big challenge of sustaining the lessons. Furthermore, with the restrictions being lifted in Sweden, there are conflicting preferences in which type of work design should be implemented. With conflicting preferences on work design, there is a risk that strategizing for sustaining the lessons can be complicated and delicate, which can lead to the lessons being discarded or not fully retained.

We believe that the purpose of our study has been accomplished as we have answered our primary research questions in chapter 4 along with some reflections and discussions in chapter 5.

1. What lessons learned in work design have been sustained or enhanced from covid-19 restrictions?
2. What are the challenges of sustaining or enhancing lessons learned in work design from covid-restrictions?

The offered results and responses to our research questions provide valuable insights for other managers, especially those working in contexts that are still under the covid-19 pandemic restrictions. By reading the documented sustained lessons and challenges of sustaining them, they can reflect on their experiences and strategize for sustaining lessons learned before the restrictions are lifted.

Knowing that managers are going with hybrid as a strategy to retain both the advantages of remote work that they have experienced during the pandemic and the benefits of onsite and more traditional work design before the pandemic can also be of interest to them and something to reflect on and think about. The observation that a number of managers in Sweden are opting for hybrid as a strategy to retain both the advantages of remote work that they have experienced during the epidemic and the advantages of onsite and more traditional work design prior to the pandemic may also be of interest and provide a learning opportunity for managers who would have the dilemma of designing their work in the near future. Other managers who are also not working under restrictions and have had the possibility of designing their work with more freedom can also have the opportunity of reflecting on the documented sustained lessons and the challenges. From this research, managers can learn more about what other managers are doing regarding sustaining the lessons learned from the pandemic and evaluate their positionality.

7 Further research recommendations

For further research, we believe that it is imperative to investigate how the challenges of sustaining lessons learned from the pandemic in work design can be overcome so that sustaining and enhancing the lessons can be guaranteed. As hybrid seems to be a popular trend after the restrictions are lifted, more research into how hybrid work can be improved and how the challenges of hybrid work can be overcome can also provide valuable insights for managers and researchers.

We would also recommend that our research can be conducted at a greater scope by conducting more interviews with a more diverse range of managers in different settings with different range of expertise in technology and remote work.

It can also be of great value to explore what employees have done to sustain the lessons learned and how they are contributing to sustaining lessons learned. Another set of input from employees that can be of great importance is what are their preferences of work design after experiencing remote work in covid and what are the reasons behind them. Examining the degree of congruence between the manager's perception of sustaining lessons learned and employee perception can also provide invaluable data for managers and researchers.

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9   Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Background of the manager
Name:
1) What is your current position and role within this organization?
2) How long have you been assigned to this role?
3) What are your main responsibilities in your role according to you?
4) Do you think of yourself as technologically adept when it comes to remote work?
5) what technological tools did you use in your management experience in remote work during covid-19 restrictions?

Topic of remote work
8.1 Have you faced any of these challenges? <show list of challenges according to studies>
8.2 What was your initial reaction to these challenges (one-by-one)?
8.3 How did you deal with them? Or how did you adapt to this over time? Did you have a strategy?
8.5 Do you see any difficulties in continuing to work with the changes?
8.6 Are you going to continue some of those actions you took even if there wouldn't be any restrictions?
8.7 Did you learn anything from these challenges?
- How do you think these lessons you learned are going to influence your future work?
- If there were another crisis, how do you think the lessons learned from working under covid-19 can influence the way you deal with that crisis?

Appendix B: List of Challenges

Communication
- Knowledge sharing was more challenging for employees
- Difficult to know how employees feel
- Facial expression and body language missing
- Lack of feedback, attention, motivation from managers
- Less accessibility to people

Workload
- Burnouts due to remote work
- Different reports on longer and more meetings from employees
- Lack of work-life balance
- Cannot find enough work to do for all employees.

Culture
- Maintaining and building relationships with colleagues
- Harder to establish trust over meetings
- Lower feeling of belonging for employees
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing and socializing between the employees
- Lack of inspirational work atmosphere
- Lack of transparency and communication

Work dynamics
- More complex coordination and organization
- Lack of concentration for employees
- Employees not familiar with technological tools
- Some employees procrastinate
- Exaggerated expectations from managers in remote work
- Leadership remotely is more challenging

Miscellaneous
- Not everything can be done from home
- Mental health problems due to isolation

Appendix C: Background Information

Hello!
We are conducting research for our master's thesis in management at Lund University, and we are calling for interested managers as participants in our study.

We want to determine what managers have experienced through challenges imposed by the covid situation, how they faced the challenges, what they have learned, and what they have done to sustain lessons learned from tackling those challenges in remote work during covid.

Our research questions are self-reflective, and we hope that by reflecting on your journey during the past two years, you can gain more insights into your management!

We aim to develop guidelines for sustaining lessons learned regarding work design in remote work based on organizational learning and organizational resilience frameworks and theories.

The interview will be conducted online and will take approximately 60 minutes. We guarantee that your personal and organizational information will be completely confidential, and the answers will be anonymized.

We would be incredibly grateful for your contribution or if you could connect us with others who would be interested in partaking in our research.

Have a great day!
Thank you.