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# Understanding Teleworking After Covid-19: Researching Office Workers in Denmark

A qualitative study on teleworking motivations, experiences and  
strategies of employees living and working in Copenhagen

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study provides a communication-driven perspective into the functioning of teleworking in the post-Covid Danish work society. Teleworking, performing office work outside of the conventional office space by using ICTs, became part of the modern-day work arrangement of many employees, mainly due to the severe effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world economy. This study's aim is to find out how teleworking is perceived by its practitioners in the Danish post-Covid labor market. Interviewees were recruited working for different Danish companies, in the same building, in central Copenhagen. A total of ten semi-structured qualitative interviews are conducted with employees working in the Danish corporate sector. Interviewees were of mixed nationalities as well as professions. By coding the interview data according to an inductive thematic coding process, a number of seven conceptual general themes were found, of which three were selected as being part of a larger analytical narrative. Work processes, Time & Space and Negotiation & Policy are the three concepts receiving the most thorough discussion in the analysis, while the remaining themes were briefly discussed in the context of the research.

It has been found that by using a multitude of strategies, employees use teleworking as a tool to balance their private and professional lives, in line with previous studies. Covid-19 has normalized teleworking in such a way, that it has become a standard part of employees' hybrid work arrangements. At the same time, downsides to teleworking are mitigated by formal and informal communication policies and active use of communication concepts like the connectivity paradox. Nevertheless, teleworking can occasionally be part of negotiation processes: between employees and employers as well as partners in private spheres, emphasizing the limits to spatial and temporal recourses. Additionally, even after experiencing a high degree of teleworking, employees are still finding obstacles in the use of ICTs, which are essential to the teleworking arrangement.

The limitations of the study are discussed, as well as suggestions for future research on teleworking and corporate communication.

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## Introduction

In the summer of 2022, a remarkable email leaked to the public from tech CEO Elon Musk, in which he demanded all of his personnel back at work or face resignation (Bursztynsky, 2022). An extreme example from an eccentric leader, but nevertheless a representation of an issue many employers had been facing since the Covid-19 pandemic has been cooling down. During the global outbreak of Covid-19 working remotely, or teleworking, was a popular solution for many organizations to keep businesses going and to prevent economies from grinding to a complete halt. However, after vaccines were widely distributed and infection numbers started to decline, it quickly became safe again for people to return to the traditional office space. Although this was true, the general fear among employers was that employees would not feel the necessity nor motivation to return to a nine to five work arrangement in a conventional office space. After all, the pandemic had shown everyone that teleworking was a valid alternative instead. In the years leading up to Covid-19, teleworking was already rising in popularity among office workers as a measure to survive the modern work environment of the 2010's. Furthermore, some advocates would even go as far as arguing it would be useful to reduce traffic congestion problems and therefore serve as a weapon in the fight against climate change as well. Work experts and consultants predicted that, especially after Covid-19, teleworking would now stay fully integrated in people's work arrangements, but still many questions are left unanswered (Molla, 2022). The Covid-19 virus is since February 2022 officially no longer considered a threat to the national health in Denmark (Statens Serum Institut, 2023), but the reality and the impact of teleworking is more nuanced than perhaps originally predicted. The pandemic has shown the possibilities of telework, but so far the number of full-time teleworkers has generally not grown significantly (Da Silva, Georgarakos and Weißler, 2023). It would appear that the office space is still an attractive place to work, and employees would rather see a more hybrid form of telework: some days working in the office, and other days working outside of the office (Da Silva, Georgarakos and Weißler, 2023).

Telework as a work arrangement is not new. In times of pre-industrialization it was more than normal to work at the same place where one would also live. Think of farmers or craftsmen having their businesses attached to their homes. It was only after the centralization of work in

factories that the home no longer was the most popular place of work (Oggolder, 2021). The introduction of the personal computer then made it possible for the first time to perform centralized work at home again. In 1975 IBM launched the first personal computer closely resembling what we now associate with a PC, including elements such as a screen and a keyboard (Reuters, 2009). However, it took more years for prices to decrease to have the PC accessible for the general public and to be completely integrated into society. In the decades following the adoption of the PC, organizations started to see the potential of the computer and the internet for their businesses. Fast forward to decades later and both the internet and digital devices (e.g. smartphones, laptops and tablets) are unmistakably connected to the act of performing paid work, partly due to the transition in many Western countries from production economies to knowledge economies.

Telework, performing paid digital work outside of a traditional office setting, has risen in popularity since technological advancements were available to the wider public. It has also been a rising conversation topic for many work futurologists and consultants. In the digital utopian world we could all telework, the traditional office ceases to exist and consequently we have to travel less. The pandemic already showed a significant difference in travel behavior (Abdullah et al., 2020). However, despite the utopian promises of teleworking, one must also face reality. Teleworking in Western economies has been a privilege rather than the status quo for a long time, it was something that needed to be negotiated in employment contracts as a benefit, rather than a company-wide standard. One only has to glance at some of the published news articles after Covid-19, many covering the question of how to tempt employees back into the office or how work will forever change after the pandemic (Lipman, 2021; Molla, 2022; Osibanjo, 2022). Companies use arguments such as; monitoring work performance, boosting company culture or wanting to ensure occupational health in their debate to forbid teleworking. Resulting in work professionals turning to consultants and other specialists in the debate to determine whether teleworking actually benefits people and businesses (Lund et al., 2020).

Worldwide teleworking numbers fluctuate yearly, but are growing positively in general (Da Silva, Georarakos and Weibler, 2023). Obviously, the corona pandemic has had a strong

impact, but it does show that perspectives on the matter are in flux. Worthy to mention is that “the ILO estimates that there were about 260 million home-based workers in the world in 2019, representing 7.9 per cent of global employment (ILO, 2021, p. 40).” Furthermore, of these 260 million permanently home-based workers, less than 25% was employed with a company (instead of being self-employed) which shows how common teleworking was within companies before Covid. During Covid, an estimated 557 million people worked from home worldwide, more than doubling the amount from 2019 (Soares et al., 2021). This significantly larger group of workers all experienced near full-time (i.e. five workdays per week) teleworking, undoubtedly provoking thoughts and opinions about the concept itself. Besides having a work method that made it possible to continue to work during Covid, which aspects of teleworking functioned properly, and which aspects were regarded as flawed? And above all: what role does teleworking have in work arrangements after Covid?

The meaning and perception of work has always changed throughout history. During the average lifetime, an incredible amount of time is spent at work. Since paid work is such an integral part of our lives and societies, it is fair to say that it deserves our academic attention too. Fortunately, the academic world has always kept a keen interest in everything work related. The same goes for teleworking, where throughout the years many studies have researched the effects of teleworking on individuals, organizations and economies. After Covid-19 had a substantial impact on our experiences with teleworking the question remains, which role does teleworking play in the daily life of employees? Additionally, communication has always been part of work, but with the indispensable role of information communication technologies (ICTs) in the workplace it has also undergone many fundamental changes. With many jobs relying on ICTs, it shows us the importance of understanding the meaning of their influences on our work experiences, work arrangements and perceptions. Now that the world has faced a pandemic, perhaps shifting our understanding of (tele)working, it is the right time to make up the balance and measure our opinions about and our experiences with the concept of teleworking and its place in our daily work arrangements.



In Denmark, the amount of people teleworking has also changed throughout the years. Before the pandemic, a little over 20% of the workforce worked at least sometimes from home or outside of the office, already signifying an incline in the number of people integrating telework in their daily work arrangements (European Commission, 2020). At the time Covid-19 was a global health risk, many Danish people found in teleworking the solution to keep their daily work on track, resulting in 40% of the workforce working from home (OECD, 2021). Recent figures of people working from home after Covid-19 indicated that not the same amount of people are teleworking now as during Covid, but compared to other non-Covid years, the amount of teleworkers has increased (Danmarks Statistik, 2022). What is factually true, is that the majority of the Danish economy is perfectly suitable for teleworking. Considering the fact that Denmark has a large knowledge economy, and many people spend their time in offices, it offers the possibility for a large part of the workforce to telework (European Commission, 2023). Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, is a suitable place to investigate how teleworking has found its place in the work-sphere. The city is the beating economical heart of Denmark, which leads to Copenhagen having a buzzing business environment in which many start-ups and scale-ups decide to settle down (Williams, 2022). Furthermore, in Denmark employers are legally obligated to ensure a safe and healthy work environment, also for teleworkers (only if teleworking is more than once per week) (Sanz de Miguel, Caprile and Arasanz, 2021). Lastly, both Denmark and Copenhagen are also an interesting research location to investigate the role of teleworking, given the favorable social climate and high levels of social trust (Nielsen & Lindvall, 2021). The question that now poses itself is “what does teleworking mean for the Danish workforce in a post-Covid world?”

## **Aims & Objectives**

The aim of this case study is to understand how the concept of teleworking is given meaning within the work environment in Copenhagen, Denmark. Furthermore, the extent of which parts of teleworking are still up for debate within Danish companies will be analyzed in this research, even after longer periods of full-time teleworking during the Covid pandemic. Lastly, in order to gain a detailed understanding of teleworking in the Danish context, the aim is to explain how teleworking plays a role in the work arrangements of employees living and working in Denmark, focusing on employees' thoughts, opinions and experiences. Considering these research aims, three guiding research questions are formulated:

- RQ 1: How does the Danish work environment shape the concept of telework?
- RQ 2: How does telework play a role in the work arrangement of employees living in Denmark?
- RQ 3: To what degree is telework negotiated by stakeholders in the Danish work environment?

The first research question is designed to find out how the Danish work environment, including all of its characteristics, might shape and form the teleworking activities of employees working in Copenhagen. The second research question is constructed in order to figure out how Copenhagen-based teleworkers give meaning to the concept of telework, and how teleworking is part of their work arrangements. Because teleworking numbers were significantly higher during Covid-19, it is interesting to know whether teleworking is already a standard part of employees' and employers' work arrangements, or whether negotiation is still taking place. That is why research question number three is formulated. Keeping the aims and the research questions of the study in mind, a qualitative approach will be used in order to find the necessary results to answer the research questions.. The goal is to understand the motivations and the strategies of people performing telework, rather than finding effects or correlations.

Interviews will be conducted, followed by a thematic inductive coding process, in order to answer all three research questions. Ultimately, the findings will be limited to the work

context of Copenhagen, Denmark. Despite the geographical limitation, the diverse sample of people in combination with the leading role of Copenhagen's business sector, will give a clear impression of what matters to employees, and how telework maintains a role in the work arrangements of the interviewees. The research will focus on the experiences of employees in Copenhagen, however these people are not necessarily Danish nationals themselves. Denmark and Copenhagen have a diverse expat community (Danmarks Statistik, 2023), so all nationalities qualify to participate in the study. The kind of jobs that qualified for the study were not predetermined. Additionally, the study will not investigate matters such as age or gender, since it is not directly relevant to answering the research questions. However, it must be mentioned that due to the relatively open character of the interviews certain topics like gender and age might come up unprompted. The research method is therefore open enough for spontaneous input. Furthermore, it is not the intention of this study to focus on experiences obtained during Covid-19, nor does it aim to test the efficiency of teleworking itself. These topics will undoubtedly come up during the interviews, but are not part of the general direction of the study.

This study hopes to contribute to the domain of teleworking research by utilizing a communication-driven perspective in the research project. Yet, since so many theoretical approaches play a part in the research on teleworking, the literature review adopts a more pragmatic character in order to map the importance of a communication-based perspective. The structure of the study will follow all steps necessary to conduct a proper qualitative research. First, the literature review will give an indication of the existing research on the research problem. It is divided in three sections, covering the core concepts of teleworking including terminology, blurring boundaries and the aspect of space. Following the literature review is an explanation of the methodology. A thorough description of the used methods, recruitment and ethical considerations will assure the case study is executed as transparently as possible. The methodology is followed by the analysis, in which an exposition is provided of all the results and the general narrative of the empirical data. Lastly, the conclusion section completes the research by summing up the most important findings, a brief mention of the limitations and suggestions for further research.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review is divided into three distinct sections covering telework research. First, it is vital to understand what is understood by ‘telework’. The first section therefore deals with the terminology, definitions and the current state of affairs within the research field. The second section is dedicated to the concept of work-life balance and boundaries. Drawing from the literature, it will describe the theories and studies on issues like gender, power and boundary work. As mentioned earlier, the aims and objectives do not necessarily touch upon matters like age or gender, but considering the irrefutable role these topics play in the (tele)working domain they will be receiving proper attention. The third and last section covers the (digital) workspace. Concepts like space, connectivity and digital orientations are included in order to complete the literary investigation into telework.

While preparing the literature review it became abundantly clear that teleworking is a favored research topic, with some papers dating back to the previous century. Recent literature reviews have primarily been focusing on the implications of telework on worker’s health and wellbeing (Beckel and Fisher, 2022), on the role of modern ICTs in teleworking practices (Messenger and Gschwind, 2016), on how companies can best handle teleworking internally (Pyöriä, 2011) or on a more general level to provide an overview of more common information (Athanasiadou and Theriou, 2021). Understandingly, most of the mentioned papers come from a human resources or organizational perspective, aiming to understand the role of teleworking in modern organizations. While communication oftentimes plays a role in these studies, it is frequently dominated by approaches based on other disciplines. The following literature review will focus on popular perspectives in teleworking research (e.g. terminologies, boundary work and organization factors), but will at the same time deliver a perspective suitable for a media and communication research approach.

## **The Concept of Telework**

With the introduction of the personal computer in the 1970’s and its increasing accessibility through the 1990’s, combined with a changing world economy, employees and employers have been experimenting with the integration of telework in work arrangements. The concept of telework knows a rich foundation of research, from a multitude of disciplines like

organizational studies, psychology as well as communication studies. The following section will give a comprehensive overview on the definitions, terminology and current state of affairs in the research field. The last two parts of this section are divided because of the Covid-19 pandemic: the first includes a review of pre-covid research and the last includes a review on research that emerged during Covid-19 and shortly after.

### **The world of terminology**

Before we are able to effectively explain and review the research that has been done on telework, we must first focus on the actual meaning of the concept. At first glance, it might seem easy to come up with a definition that fully covers the entire concept. After all, when we perform office work outside of the conventional office space we can define it as ‘telework’. However, as this section will illustrate, throughout several studies different terms and definitions are being used. Working from home, as a concept, is only one way of labeling it. Other papers have used terms like remote work, flexible work, digital labour, home-based work, distributed work or virtual work to describe the act of performing labour outside of the conventional office space. This way it might seem difficult to stick to just one version of a definition or terminology. After all, how will we understand telework? In order to maintain continuity throughout the paper, this study will make use of the umbrella term ‘telework’ to describe “working from home or elsewhere using technology and communicating with the manager, colleagues and clients remotely” (Raišienė et al., 2021). The reason for this decision has to do with the ability to describe a wide variety of modes of working by using one term. Telework encompasses working from a variety of locations except the traditional office space, whereas a term like working from home only describes the act of performing work in the domestic sphere. In modern society, where digital technologies and ICT allow for workers to perform work-related tasks anywhere and anytime, this research cannot permit itself to just analyze one mode of working. Additionally, most recent studies make use of the term ‘telework’. So as to not create any confusion this paper will follow this trend.

In their 2019 paper, Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė and Goštautaitė argued that the concept of what they call ‘telework’ is incredibly broad. Moreover, for a long time it lacked a commonly accepted definition (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). The same authors then draw from other

literature to formulate a framework that determines what kind of telework is being performed. This further helps positioning the research in the broad field of studies investigating the phenomenon.

The first classification mentioned by the authors in their paper is “telework intensity (how often?)” (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). The spectrum of telework intensity ranges from part-time remote work all the way to full-time remote work (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). As the label suggests, when someone works remotely only part-time, this implies the person performs work outside of the traditional office space on a part-time basis. The other side of the spectrum, full-time remote work, implies the person rarely ever visits the office space and performs all the work at a different location. The second classification has to do with timing: “telework timework (when?)” (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). This classification asks whether the performance of telework is done during conventional office hours, or outside of them. This would happen for instance, when an employee could not finish work during the weekdays and decides to perform work-related tasks during the evenings or weekends. The third classification has to do with the location. Described by the authors as “telework place (where?)” (Nakrošienė et al., 2019), this classification relates to the place in which the remote work is being performed. Interestingly, the authors draw from research done by Huws (1997) to be able to describe the difference between on one hand performing work partly in the office and partly somewhere else, and on the other hand performing work completely away from the office space. In the first scenario, where a person performs work partly away from the office and partly at the office, this is defined as “multi-site telework” (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). In the other scenario, where work is performed completely away from the office, it is defined as “tele-home working” or simply “work from home” (Nakrošienė et al., 2019).

Although Nakrošienė et al. (2019) provided a good classification of telework intensity, another perspective on the matter can be understood as ‘hybrid work’, especially valued from a post-pandemic perspective (Yang, Kim and Hong, 2021). Hybrid work in this context means the act of balancing work activities between traditional work locations like the office and remote locations like home or someplace else. The structural character of hybrid work can both provide flexibility to workers so they can choose their place of work depending on

whatever suits them best, while at the same time may demand a more intense flow of communication updating teams and managers about their whereabouts and activities. As Susan Halford argued, studies often fail to acknowledge the large group of employees who for instance both work from home and from the office space (Halford, 2005).

### **Research directions: pre-covid**

Despite the fact that new perspectives on the way we work have become somewhat popular to discuss since Covid-19 (Lund et al., 2021), many studies on telework are from before the pandemic. In the following section it will become clear what the field of research looked like before the world was struck by Covid-19. During the making of a literature review, it is vital to look at the most recent academic work done in the field. However, as Nakrošienė et al. pointed out in their publication (2019), many studies on the costs and benefits of telework are from the early 2000's. That is not to say this literature review will mostly look at relatively old papers, but it is something to keep in mind while the review discusses the research on telework. The majority of early studies focuses on the costs and gains of telework from an HR driven perspective. For instance, some studies investigated productiveness, family factors or the role of gender (Beham, Baiertl and Poelmans, 2014; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003; Sullivan and Smithson, 2007). On the other hand, some studies did focus on more communication-related issues like social isolation, communication with colleagues and access to company resources (Fonner and Roloff, 2010; Fuller, Vician and Brown, 2016). The overarching narrative of most research papers delineate telework as an option available to white collar workers, or as part of the negotiation on working conditions with the employer. Later we will find out how this narrative changes because of Covid-19, but that is for another section.

### **Research directions and current state of affairs: post-covid**

Just as it is important to focus on the history of research on telework, it is also vital to gauge the current state of affairs on the matter. The following section will therefore set out the most recent studies on telework, from the Covid-19 pandemic and onwards. The reason for this division has everything to do with motivation. Where pre-Covid telework activities were initially seen as a negotiable option or a luxury, during the pandemic this shifted towards a

necessity in most industries. During and after Covid-19 a number of papers were published focussing on the ‘new normal’ (after Covid-19 it would seem that the reality was more nuanced than that), emphasizing the changes in the way we perform work. These papers mainly discuss the potential changes in workers’ productivity away from the office (Awada et al., 2021), the design of our domestic workspaces (Watson, Lupton and Michael, 2021) or the impact of technology on people and their interpersonal communication while working from home (Pennington, Holmstrom and Hall, 2021).

Shortly after Covid-19 was no longer considered a serious health threat in Western Europe, around the beginning of 2022, the first research papers emerged, primarily discussing the lessons and experiences obtained during the pandemic. These lessons can then be neatly organized according to either costs/benefits or the challenges of telework. However, before the presentation of the analysis, it is important to mention again how Covid-19 changed the nature of telework and the research around it. As mentioned before, telework before Covid-19 was already quite common in most Western countries. In some companies telework was a luxury, or something that needed to be negotiated as part of a job offer. In other companies, only a small number of employees worked remotely because their job allowed for it. For the larger part of 2020 and 2021 this changed drastically. Telework became the new standard for many people, instead of it being an exception to the status quo. This meant a dream scenario for social scientists and advocates for telework. Masses of people performing telework meant not only an opportunity for new research, but also a serious test for the concept of telework itself: for never before did so many people forcefully ‘try out’ telework.

Whereas the first papers in 2020 and onwards mainly focussed on best practices and quick-scans of how people and companies adapted to the situation, the first papers seriously evaluating the effects of full-time telework emerged in 2021. Naturally, not every mode of work is completely flawless, but telework did bring some benefits, experienced by various groups of teleworkers. One benefit continuously mentioned by many papers is a higher degree of (self-reported) productivity from teleworkers, while maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Labrado Antolín, Rodríguez-Ruiz and Fernández Menéndez, 2022; Martin, Hauret and Fuhrer, 2022; Vayre et al., 2022). Arguably, the notion of productivity is a concern



of the management rather than the employees themselves. Productivity in that sense is hard to measure and often subjective in various situations. Measuring productivity is above all a way of monitoring, or control.

Another benefit of telework, reported by employees engaged in remote work, is autonomy of their time planning and decision making (Metselaar, den Dulk and Vermeeren, 2022). Without the rigid time structures of the office and the commute towards it, employees are able to plan their own day according to their own needs. Apart from listing the benefits of telework for the individual employee, one must also consider the benefits for the company. Companies with employees who work remotely often are in need of less space, energy or resources. Reports also show the importance of telework in the hiring process, in which young professionals demand a flexible telework policy before choosing to work for a specific company (Awada et al., 2021). Additionally, telework also provides certain benefits to society. During Covid-19, with some countries reporting exceptionally high numbers of teleworkers, traffic congestions appeared less frequently thus potentially saving on energy and public space (Abdullah et al., 2020).

The benefits listed above are used as the main arguments by telework advocates. However, telework is no perfect method and does present some challenges. One of the most basic challenges has to do with technology. Almost every job performed by teleworking demands a sufficient level of knowledge of communication technologies. After all, telework is not possible without the pc, the internet and communication software. However, just being in possession of knowledge of communication technologies is not enough. Telework also requires the employee to be a skilled user of digital technologies and to be able to move around a wide variety of digital platforms and softwares (also known as 'ICT literacy' (Awada et al., 2021)). Furthermore, a high degree of using digital communication environments also has practical implications for other areas of concern such as accessibility, monitoring, privacy and visibility of employees (Sivunen and Laitinen, 2019).

Communication is one of the most important factors in the productivity and effectiveness of employees and teams (Valo and Mikkola, 2019). Additionally, what may have an even bigger

impact in the long run, is informal communication. Despite employees often seeing it as non-work, or even feeling guilty about practicing it, informal communication is a major part of workplace interactions (Wajcman and Rose, 2011). As explored and discussed by Methot et al. (2020), informal communication in the workplace, or small talk, impacts the work experience by creating a sense of organizational belonging and enhancing the overall well-being of employees at the end of the day (Methot et al., 2020). As Viererbl, Denner and Koch found out in their 2022 research, it can be more complicated when employees want to engage in informal communication when teleworking. There is not necessarily a difference in the character of informal communication while teleworking: it is rather the frequency of it that changes when employees no longer work together in a common physical space. Teleworking also leads to co-workers no longer meeting each other incidentally, and informal communication often needs to be scheduled in order for it to take place (Viererbl, Denner and Koch, 2022), and making this communication less informal by nature. The fact that co-workers do not meet each other physically not only has an effect on informal communication, but also impacts the management of employees. When there is less spontaneous communication during work time, managers face a more difficult task of keeping in touch with their employees. This then leads to problems in delegating work, keeping track of work progress and being aware of the workers' challenges (Valsecchi, 2006).

A retrospective has its value and generally shapes the foundation for telework research. However, the future of telework research needs a more realistic and honest perspective. Before Covid-19, industry experts could only wonder what the economy would look like if the majority of workers engaged in telework. Now some countries have experienced this unwillingly due to Covid-19, the research perspective shifted towards focussing on the complete domestication of the workplace (Watson, Lupton and Michael, 2021). Let us assume (and hope) that a severe pandemic like Covid-19 only happens every so often, and let us learn from what happened in those years. Research has shown that telework has its value and is here to stay post Covid-19, so as argued by Lund et al. (2020), new research should investigate how this will be taking shape in the coming years.

## **Work-life Balance & Blurred Boundaries**

As identified by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) and explained by Viererbl, Denner and Koch (2022), one of the most potent themes of telework investigated by academic research is the effects of it on work-life balance. As this is such a prominent and vital aspect within telework research, this section of the literature review will therefore shift its focus towards it. Work-life balance is explored in the literature according to its definitions and terminology, the aspect of gender and the power structures in employer-employee relationships. At its core, work-life balance is about boundaries and different roles, which is why this section will finally discuss the dynamics of boundary management in the telework context.

### **Definitions and Concepts**

At first, the concept of work-life balance might suggest a divide between performing work and the rest of one's life, suggesting that what we call 'life' happens outside of work. Nevertheless, considering the fact that the term is a staple within the world of (tele)work, this review shall continue to investigate it. Before the core concepts are explored however, attention needs to be given to its definition. Finding one definition for work-life balance presents an interesting challenge as many different papers use different versions. Therefore, it is useful to look at a few examples, and then choose one according to the context of this particular research.

If asked, most people could describe what we mean by a work-life balance. Initially, one might be thinking of a good or a bad work-life balance. A good work-life balance might mean that work-related activities are compatible with all social activities that happen outside of the workplace. A bad work-life balance might evoke thoughts about conflicts in which work-related tasks collide with family-related tasks. However simple the concept might seem, as is the case with many concepts, the academic community tends to use a variety of definitions, often depending on the research context.

In their 2008 publication, Kalliath and Brough attempted to collect the most common-used definitions and distill them into two. In total they identified six common definitions of work-life balance, each one highlighting one characteristic or perspective. The first definition

mentioned comes from the research by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and describes the classic notion that work-life balance is based on the different roles one assumes when combining work and personal activities. The second definition is by the same authors, but dives deeper in the aspect of satisfaction equality across different roles (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003, p. 511). For the third variant, the authors looked at definitions in which satisfaction between the different roles was an important aspect (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). The fourth variant has to do with ‘role salience’ (Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p. 325) and considers that different roles might become more important to an individual overtime than others. The fifth approach comes from a psychological perspective, incorporating the concepts of ‘conflict’ and ‘facilitation’ Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p. 325). The sixth and final variant might seem more modern, as it considers “the degree of autonomy an individual perceives themselves to have over their multiple role demands” (Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p. 325).

All these six variants eventually lead to one overarching definition by Kalliath and Brough (2008), providing a more solid foundation on which a literary discussion of work-life balance is possible: “Work–life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life priorities” (Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p. 326). This definition suits this study best, because it focusses on the individual standpoint, which is compatible with the qualitative and constructivist nature of this study. Lastly, Having the possibility to actually perform work outside of the office could also be seen as a question of power. In their earlier publication, Klaus and Flecker argued that by providing this sense of empowerment to workers, it also becomes increasingly difficult to identify the border between paid and unpaid work, making it even more vital to understand how employees give meaning to these borders themselves (Klaus and Flecker, 2021).

### **Gender Roles from a Telework Perspective**

Gender might not be evidently vital to finding answers to the research questions within this study, but it is such an integral part of the work experience, that a brief review of the latest developments is appropriate. Throughout the last decades the world has seen emancipation

movements modernizing the position of women in the workplace, consequently revolutionizing the roles of both men and women in the family context. Considering these roles are heavily integrated in our culture, it is relevant to mention the research context again before going further. Denmark is widely considered as a modern and emancipated nation, maintaining high scores on livability and equality indexes (OECD, 2022). Nevertheless, gender inequality remains an issue, even in a progressive nation like Denmark (Denmark.dk, n.d.). Consequently, the following paragraphs will touch upon gender roles in the workplace, and what changes when the workplace moves into the home due to teleworking.

It does not come as a surprise that Covid-19 also had an influence on gender roles when it comes to combining work and family tasks. Before considering these influences however, it is important to review the research done before the pandemic first. Gender inequality is still a contemporary issue: research has shown that it very much persists throughout telework activities (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001). This is partly because of the global unfair division of unpaid work between men and women. There are also different motivations: men often use remote work to cope with the workload outside of work hours whereas women work remotely to be able to combine family duties and paid work tasks. All of it comes down to the fact that stereotypical gender roles are very much hardwired into societal expectations. Oftentimes, telework is advertised as a tool for women to be able to combine unpaid work like family duties with paid work activities, but research has already shown that this is not necessarily the case (Tremblay, Paquet and Najem, 2006). In their 2021 publication, Lyttelton, Zang and Musick studied the differences in telework pre-Covid versus post-Covid among American working parents. What the researchers found confirmed the suspicions about gender roles, where teleworking allowed both mothers and fathers to keep working during the pandemic, but the main difference being that mothers have longer work days compared to fathers (Lyttelton, Zang and Musick, 2021). In general, fathers take up more tasks in childcare when teleworking, but the majority of unpaid work is still done by women (Lyttelton, Zang and Musick, 2021). What is important to keep in mind however, is the US-based research context of this particular study.

## **Boundary Management**

Defining boundary management has everything to do with combining work and private activities. In their paper, Kossek and Lautsch define boundary management as “the general approach an individual uses to demarcate boundaries and regulate attending to work and family roles” (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012, p. 155). At the foundation of boundary management are the rise of ICTs, the changed nature of many jobs and other larger societal changes. For many organizations the work locations are spread globally and teleworking is often a reasonable option. The possibility to stay connected with work-related activities due to the growing influence of wireless technologies in our daily lives has led to the need for individuals to perform some kind of boundary management (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012). ICTs are in that sense both a curse and a blessing: while they provide the option to be flexible in the performance of paid work, they also increasingly blur boundaries between the professional and private life. Other research has shown that the method of how boundary management is performed differentiates substantially per individual (Kossek et al., 2012). In their paper, Kossek et al. identified six different “boundary management styles” (Kossek et al., 2012). These styles are: Nonwork-eclectics, Dividers, Fusion Lovers, Family Guardians, Reactors and Work Warriors (Kossek et al., 2012). At the foundation of these different styles the researchers highlight three important factors: “cross-role interruption”, “identity centrality of work and family roles” and “perceived control of boundaries”. The variety in styles of boundary management stresses the fact that every individual plans their workweeks differently, and every person might use teleworking differently in order to keep a balance between work and non-work.

Of course, we need to turn our attention towards the role of boundary management in a telework context. In her 2020 paper, Smith sought after the relationship between boundary management and telework. Proving that boundary management is personal and large in variation, she also showed that telework might impact the methods individuals deploy in order to maintain their boundaries (Smith, 2020). Furthermore, Smith stressed the importance of the continuation of boundary management research after Covid-19, because “the reality of life as a teleworker in the wake of the crisis has likely shifted in important ways” (Smith, 2020, p. 81). This is because the pandemic could have increased virtual connectedness

between people, making it increasingly more challenging for employees and their superiors to manage their boundaries (Smith, 2020, p. 81). Many studies performed during the pandemic, and published shortly after, have indeed been looking into the role of boundary management while teleworking for most of the time. One study, for instance, has shown a surprising correlation between desiring a greater segmentation between work and non-work and reporting a greater work-life balance (Allen et al., 2020). Additionally, in their 2022 paper, Urbanavičiūtė, Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė and Žiedelis found evidence for a dynamic approach to boundary management styles. In basic terms: individuals tend to shift in their boundary management styles depending on influences like demographic or work-related factors (Urbanavičiūtė, Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė and Žiedelis, 2022). However interesting these findings are, many contextual factors should be considered when we take studies from the pandemic into consideration. After all, forced telework is simply not the same as optional telework. It is therefore relevant for this study to also focus on boundary management from a post-Covid perspective, to find out whether employees might have gotten used to managing their boundaries in more highly connected environments.

### **Trust and Telework**

In their thorough paper, Kaplan et al. found that managers mostly based their telework decisions on two factors: trustworthiness and conscientiousness (Kaplan et al., 2017). Furthermore, according to their literature overview, managers also pay close attention to three other concerns: a lack of trust, lower levels of communication between employees and managers and an observed inequity of allowing only some employees to perform telework (Kaplan et al., 2017, p. 366). These management priorities could be of great importance, considering that employees still base their decision to telework on the judgment of the management. Kaplan et al. (2017) use a definition of trust from 1985 by Lewis and Weigert (1985): “the undertaking of a risky course of action on the confident expectation that all persons involved in the action will act competently and dutifully” (Lewis and Weigert, 1985, p. 971). By using a definition from almost four decades ago, it proves that a concept such as trust has been important throughout the years. We can therefore already deduce how important the factor of trust is in a teleworking arrangement. Lastly, according to a US survey cited by Kaplan et al. (2017), the top two reasons for managers to not allow their employees

to telework are: being uncertain how to manage workers in a remote setting and being unable to properly measure their performance when they do perform telework. These concerns have only to do with management and consequently with control.

Research has shown that management is the largest obstacle for workers choosing to perform telework (Peters, den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2010). This has largely to do with the somewhat traditional management styles still prevalent in many industries, where managers meet their (organizations') goals by focusing mostly on coordinating and controlling employees (Peters, den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2010). Trust in the employee or the ability to control the required output is the overarching factor in the management's decision process of allowing telework or not (Kaplan et al., 2017). Furthermore, the influence of the manager on the decision to telework or not can further be explained by the level of support, communication preferences and company policies (Beham, Baierl and Poelmans, 2014). The apparent importance of the management's decision making in the teleworking negotiation process proves that attention towards the matter is justified, meaning the rest of the study should keep a close focus on trust, negotiation and decision processes.

### **(Digital) Work Places**

Considering the possibilities of ICTs to perform work anywhere and anytime, one could almost argue that the space in which it is performed becomes less and less relevant. Why should one worry about the space they are in, when their work computer can connect to any WiFi network available? Or why does it matter where work is performed, when most of the work can be done from a smartphone? Despite all recent technological advances and changes in the way people perform work, it is still relevant to consider the spatial element within the concept of telework. After all, telework is to some extent a reconsideration of space. In order to explore the aspect of space within telework, this section discusses the flexibility of space in telework, the role of the office space, mediatization of the workplace and digital environments.



## **Space Making & Spatial flexibility**

In the first section, a definition from 2021 was cited to make sense of the concept of telework: “working from home or elsewhere using technology and communicating with the manager, colleagues and clients remotely” (Raišienė et al., 2021). If telework means that the conventional office space is left behind, then which spaces become important instead? As it seems, any space which provides the necessities to perform work (an internet connection, perhaps a chair and a table) will do. Still, while reading through existing research, we can already identify some popular places where people perform their telework, one of them being their own home. The COVID-19 pandemic made us realize the importance of the domestic space in telework, but as Sander, Rafferty and Jordan (2021) argued in their publication, telework in the domestic space has received surprisingly little scholarly attention in recent years. In the same publication, the authors formulate several suggestions for future research on the domestic space in telework.

At first, considering the somewhat lacking guidance of how to properly design a workspace at home, the authors wonder which spatial elements might be important when it comes to performing work from the domestic space (Sander, Rafferty and Jordan, 2021, p. 189). Factors such as “layout, materials, lighting, temperature, color, and privacy” (Sander, Rafferty and Jordan, 2021, p. 189) are important (and even legally required in Denmark) when it comes to designing an office space, but are these factors equally important in the domestic space? Spatial flexibility, the possibility to perform telework in a multitude of spaces, might be beneficial for the employee and the company overall, but true motivations related to special factors for employees to use teleworking are scarce (Vilhelmson and Thulin, 2016). Much time and care is spent designing an office space. When employees decide to perform telework in different locations and spaces, the professional supervision of the design of the workspace often disappears. In those situations, an employee might trade their carefully chosen ergonomic chair for the dinner table in their own kitchen. Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, domestic spaces played a vital role in the continuation of work for many people. Additionally, telework during the first months of the pandemic led to many people forcefully performing telework, sometimes for the first time. In many cases, this meant that the arrangements for working from home had to be improvised, using the space

that was available to teleworkers at that point in time (Watson, Lupton and Michael, 2021). The main concern of managers during the pandemic was to keep the work going, despite the relatively new way companies had to operate during Covid-19, which in turn might explain the ongoing focus on productivity by many research papers.

### **Digital Orientations in the Workplace**

Imagine never having used a computer or a laptop, and being tasked to perform work in the contemporary digital workspace. This hypothetical situation would of course never happen, but it does help us realize how much prior knowledge, cultural awareness and practical experience it takes to function in the modern workplace. Considering Shaun Moores' observations about everyday media practices, a non-media centric approach might provide a new perspective on how workers might think of the workspace and digital communication. In his 2014 paper, Moores argues for the multiple layers of digital media. Instead of following the narrative of digital media creating a sense of disembodiment, placing someone in a different dimension, one must bear in mind that digital media must also be physically operated by the user. A keyboard, a computer mouse or a trackpad need human input and operation before one is able to engage with emailing, videoconferencing or typing up a document. In the same sense, for telework to be possible, participants in the contemporary work environment possess an almost intuitive skill in order to orient themselves in complex digital environments such as virtual meeting rooms.

To make matters even more complicated, the spatial factor should also be considered when thinking about digital orientations. In the workplace, digital technologies like videoconferencing are usually intertwined with social etiquette, use of space and technological limitations. It might make sense for an employee to not start calling other colleagues in the middle of the office floor, potentially disturbing other colleagues. It would seem almost self-evident that a videoconference demands a more conscious communicative approach. However, these specific behavioral phenomena have become almost unconscious social rules by now. Over the years, processes of increased media saturation in the workplace have introduced corresponding social rules and physical behavior to the modern office.

## **The Office & the Connectivity Paradox**

Performing telework often leads to a decreased amount of social interaction with other colleagues (Viererbl, Denner and Koch, 2022). After all, removing oneself from the office space creates a more intentional and conscious decision to communicate with others. This phenomena has two sides: on the one hand, employees might find themselves less distracted by others and are better able to focus on tasks (Fonner and Roloff, 2010). On the other hand, this increased distance to others might create a sense of isolation (Golden, Veiga and Dino, 2008), and could possibly jeopardize organizational identification (Belle, Burley and Long, 2014). As it turns out, research into these issues has already been widely conducted. In their 2001 paper, Ward and Shabha wrote about the socio-psychological factors of teleworking, addressing the most prominent issues employees face when they stop going to the office. The foremost issues identified by the authors include the disability to properly exchange ideas between colleagues, the lack of companionship, the inability to keep up with company developments and the loss of a sense of belonging (Ward and Shabha, 2001, p. 62). Arguably, the results from the paper might already be dated, and modern digital technologies have attempted to solve some of the mentioned issues. However, despite the fact that modern technology has developed enormously, we cannot simply disregard the social impacts of teleworking.

In order to keep up with colleagues and to make it possible to exchange information, ICTs are the necessary means of communication for all teleworkers. Tools like Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Slack replace the physical office space and facilitate the digital space in which work is performed. These digital tools provide many solutions, like asynchronous communication, videoconferencing and file sharing. The distance to others created by teleworking is mitigated by the use of said digital tools, creating a situation appropriately described by Leonardi, Treem and Jackson as the ‘connectivity paradox’ (2010). The authors go on to explain the connectivity paradox as: “The same ICTs that are implemented to overcome distance felt in these settings can also create the expectation of constant connectivity for individuals, constructing a paradox for teleworkers who find the potential benefits of distributed work negated by the very technologies that made the arrangement possible” (Leonardi, Treem and Jackson, 2010, p. 86). In teleworking, the digital tools that

make telework possible can often be both a curse and a blessing. The same researchers found that oftentimes teleworkers would strategically make use of digital tools, in order to deal with the connectivity paradox. By doing so, they maintain the distance obtained through telework, while at the same time making sure their colleagues are sufficiently kept up to date (Leonardi, Treem and Jackson, 2010).

As made clear in the previous paragraph, teleworking in the modern workplace without the use of digital technologies is near impossible. It raises the question as to how employees behave around digital means of communication as compared to traditional face-to-face communication. A 2004 literature review on the challenges of virtual team work identified several obstacles in the communication process (Powell, Piccoli and Ives, 2004). The authors found that most early research on virtual teams investigated methods as to how to create a knowledge-sharing environment, and how to overcome communication and technology issues (Powell, Piccoli and Ives, 2004). Apart from the technological challenges (it must be noted that since 2004 digital technology has come a long way), the authors do address some issues that are still relevant in the 2020's. Within virtual teams, there is a bigger need for communication to run smoothly and effectively in order for the team to function properly. Additionally, virtual teams communicate more than teams physically present in the same environment, and full participation of remote team members is not always guaranteed (Powell, Piccoli and Ives, 2004).

### **Telepresence and the Workspace**

When discussing space, the concept of presence should also be taken into account. Physical presence can mean a whole lot for the effectiveness of communication, but what about telepresence? In his 2023 paper, Bourdon analyzed the concept exhaustively. The author provides not just modern definitions and interpretations, but also discusses the historical background. In the most modern sense, especially after Covid-19, Bourdon defines telepresence as “[...] a socio-psychological state in which individuals feel, to some extent, the presence of remote people or locations, through the use of technologies” (Bourdon, 2023, p. 886).

Over time, due to the development of ICTs, telepresence has also undergone many changes. These changes are made obvious by reviewing a research paper from 1999, in which Scott and Timmerman surveyed American teleworkers (or “virtual workers” as the authors call them). In their paper the most commonly used communication technologies are the phone and voicemail (Scott and Timmerman, 1999). It shows us how far communication technologies have come, and how in turn those technologies have changed our interactions with them. For instance, one could argue that telepresence has become an even more immersive experience, thanks to the help of hardware (e.g. webcams, microphones and other devices) and software (e.g. Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Slack, etc.). In many cases, telepresence rather than physical presence is more common in the workplace than one might think. Quick video calls with potential clients, frequent internal meetings using teleconferencing software or using the laptop and the internet as the gateways to the workplace when working from a location other than the traditional office.

In his paper, Bourdon goes on to argue that by what we know as the suspension of disbelief, “Individuals experience telepresence as a successful contact with far away people through technology” (Bourdon, 2023, p. 887). Regardless of technological obstacles (e.g. sometimes the WiFi connection falls out), the willing suspension of disbelief is a powerful phenomenon in these situations. It is also necessary, making sure that any colleagues who perform teleworking are engaged in the work activities. Essential to the continuation of exploring telepresence is finding out how the concept is experienced after Covid-19, in which telepresence was arguably a vital instrument for people to feel connected. Telepresence as a concept is an interesting theory, but people’s experiences and attitudes with it, in a modern post-Covid context, are vital in understanding the future of telepresence in telework.

## **Method**

The following section will illustrate the methodological approach of the study. The first paragraphs will elaborate on the choice to use qualitative semi-structured interviews as the research method, followed by an exhaustive description of the entire interview process: from interview guide, to the sampling and the conducting of the actual interviews. The coding process is described afterwards, making it transparent as to how the interview data was analyzed. The methodology section is closed by remarks about the reliability, validity and lastly ethical considerations.

To a large extent, this study is focussed on investigating the negotiation and policy processes that lay at the foundation of teleworking. Researching the dynamics of negotiation and policy is to a large extent a question about power. In his 2001 publication, Flyvbjerg argued for the use of cases in phronetic research, building on the works of Aristotle and Foucault, stating that “practical rationality, therefore, is best understood through cases – experienced or narrated – just as judgment is best cultivated and communicated via the exposition of cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 135). In the same publication, Flyvbjerg goes on a quest to reprioritize the role of social sciences, by re-establishing the importance of values and power. Additionally, he stresses the notion that “[...] the goal of phronetic research is to produce input to the ongoing social dialogue and praxis in a society, rather than to generate ultimate, unequivocally verified knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 139). By following Flyvbjerg’s advice, this study has chosen to perform one specific case study in Copenhagen, Denmark. Furthermore, with semi-structured interviews being the chosen research method, it contributes to Flyvbjerg’s notion that phronetic research should assist the continuation of conversations, rather than strive for one proven point of knowledge.

## **Interviews**

The method of choice for this study is the semi-structured qualitative interview. The interview data was then qualitatively coded, which will be further described in the following paragraphs. This study is explorative by nature, which means that it aims to find new perspectives and surprising angles to the research problem. The qualitative interview method is ideal for this purpose, because the semi-structured design allows for study participants to

fully express their thoughts about the issue at hand, without being held back by set rules or questions. By viewing the interviewees as independent agents who construct meaning through their answers, the (semi-structured) interview method is therefore perfectly suitable for a more constructivist approach (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001, p. 83) The interview process is a lot more spontaneous, and allows for a certain flexibility to follow the direction of the interviewed person. The semi-structured interview is therefore designed to record the most striking details, in order to truly find out how people's opinions and experiences are related to the research topic. Or in the words of Jensen: "Particularly in-depth interviewing, with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents' perspective on the media, since spoken language remains a primary and familiar mode of social interaction, and one that people habitually relate to the technological media" (Jensen, 2002, p. 240).

In order to find the answers to all three research questions, ten interviews were conducted during the month of April of 2023 with ten different participants. The number of interviewees was determined based on the quality rather than the quantity of the recorded data. A total of eight of these interviews were conducted through a virtual meeting tool such as Zoom or Google Meet. The decision to make the digital option available to interviewees came out of a notion of flexibility, but also because contemporary methods of connectivity have become increasingly more efficient, and its users have become more and more professional utilizing them. Apart from debates in the academic community about virtual or physical interviews, this study also found its own experiences with both interview modes. The video calling software facilitated the recording of the interview audio, and allowed for interviewees to be flexible in their participation in both time and place. Two interviews were conducted in the office space of the participants, in which the audio was recorded using a dictaphone. In practice, the online interviews were useful because of the flexibility, but during the process it would become clear what the difference is compared to conducting face-to-face interviews. Being in the same room allows for a richer flow of information, where body language has a greater role together with facial expressions. At the same time, it must also be mentioned that it is much harder to not talk through the interviewees' words in the face-to-face interviews, whereas an online interview makes sure that interruptions happen a lot less. Regardless of the

benefits and shortcomings of both interview modes, the interview data came out well and resulted in a rich dataset ready for analysis<sup>1</sup>.

The average length of the interviews was about 40 minutes, with the shortest being 25 minutes long and the longest almost 46. In total 401 minutes of interview audio was recorded, resulting in 148 pages of written interview transcript<sup>2</sup>. The transcription process was done more efficiently by using the transcription software from Microsoft Word, using an account provided by Lund University. This meant that the interview data (without identifying elements, e.g. names) was uploaded to OneDrive, transcribed using software, and then ultimately deleted again to ensure proper data management. The participation in the study was completely voluntary, and there was no monetary incentive to take part in the study. Moreover, it was communicated to the participants that they could stop their involvement at any given time.

## **Recruitment**

One office building in central Copenhagen houses a number of companies sharing similar profiles. Most of them are young companies, either in the startup or scale-up phases. These companies are all in some way part of the Copenhagen tech sector, with some focusing on software development and others on both software and hardware. A conscious choice was made to recruit participants in this building, since the character of the companies fit the profile which allows for employees to incorporate telework in their work schedules. According to Lund et al. (2020), teleworking is mostly done by employees working in the tech and information sectors. Once was determined where to perform the recruitment, the actual recruitment phase itself started on two locations. The first one being a virtual location: the common Slack communication channel of the building's inhabitants. A call for participation in the study was published here, resulting in the recruitment of two people. After trying another time, it was decided another approach was necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> For a sample of an interview transcript, please refer to appendix D.

<sup>2</sup> For a more complete overview of the recorded interviews, please refer to appendix A.



The second location where the recruitment took place was the communal canteen of the building. What more perfect place than the one physical space where all employees come together for a break? After explicit permission from the canteen's personnel, a poster was placed in the canteen which directed participants to a digital sign-up page where they could opt for a time slot to participate in the interview. Additionally, with the help of the canteen's personnel, participants could claim a free coffee at the bar upon registering for the interviews<sup>3</sup>. This minor incentive helped enormously with the recruitment, after which the remaining eight interviewees were scheduled to take part in the study. The digital signup page allowed for the interviewees to find a moment where they had time to participate, either online or offline. Initially the recruitment phase was meant to include a criterium, since people had to actively be performing telework in order to be able to participate in the interviews. However, the signup poster clearly stated the main topic of the study, which most likely attracted only participants who regularly used teleworking in their work arrangement and consequently filtered out any people who did not telework.

## **The Interview Guide**

The interview guide was essential to the interview process.<sup>4</sup> The guide helped to keep the conversations on track, making sure data was collected relevant to the study's research questions. Additionally, when the conversations might get stuck on a specific topic, the guide assisted in finding a new direction by which the participants could express new thoughts or ideas. The order and content of the guide was continuously revised according to the interview processes, to make sure it was up-to-date and functioning as optimally as possible. The dominating concepts and themes in the literature review were essential in structuring the interview guide. For instance, where the literature review analyzed the concept of boundary management, the interview guide would ask questions regarding the same theme. Similarly, themes such as space, communication, management and company policies found their way into the guide. The literature review therefore serves as an exposition of the available research, guiding the direction of the research questions and the interview guide.

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<sup>3</sup> A copy of the recruitment poster is available in appendix F.

<sup>4</sup> The interview guide used in the process can be found in appendix B.

The first part of the guide was meant to ease participants in the process, by letting them talk about their own work and related tasks. By doing so, they could easily talk about a familiar topic, while at the same time positioning them mentally in the topic needed for the overall conversation. The first part was then followed by the first actual theme, which consisted of questions directed at their teleworking habits and experiences. What might stand out from the formulation of the questions, is the use of the terms ‘working remotely’ or ‘working from home’. This is because ‘teleworking’ is terminology mostly used by professionals or academics, and might not carry meaning for the average employee. The third theme steered the conversation towards the subject of space, asking questions about their workspace and communication habits. The last theme of the semi-structured interview asked questions about management and performance, aiming to direct the interview towards the subject of work policies. Lastly, time was given to the interviewees to reflect on anything that was not part of the interview guide, since oftentimes the most surprising thoughts could come up when no structural question is asked beforehand.

One question was left out because it caused too much confusion with the interviewees, and evoked no interesting thoughts from most of the participants. Furthermore, the interview guide was used as a directive, rather than a set of rules. Therefore certain questions were skipped altogether. A pilot interview was not planned, for the simple reason that the research project was a one-person operation. There was no need to compare interviews in a group of researchers, and the interview guide kept being updated over the course of the first interviews, rather than after one pilot interview. That does not mean that the results from the first conversations were invalid, simply that the interview guide’s functioning was continuously evaluated. In the end, the purpose of the interview guide was to assist with obtaining rich interview data based on the themes fundamental to the study.

## **The Coding Process**

The ten interviews resulted in a collection of rich textual data. To prepare the data for further analysis, an inductive coding approach was selected (Jensen, 2002). The goal of the interviews was to find new or surprising experiences from the interviewees in contrast to the literature review findings, which is why an inductive approach was appropriate. The

qualitative thematic coding process comprises a round of open coding, followed by a round of categorization and ultimately the construction of the general themes. Computer software was used in the coding process, in order to properly handle the big amount of interview data. The paragraph on ethical considerations also mentions that all data and coding was kept and processed locally on one hard drive. The codebook<sup>5</sup> provides a thorough overview of all the generated codes, sub-themes and themes.

The open coding process initially resulted in a list with 269 different codes. After further coding this list of codes was distilled further into 252 unique descriptive codes ready for analysis and interpretation, making sure no codes were double or similar. The consecutive round of coding resulted in 19 categories. Consequently, these categories were divided into 7 distinct, overarching larger themes. Table 1 includes a comprehensive overview of the three most important layers of data. The three themes at the top of the table, further explored in this section, were selected based on the relevance for the narrative of the final analysis.

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<sup>5</sup> The codebook is made available in appendix E.

<i>Themes</i>	<b>Negotiation &amp; Policy</b>	<b>Work Processes &amp; Practices</b>	<b>Space &amp; Time</b>
<i>Categories</i>	Negotiating Processes	Activities at work	Time and Planning
		Communication	Space
	Policy Processes	Meetings	Flexibility
		Focus & Distractions	
<i>Codes (examples)</i>	Arguments for working in the office / for working remotely	Collaborating together	Coordinating remote work days
	Reasons for going to the office	Friday bars	Deciding on a remote work day
	High level of trust	Lost communication	Figuring out the work rhythm
	Being able to work remotely	Non-verbal communication	Different virtual spaces
	Asking permission	Meeting efficiency	Design of the office space
	Remote work in the contract	Internal vs external meetings	Description of the house
	Wishing for a policy	Finding the office noisy	Disliking flexibility
Policy differences	Distractions at home	Time flexibility	

Table 1

## **Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure maximum credibility of the results, a form of data triangulation is used in the coding process. By analyzing ten different datasets it is ensured that the constructed codes are valid in different contexts. Furthermore, the data sources (or study participants) each worked for different companies, did not know each other and had different function profiles. This way data diversity was maximized along the way. Considering the fact that the project was executed by one person, this was the maximum level of credibility attainable, since inter-coder reliability is not applicable in the context of this study. The research process, including interviews and data analysis, is thoroughly described throughout the whole study. Furthermore, the entire codebook containing textual examples from the data is included in the

appendix. These steps were taken to ensure a transparent research process, essential to a successful qualitative study (Nowell et al., 2017). Reflexivity was also considered during the process, which is why all the codes in the codebook came from the exact transcriptions of what the participants expressed to prevent bias of the researcher. Additionally, within the codebook in the appendix it is made clear with concrete examples how certain categories were assigned to empirical data.

## **Ethical Considerations**

To make sure the study is executed according to good ethical standards, special attention is given to a number of practicalities along the way. This paragraph aims to demonstrate some of these matters, because it is the responsibility of the researcher to comply with certain ethical standards, especially when it concerns the data from study participants. As an example, special care is given to removing all identifiable information from study participants in the written transcripts. Despite the fact that the interview guide was designed to not ask anyone for their names, names of companies or other information that can relate to the person, sometimes names were mentioned unintentionally. Furthermore, special attention was given that no person with personal relations to the researcher (e.g. colleagues, friends, family) was interviewed. Recruitment took exclusively place among people of interest without any affiliation with the author. Participants were able to terminate the interview without a valid reason, to ensure no harm was inflicted during the data gathering process.

Each interview's audio was recorded to make the data process more smooth, but was never stored online or in a cloud service. The only exception is OneDrive, which was needed to efficiently transcribe the audio into written text. After transcription the audio files were deleted from OneDrive. During the rest of the study all data was stored locally on a hard drive. At all times maximum effort was given to ensure no unauthorized access to the data was possible. Before the interviews were recorded, the interviewees were asked for their consent<sup>6</sup>. Naturally no signed consent forms will be published because of privacy concerns. If any of the participants would have chosen to have their data removed before publishing, this would of course be facilitated.

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<sup>6</sup> An example of the Consent Form can be found in appendix C.

## **Analysis**

The start of the analysis will first explain the structure of the section, before further exploring the accumulated data. The general structure of the analysis can be explained by three themes found in the interview data: Work Processes & Practices, Negotiating & Policy and Space & Time. These themes are explored and explained by looking closer at the gathered empirical material. By doing so, the analysis will be able to explore the themes on an abstract level, while maintaining the connection to the empirical material from the semi-structured interviews. The section closes off with a collection of themes that did not fit the general narrative of the findings, but are nevertheless interesting to mention.

### **Work Processes & Practices**

The first theme is called Work Processes & Practices. It is a theme discussing the practical processes that make up the work experiences of the interviewees, by discussing the four categories that make up the total narrative. In the interest of keeping the analysis concise, the category of ‘Activities at Work’ will not be discussed, since it mainly concerns practical activities performed by the interviewees. On the other hand, the categories of ‘Meetings’, ‘Focus & Distraction’ and ‘Communication’ will receive a thorough exposition. This is because they were not only conversation topics often initiated by the interviewees, but they also explain in an interpretative manner how the interviewees gave meaning to the role of teleworking in their work activities.

### **Meetings**

The Covid-19 pandemic initiated a significant rise in the use of video calling software, which motivated a number of papers to investigate the concept of ‘Videoconference fatigue’: “the experience of fatigue during and/or after a videoconference” (Döring et al., 2022, p. 2061). Although videoconferencing fatigue is most likely of influence during teleworking too, interviewees addressed the act of virtual meetings and all of its benefits and shortcomings very often. During the interviews it would become clear that having meetings demanded the most amount of time from most of the employees who took part in the study. One could argue that this might be because of the nature of work in the 21st century: in a knowledge economy like Denmark, most businesses are tech or information companies by nature (European

Commission, 2023). In the process of knowledge production and transfer, professional communication is thus one of the foremost activities performed by employees (Wajcman, 2015, p. 100). It is then not unusual that most interviewees spend a substantial amount of time discussing the meeting frequency, the structure of meetings and the different kinds of meetings the interviewees participated in during their work days. The purpose of this section is to discuss different kinds of behaviors in different kinds of meetings, as well as the efficiency and structure of those meetings. Keeping in mind the telework perspective, it will shed light on work practices performed by the interviewees, ultimately shaping how they give meaning to the concept of telework itself along the way.

When discussing the meeting phenomena, the general narrative was mostly shaped by comparison and contradiction. Through the interview data, it becomes clear that different situations need different approaches to the way employees interact with each other. The first comparison often made is virtual meetings on the one hand and physical meetings on the other. ICTs have made it possible to conduct meetings with people spread over great distances, but they do demand a different communicative approach and oftentimes even different kinds of behavior. This contemporary attitude to having meetings also leads to how interviewees structure their day around them, sometimes even choosing their workspace based on the amount of meetings they might have.

*“[...] if I have a day, where I can see it's completely booked with meetings. Why come to the office? Because half of them are gonna be with people who are online anyway, right? So I think if I have a day that's fully packed, with just check-ins and meetings, then I think I'll do it at home. Then it's the most efficient.”*

- Citation from Interview 9

What can be noted is that interviewees often matched their schedules to other co-workers' rhythms, with the purpose of meeting each other in the office space when they were there. As becomes clear from the citation above, this interviewee considered their daily activities and planned their location accordingly. The value of the office space is consequently constructed through the presence of colleagues. If there are no other colleagues around to communicate

with, then the office space becomes just as practical to work in as one's own kitchen. Through this continuous process of negotiation within and between employees, the value of the office space depends on the communication that is needed for the day, or even for the situation. Furthermore, depending on the purpose of the meeting, interviewees preferred physical meetings over virtual ones and vice versa. Specifically internal meetings that demanded close collaboration with colleagues had an obvious preferred physical meeting mode.

The purpose of the (virtual) meeting shapes the way interviewees behave around them as well. An internal meeting with colleagues might be less formal and demands a less rigorous approach compared to an external meeting with prospective clients or with existing business partners. The character of the meeting then also directly decides whether the employee considers to perform their tasks remotely, or in the office. If the goal is to have a simple information exchange, a virtual work environment is sufficient enough to fulfil that task. If the meeting's purpose is close collaboration on projects, many interviewees argued for a physical work environment, e.g. an office meeting room.

*“Yeah, I prefer to deal with collaborative teamwork things in real life. [...] I feel like it works quicker and you'll like, avoid misunderstandings and you just get to the point straight away.”*

- Citation from Interview 8

The interviewee from the eighth interview works in a relatively small team, in which collaboration was indicated to be very important. From the conversation it became clear that they valued close collaborative work, which might explain their preference for in-person meetings to get the work done. The goal of this section, or even the whole study, is not to determine whether virtual meetings are more or less efficient compared to physical meetings. Despite the fact that meeting efficiency would be complicated to measure, it also does not serve the purpose of this project. However, it is relevant to discuss what the interviewees might experience as more efficient, and why. This is because it provides an insight into the motivations of the interviewees during remote work activities. Apart from efficiency, interviewees also talked about how meetings are differently structured depending on the



space in which they are held. Surprisingly, even after some months of extensive online interactions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, efficiency and structure in online meetings are still debated. Regardless of improved technology such as a stable internet connection and elaborate videoconferencing software, certain rituals apparently still take up time while conducting a virtual meeting with someone, e.g. asking whether the participants can hear and see each other well enough, or letting someone know that the sharing of the screen is working properly.

*“It's always this etiquette of like, oh, I'm gonna share my screen, but how do I share my screen, where's the button? [...] Like, can you see my screen? It's always this like dancing around the video calls.”*

- Citation from Interview 8

### **Focus & Distraction**

When discussing interviewees' work experiences, it is unavoidable to touch upon the subject of work efficiency. Not because it was the purpose of the study to do so, but because the topic was a popular conversation item for many interviewees. Without already touching on the concept of space too much, for it is yet to be discussed in another section, it has to be mentioned alongside the other concepts. The concepts discussed in this section are unmistakably intertwined with space. Interviewees discussed their decisions of where to work based on the kind of work they need to perform that day. Additionally, the different spaces are discussed based on the perceived level of ability to focus. Every workplace, whether it is the office or the home, also has its own distractions and downsides, which was found to be a prominent conversation item for many of the study participants.

What place facilitates what kind of work best? Most interviewees engage in a decision process trying to find the answer to that specific question, in an ongoing and dynamic process. The fact that the office space facilitates qualitatively good communication, also means that focussed workflows might be interrupted by the approachability of colleagues. It is one of the foremost motivations for interviewees to select specific days on which they decide to work remotely.

*“And then I think I'm more focused at home too. There's no no noise, nothing. I can go pretty deep into it. So I think if I'm going to be highly productive, I'm actually more productive at home than I am in the office.”*

- Citation from Interview 4

In the conversation with interviewee 4, they expressed that the entire company was still young and relatively small. Moreover, the majority of the people working for the company practiced full-time teleworking, because the needed talent was hard to find locally in Copenhagen. This motivation is more relevant for the employer than the employee, but it does explain an important reason as to how the rest of the company's work culture is shaped. This meant for the people working in Copenhagen that there was more freedom to practice telework as well, since there were not many colleagues in the office to take into account.

Consequently, it is about finding the right balance. The choice of performing telework or working in the office then depends not only on the tasks at hand, but also on the function profile of the employee. A function which requires a high degree of collaboration and communication might not gain a lot from working remotely, whereas a function demanding full attention and which is independent from others might just benefit from a remote working place. This means we have to look further than just companies and industries, and instead look into function profiles and the corresponding work tasks when we want to determine whether teleworking is a viable option. Despite interviewees often finding the office distracting or noisy, the alternatives, often their own homes, are also not without distractions. When interviewees do work from home for instance, there are many distractions in the form of alternative media like tv or their phones, or the urge to do chores like the dishes or the laundry. Interestingly enough, almost every interviewee mentioned doing the laundry as a benefit of working from home, so they could keep up with their chores. Another distraction at home is making lunch for oneself, whereas the office building has a canteen where employees have the option to be served lunch instead.

In interview 7 it became apparent how working with screens might influence people's decisions throughout a work day. This person talked about their high level of screen time during the work day, which in turn might explain the need to sometimes take the eyes of the screen and find another distraction. In the case of their teleworking habits, this would mean for them watering the plants or finding a snack. Domestic distractions not only require a higher degree of self-discipline from teleworkers. It also tests the trust of managers and work leaders to the extent where they have to assume teleworkers possess and practice this self-discipline. Monitoring in a teleworking context can be found much more difficult compared to a physical office space.

*"I see my plants. I just wanna, you know, water them. [...] Or it's food. I know that I have food in my fridge and I'm tempted to get a snack."*

- Citation from Interview 7

Another contributing factor is distance. In every situation the employee uses telework as a tool to influence the distance not just to the office space, but more likely to their colleagues. In the interviews it truly comes to light that a close distance is useful for collaboration and efficient communication with colleagues. The downside to this are distractions and interrupted workflows. On the other hand, a larger distance might be beneficial to focussed work and uninterrupted workflows, whereas the downside could be less efficient communication with colleagues and a smaller amount of monitoring. As explained in the literature review, the connectivity paradox might offer an explanation to this dynamic. Further elaborated on by Leonardi and his colleagues in 2010, employees can actually use this connectivity paradox to dynamically shift between distances and thereby influence what their (telework-) day looks like (Leonardi, Treem and Jackson, 2010). The asynchronous character of digital communication is ideal for making this possible.

## **Communication**

When communication is performed virtually, it is made possible and aided by ICTs. Software like Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Slack are popular digital platforms used by the interviewees who need to interact together with other co-workers. However, judging from the

input from some of the study participants, this does not always go without a struggle. Oftentimes, the digital communication processes can create miscommunications or inefficiencies and may require more focus and energy than non-digital forms of communication, as shown in earlier research (Fuller, Vician and Brown, 2016). Some of the interviewees discussed their experiences with asynchronous forms of communication like Slack or Teams: while doing so, they would often mention the inefficiencies and the lack of informal and nonverbal communication, in line with findings presented by earlier research (Viererbl, Denner and Koch, 2022).

Although most digital communication technologies do provide the option to see your conversation partner through webcams for instance, it still does not fully replace physical nonverbal communication. When discussing ICTs or digital tools with the interviewees, they would often mention the fact that the extra information obtained by simply being in the same room is genuinely missed when talking to each other through an internet connection. One can often tell someone's mood or attitude by reading body language, and it is this kind of information that is not fully communicated when using ICTs. One specific interviewee has one-on-one meetings regularly with their co-workers, and in the interview it became clear how important a physical presence can be in those kinds of conversations.

*“I think it just comes down to like, just the communication, because a lot of human communication is, of course, nonverbal communication as well. [...] You know, some people have this nervous thing that when they get nervous, their leg starts to like, do this. I don't know. Almost like itching, like going up and down. And then just these little parts of this nonverbal communication that I find so important, to have really engaging discussions.”*

- Citation from Interview 2

Prior research has shown that informal communication is a huge benefactor to company culture and professional relations (Methot et al., 2020). This kind of communication is often very hard to perform, or sometimes simply lost, when teleworking (Viererbl, Denner and Koch, 2022). Additionally, nonverbal communication (e.g. body language) is to a great extent

also lost. One could argue that by applying telepresence there is some kind of improvement of virtual communication possible (Bourdon, 2023), although this is in general not of the same quality as a physical presence. Alternatively, should this comparison between virtual and physical communication even be made? The interviewees have discussed in their interviews that teleworking has a specific role in their work structures, in which it serves as a secondary option rather than the status quo in most offices.

## **Space & Time**

The second theme in this section is 'Space & Time'. The choice of naming the theme this way has to do with the inseparability of both 'space' and 'time'. Oftentimes interviewees would refer to a specific time planning, while simultaneously mentioning the meaning of the corresponding space. In the time & planning paragraphs, special attention is given to how interviewees would divide their time, give structure to their workdays and how teleworking plays a role in these processes. The other paragraphs will look into the domestic space, the office space and how decisions about space are generally based on teleworking options. Lastly, the section will close off discussing the flexibility factor in teleworking practices: flexibility in time but also in space.

## **Time & Planning**

Most interviewees who participated in the interviews did not work fully remote. Their teleworking activities would always happen on the same fixed days of the week. After continued questioning about the reasoning behind their choices, it would seem that fixed teleworking days solve a number of problems. First of all: communication with colleagues. Some companies would demand from their employees to register their regular teleworking days in a shared calendar, as to prevent confused co-workers. Secondly, fixed teleworking days meant that all employees knew what to expect from each other, meaning they did not have to look for one another in the office space.

*“Sometimes when you want to ask questions, you just go looking. You know you do a little walk around the office and then suddenly someone from another team tells you that, like, Oh no, they have been working from home the whole day and we have just been, you know, making these kind of lookout walks throughout the day.”*

- Citation from Interview 2

The study participant from interview 2 had a leading role in the company, which meant that they were often in touch with other co-workers. This need for communication might explain the necessity to know where co-workers are working on which specific days. Most interviewees did not mention having any kids, or that kids would be a factor in the decision-making process of when to telework. Still, other members of their household did have an influence on when they would telework. Mainly partners and their teleworking activities would be part of the negotiating process. Considering most apartments in central Copenhagen are small, this would mean that sometimes only the kitchen table is available for teleworking, meaning that teleconferencing could be a disturbance for both teleworkers if they have to share that space together. This can be regarded as a reminder that space is a finite resource for most teleworkers.

Notions of time differentiate substantially, in the sense that most interviewees mentioned time as a measurement of work quality. What is time well spent? How can I use telework to obtain the best quality of work time? Wajcman wrote extensively on the topic of our changing notion of time, further discussing the immense influence ICTs have on the daily communication between co-workers. As explained in previous sections, many interviewees chose to schedule teleworking days according to the need to be focussed on a specific task. In her 2015 publication, Wajcman argued that the distractions in a workday are actually essential to the work process (Wajcman, 2016, p. 101). Still, this notion is not necessarily shared by some of the interviewees of the study, while they elaborated on the benefits of asynchronous communication.

*“So when I work home, I can just block time. So if a project manager sent a message and I still need half an hour to finish something that I really need to concentrate on, I can just choose to read a message or open the e-mail half an hour later when I'm done with what I'm doing instead of constantly being interrupted in my flow.”*

- Citation from Interview 3

The person who took part in the third interview worked with paid media, in which they manage the advertising accounts for multiple companies, which meant that they need to interpret numbers most of their time. In the conversation they expressed the need for an uninterrupted workflow in order to not make mistakes with calculating numbers. Teleworking then facilitates a work setting in which communication distractions can be mitigated by having them temporarily stored somewhere, allowing for more control over them by the receivers. Or, as Wajcman formulated: “[...] the capacity of ICTs to store messages electronically in their material memory means that constant connectivity does not inevitably mean constant interruptions” (Wajcman, 2015, p. 101). The technological affordances thus offer the possibility to teleworkers to gain more autonomy over their own work planning, but might be obstructive in the larger communication processes within a company.

The structure of the work day also significantly changes when performing telework. A day in the physical office is usually structured according to ancient social rules, as most of the interviewees would mention: work in the morning, a lunch break, work in the afternoon and being able to leave around five. Teleworking provides the possibility of restructuring interviewees' days, according to the needs and responsibilities of both their paid and unpaid work tasks. This improved sense of authority over their own time planning was in turn to some extent nuanced by plenary meetings, as a means to synchronize each others' work activities. However, what might be seen as a lesser positive side effect of teleworking, previous research has shown that teleworkers work longer in a teleworking day, and take shorter breaks as well (Šmite et al., 2022). The participants in this study also admitted they work longer days when they telework, while at the same time also not taking proper breaks in between work hours.

*“Not only not taking breaks, but also like working longer. Which is not necessarily synonymous with working more effectively.”*

- Citation from Interview 7

Moreover, as argued for in previous sections, the time spend teleworking comprises not always solely paid work tasks. Oftentimes household chores like doing laundry or cleaning up would be part of a telework-day. This could be one of many reasons as to why employees have longer workdays while teleworking, but other research has found that these longer days could also be attributed to extending work-related communication into the late afternoon or evening (Šmite et al., 2022). Some of the interviews in this study also suggested that devices stay on for longer, and work-related communication software is often also installed on personal mobile phones. Furthermore, one could argue that by not having to make a commute, time could be spend more effectively by starting later, or finishing earlier. However, interviewees admitted that by gaining this time because of teleworking they would start early regardless, and still finish around the same time as they would when they work in the office.

*“In the beginning, last year when I started working remotely, I yeah, it was very, like, enthusiastic. Like when you start a new job and I did not go out at all. I just started early, then worked, worked, worked, and then stopped later and in fact it's a bit depressing.”*

- Citation from Interview 10

## **Space**

Living and working in a busy city means space is oftentimes scarce and part of a continues negotiation process. In a utopian frame of the increasing influence of ICTs in the workspace, many have argued that one can work anywhere and anytime, regardless of the office space or conventional working hours. In that sense, the concept of space could almost be disregarded. The empirical material of this study suggests otherwise, arguing that space is an inseparable factor in the research on (tele)work. Teleworking means that the office space is not used, evidently suggesting that there has to be a replacement space in which the work is performed



instead. In many of the situations the space that is the replacement for the office is the domestic space. Part of the acclimatization process of telework is finding a suitable workspace in the home, as already shown by Watson and colleagues in their research during COVID-19 (Watson, Lupton and Michael, 2021). This process of habituation is also present in this study's findings, oftentimes paired together with a negotiation process in which partners or flat mates take part.

*“But when I'm working from distance then it's a bit more difficult because I have found that the best place for the Wi-Fi is near our dining table. So the moment my mom or anyone would start to do anything in the kitchen, I would have to leave. Unless I'm doing something where it's fine to have a background noise, because I cannot just have someone cooking behind me and I'm having a meeting with a client.”*

- Citation from Interview 2

Interviewee number two would often use teleworking as a means to combine work with family visits in their family's home country. This way they would not have to compromise on paid vacation days, while at the same time they were able to visit their family abroad. It does mean however, one has to get creative with the space that is available. In that sense, a high degree of teleworking has shown employees the limits of space and time, stressing how these recourses too are limited and subjected to negotiation dynamics.

In the literature section, one article was discussed in order to determine which spatial factors could be of importance to teleworkers working in the domestic sphere: “layout, materials, lighting, temperature, color, and privacy” (Sander, Rafferty and Jordan, 2021, p. 189). These factors were withdrawn from the traditional office space, but are they still as relevant to the home? Most of the layout, lighting and temperature in the home are more than likely designed according to personal preference and identity. As became clear from the citation mentioned earlier, privacy is a very important factor to interviewees when it comes to choosing the right teleworking space.

Having established that the physical space still plays a role in the teleworking process, one must not forget the important influence of the virtual space. Chatrooms, virtual briefings and collaborating online are only some of the work activities that take place in the virtual work sphere. Due to the fact that not every employee performs telework on the same day, it often happens that meetings have to be conducted in a virtual meeting room. This asynchronous interplay of spaces is a fine solution for some of the participants, but can also lead to miscommunication, isolation or inefficient collaboration. Virtual meetings also demand a different communicative approach. Nonverbal communication is no longer self-evident, and in general interviewees report a higher demand of attention and energy.

*“[In a virtual meeting] people just look at you. Whereas in a room I feel like people have other things to focus on and you can maybe zone out a bit more. And like, you don't have to be like on high alert at all times.”*

- Citation from Interview 8

In that sense, the concept of telepresence<sup>7</sup> could almost be influenced by the technological affordances of virtual spaces. In the physical room nonverbal communication is part of the whole communication process, letting people know everyone's moods and attitudes. If the meeting takes place in a virtual space, a person may choose to turn off the camera or microphone. Depending on the importance of the meeting, this also means that constant attention has to be given to the information exchange, making sure no relevant information is missed or lost. A high level of attendance in virtual rooms, especially due to the presence of a webcam, has proven to be possibly stressful for teleworkers working from home (Pennington, Holmstrom and Hall, 2021).

### **Flexibility**

Flexibility is in its most basic understanding the ability to negotiate space and time dynamically. Many studies show the benefits of flexibility on the job provided by teleworking (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Fonner and Roloff, 2010; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė and Goštautaitė, 2019), but is this still relevant in the context of this study? Flexibility can be

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<sup>7</sup> As explained in the literature review under “Telepresence and the Workspace”.

discussed alongside the two dimensions already analyzed: time and space. Although both dimensions each have their own unique analytical potential, they both have the flexibility factor in common. After all, in the most common sense teleworking allows for a certain flexibility in where and when the work is performed. Many interviewees expressed their satisfaction when it comes to time flexibility, because it allowed them to better match their own personal rhythms with the work that needed to be done. Teleworking consequently allows for employees to almost disregard the traditional office hours (or the nine to five status quo), and let them decide their own work hours.

*“Especially if asked to be like creative in some way. And so I’ve always found my mind as clear around 7:30. So I just start, there’s like no reason not to, I think and I like, don’t have breakfast anyway. So there’s just, like, really nothing between me and getting into it.”*

- Citation from Interview 5

Despite the fact that time flexibility is regarded as a benefit of teleworking, some interviewees consider a traditional approach to time structure as a valuable aspect. Usually this preference of a regular time structure goes hand in hand with a preference for the traditional office. This does not mean the interviewees do not telework, or sometimes make use of the available flexibility, but it does show a re-appreciation for the conventional office space and time structures. All in all, the interviews would prove that flexibility is appreciated and praised, as predicted by previous studies, but it would also show that this flexibility almost is regarded as a given to some of the interviewees. This raises the notion that, especially since Covid-19, the employees may have gotten used to the comfort and privilege of flexibility in their work arrangements.

## **Negotiating & Policy**

The main body of this analysis discusses three themes considered to be substantial for the overall narrative of the analysis. The third and last theme that is part of that narrative is Negotiating and Policy. The theme consists of two sub-themes that represent most of the

interviewees' conversation items, arguably displaying how big a part this theme plays in interviewee's considerations about telework.

### **Negotiating Processes**

While this research project studies the dynamics around teleworking, one must not forget the other option. Going to a physical office is still very much the status quo, and quickly diving deeper into the reasons as to why office spaces are still an attractive option also tells us more why teleworking might or might not work. Additionally, the other side of the discussion is also worth exploring: why do people want to telework? After having experienced full-time teleworking during COVID-19, what do the interviewees think about not seeing the office for a long while?

What is most striking, is that arguments for both sides come from a pragmatic point of view. Overall, interviewees look for the arrangement that helps them structure their work best. Arguments for going to the office regularly are of both social and practical nature. Many interviewees state that the canteen, together with the lunch offer, is a major reason for choosing office days. It helps them keeping a healthy diet, while at the same time saving time by not having to make meals for themselves. Additionally, the office is still very much a popular option because of the simple reason of social relationships. Colleagues wish to meet with other colleagues physically, and participate in social gatherings in the office after work is done. The third argument that came up regularly is work facilitations. The interviewees argued that the office has better furniture (e.g. ergonomic chairs and desks), better technological facilities (e.g. extra computer displays) and ultimately providing more space to move around in (compared to their own much smaller kitchens or bedrooms). Many companies try to keep their employees to come to the office by providing benefits like leisure (e.g. games or physical activity), or perhaps an extensive food and drinks selection (Osibanjo, 2022). However, the reasons for employees to still come to the office might seem a lot simpler than that.

Two other factors make up the negotiation process: trust and company culture. What is self-evident to teleworking is a mutual sense of trust between the employer and the employee. In

the regular work arrangement, trust is already an important condition for a healthy and successful work environment (Kramer, 1999), but mutual trust between employee and employer becomes even more vital in the teleworking context (Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999; Kirs and Bagchi, 2012). The ultimate decision to let employees telework is made by the management. Employees are still able to exercise their influence on this decision by engaging in discussions, expressing their wishes in meetings and ultimately demonstrating how teleworking might be beneficial to the company itself.

*"[...] you need to be able to make that decision yourself, whether it's me as a COO or if it's the new marketing team, you know, it's up to you to make that judgement. Whether you should be in or not. And then we trust you to do that, for example."*

- Citation from Interview 9

A company culture (or 'identity', both terms are very loosely used by employees and employers) helps with the commitment, sense of purpose and overall employee happiness (Lund, 2003). It is then more than logical for companies to heavily invest in measures influencing company culture positively. In this study the data supports that notion, finding evidence in the form of collectively designing the space, offering social gatherings outside of work hours and scheduling reoccurring meetings discussing collective achievements. All of the companies represented in the data are Danish, but do employ a large number of foreign workers. Part of the negotiation process is then the consideration of the social factor. Or, as one interviewee formulated it:

*"Many of these people moved here for work and might not have as many options to socialize, so they choose to socialize with the people that they meet at the company. So I think this creates a bit of a different atmosphere than most companies would have. Just because you have this kind of bonding experience already."*

- Citation from Interview 2

For that group of people, the arguments in favor of going to the office probably look very different compared to people already socially settled in the local community. In that sense,

the office is more than just a place to work, namely also a place to meet people and socialize. In an ever globalizing world, especially with the free movement of workers within the EU, the physical office becomes a space with multiple purposes. Choosing to telework might then limit colleagues to engage in bonding activities, sometimes as small as grabbing a coffee in the kitchen and spontaneously meeting each other for a quick chat. Previous research has already shown the value of these informal small meetings (Methot et al., 2020).

### **Policy Processes**

Earlier research has shown that technological affordances, personal preferences or available spaces have not been the biggest limitations for people to perform telework. Managers and their policy have been the first and foremost reason for people to not telework (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). Considering this fact, how do the interviewees experience the policies in place in their workplaces, if there are any? And if there are not any in place, should there be a process to install them? In general, how larger the company, how more the internal policies varied. In some of the interviews the interviewees expressed that because of the relatively small size of the company, there was not a need to install formal policy. It was more than enough for the workers to come together and informally set agreements. In the larger companies however, the policies sometimes changed per department. It would happen for instance, that within one company the sales department had a very loosely defined teleworking policy, whereas the product development team had very strict rules and expectations in place. Some interviewees expressed their preference for formal company policies because of the clarity it gave, whereas other interviewees thought the policy felt too rigorous.

*“How much flexibility we have in regards to working from home is different per person, and the team culture. And also yeah, the departments. So some departments, you can just say, oh, I will work from home or I will work from Tokyo for one month for instance. But some teams don't prefer the members doing that. So it's very different among departments.”*

- Citation from Interview 6

What seems to be the largest condition for employees to be allowed to telework is a sufficient level of communication between them and the management. Almost all interviewees had to inform their superiors about their whereabouts, whether they would work somewhere else than the office. This information then had to be shared in one central location, so that the rest of the company is also updated on everybody's work arrangements. Oftentimes this would be an online calendar, or sometimes even on a daily basis on a digital chat platform. This whole phenomena of updating each other on one's whereabouts replaces the very simple notion of just coming into an office where your manager can see you perform your job. In their 2017 paper, Kaplan et al. found two main reasons why US managers were doubting whether to allow teleworking: being unsure how to manage teleworkers and not being able to sufficiently measure performance. Updating the team on teleworking activities at least mitigates some of the issues raised by managers. Regardless, teleworking still leads to a lesser visibility of employees, which might explain the managers' concern of not being sure how to properly manage teleworkers.

*“So now it's just come down to this policy after some reiteration that OK, you just need to tell your manager that you will be working from home and then it should be fine.”*

- Citation from Interview 2

Overall there were not many overtly negative reactions to the policies in place. For most it would seem to work fine, apart for some minor exceptions. It would seem that a teleworking policy works best if there is also enough incentive to act on it. It is combining the trust in the employee to make the right decisions on their own, combined with an attractive office space (and environment) to work in. On only one occasion an employee did not find the match between their own work arrangement preferences and the employer's policy and expectations. In this specific case the company policy itself would seem to be quite rigid, and the preferences of the employee were severely misaligned, leading to the ultimate decision of the employee to find other work.

One teleworking preference was almost unanimously supported by all the interviewees: to simply have the possibility to perform telework. They would not necessarily act on the possibility, but just to have the option to be able to do it was enough for them.

*“But on the other hand, if the employees have this option that, like if you want to work from home, you can work from home I think. It brings more, you know, happiness in the mind and life, ohh like I have this option. You know, maybe I will not use it, but I have this option and that's really valuable.”*

- Citation from Interview 1

Providing employees the option to telework, without them necessarily acting on the option, not only gives them a sense of trust, but also an enormous sense of authority over their own time schedule. Ultimately leading to a larger job satisfaction and overall happiness (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). Especially some of the non-Danish workers were positively surprised by the levels of trust given by the management, for them to make the right decisions in their work arrangements.

## **Practicalities, Social Influences & Work-life Balance**

Negotiation & policy, work practices and space & time were the three themes driving the narrative of the analysis, but that does not mean there was no other data left. Some of the other themes emerging from the data are relevant to teleworking, but might not support the demand for scientific innovation and development. However, to be absolutely thorough and to do justice to the rich data, three additional themes deserve a very brief review: practicalities, social influences and work-life balance. In order to get a complete overview of all the codes, sub-themes and themes, please refer to appendix E.

### **Work Practicalities**

The theme ‘Work Practicalities’ consists of sub-themes such as descriptions of the job itself, tech & tools and notions about productivity on the job. Without these topics having anything directly to do with teleworking, they do explain the underlying affordances of the tasks and jobs of the employees exercising their option to work remotely. For instance, interviewees



discussed the technologies that made teleworking possible (e.g. hardware and software). Additionally, some interviewees would mention the fact that they are more efficient on the job either in or out of the office space.

### **Social Influences**

‘Social influences’ as a theme discusses sub-themes such as psychological influences, influences from other individuals and notions about the team and culture within the company. Many studies investigated the effects of loneliness in the teleworking arrangement (Mann and Holdsworth, 2003; Ward and Shabha, 2001), so that aspect did not need the same thoroughness as the rest of the collected data. Additionally, the topic did not occur often enough in the data for it to be a substantial contributor. Nevertheless, what is important to mention are these influences on the interviewees’ decisions whether to exercise teleworking or not. What was a more contributing factor than expected were the influences from other individuals, meaning that employees would decide on office work or telework depending on what their colleagues would do.

### **Work-life Balance**

Closing of this section might be one of the biggest clichés in workplace research: work-life balance. Research into the influences of work-life balance on telework are abundant, consequently rendering it redundant in this study. However, to prevent completely disregarding the share of work-life balance related codes in the data, some interesting results are interesting to mention. For many interviewees, teleworking is a tool for them to maintain control over their daily lives. It facilitated the ways in which they can combine personal health, extra education and family duties while at the same time performing their paid work tasks. Additionally, this theme also consists of the notion that teleworking also leads to the blurring of the boundaries between the private and professional life, as discussed by many other earlier studies.

## **Conclusion**

In the beginning of the research project three distinct research questions were formulated. In this concluding section those three questions will be answered according to the findings of the previous section. In order to be thorough, the three research questions will dictate the structure of this section. Afterwards, reflections will be provided about the originality of the research, as well as the limitations. Lastly, recommendations are made for future research.

## **The Continuous Shaping of the Work Environment**

The first research question was aimed at the Danish work environment, aiming to understand the role of teleworking in a post-Covid labor market, and how employees shaped the concept of telework in their own contexts. According to available statistics, it is already known that teleworking is being actively performed by employees in Denmark, except it was the goal of the first research question to understand how teleworking has found a place in so many work arrangements after Covid-19. Teleworking comes in many different forms, so the exploratory character of the first questions is essential in helping to understand the status of telework in the Danish context. Furthermore, every work culture has its own characteristics, possibly influencing how employees think about telework (e.g. in relation to social aspects, management styles etc.).

RQ 1: How does the Danish work environment shape the concept of telework?

The concept of telework is shaped by the Danish work environment according to three main themes identified in the interviews: Work Processes, Space & Time and Negotiation & Policy. Through the conversations with the employees it would become clear how the Danish work tradition, based on a high degree of trust and liveability, contributes to a fruitful environment in which teleworking is made possible. The first important theme constructed by analyzing the interviews is Work Processes. In the context of the research, work meetings were discussed to great length by the majority of the participants. Having meetings was identified as one of the predominant conversation items, primarily in jobs demanding extensive communication with colleagues and external parties. In recent years communication technologies have improved substantially, but some of the tech characteristics were still

flagged as annoyances by some of the interviewees. In jobs where close collaboration is essential to performing the work tasks this was especially prevalent. Firstly, the office space was often blamed by employees for being disrupting in work flows, whereas at the same time it was being praised for facilitating the quick and easy communication assisting them in their work. Secondly, teleworking was praised for offering the possibility to completely focus on specific independent work tasks, and at the same time employees reflectively expressed that asynchronous communication could also slow down certain work processes. Interestingly, one might think that after so many years of developed technology and experience with telework the annoyances with those technologies would be somewhat more mitigated. Alternatively, by providing the interviewees with an opportunity to openly talk about their thoughts and feelings about their workplace, it does not come as a surprise that discontents make up a large part of each conversation.

Some of the observations about the interviewees' virtual meeting behaviors might be explained by the connectivity paradox, which can be actively utilized by employees to both use the benefits of working at a distance, when at the same time staying asynchronously connected to co-workers. In a post-Covid labor market companies might worry about organizational identification or culture, considering teleworking has proven to be a viable option to many employees. This active utilization of the connectivity paradox might mitigate these concerns, or is at least worth additional research in the future, take for example the findings of earlier research: "More communication is not always better, and organizations should develop cultural norms focused on streamlined communication" (Fonner and Roloff, 2012, p. 226). Although this might be easier said than done, teleworking processes expose the fact that performing work runs better when thought is given to how work processes are executed. Furthermore, organizations and managers can actively take a role in this process by developing clear policy about corporate communication, both in the office but also in teleworking arrangements.

Additionally, by assuming the prevalent role of the connectivity paradox, it must be said that communication is often already found key in practicing teleworking. In many teleworking arrangements, the employees indicated that a steady flow of communication was needed in

order to make processes work. This would often be done by daily updates on whereabouts to colleagues, daily or weekly update meetings within teams and/or a general shared calendar in which everyone structured their teleworking days. By keeping the whole team updated by using these strategies the employees prevented confusion, made optimal use of their own time and were able to successfully integrate teleworking in their collective work arrangement. However, these formal requirements by team managers or company leaders are not the general norm for most companies. As previously mentioned, a formal communication policy could assist in preventing miscommunication or confusion. Policy is still often informally shaped by the employees themselves and within teams or departments. This might suggest that the policy making processes are frequently dynamic, continuously reconsidered and weighted by stakeholders. In turn, this process might be influenced by factors such as the company's size and hierarchical character, meaning that these processes vary across companies and organizations.

Lastly, it is important to mention that none of the interviewees performed teleworking full-time. Within the work environments of the interviewees of this study it was still important for both them and their employers that there was some level of presence in the office space. This is important in the modern-day work context, proving that the office space must not simply be disregarded in communication research. All interviewees could adequately elaborate which work tasks, meetings or other work activities demanded their physical presence in the office, while at the same time swiftly alternating between virtual and physical forms of communication along the way. The physical office space is in that sense still regarded as a valuable space in which collaboration is facilitated, meaning future communication research could perhaps focus on the hybrid communication processes that take place between virtual and physical work spaces. Mapping the behaviors and strategies of employees working in both virtual and physical spaces could result in interesting teleworking perspectives.

Full-time teleworking does exist in the labor market, but this is usually a privilege reserved for a minority of the workers. Furthermore, a full-time structure is not necessarily the preferred work arrangement for most people. Oftentimes these full-time arrangements would be integrated if the job demanded a very specific skill, and local talent to fill the vacancy is

hard to find. A full-time teleworking arrangement is also fundamentally different compared to a part-time teleworking arrangement, in both work tasks and communication intensity. After all, in a part-time teleworking arrangement the person still appears in the office, being exposed to colleagues and perhaps taking part in social gatherings.

### **Structuring Weeks: Teleworking as a Planning Tool**

The second research question was aimed at the work arrangements of Danish employees, working in the information sector and thus being able to perform telework as part of their work arrangement. Prior knowledge obtained through the literature review already indicated that teleworking has a large potential to substantially improve, amongst other factors, employee productivity, happiness, turnover intent and stress levels (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė and Goštautaitė, 2019). Acknowledging the potential gains from teleworking, it was the goal of the research to find out how employees in the Danish knowledge economy used teleworking in their favor.

RQ 2: How does telework play a role in the work arrangement of employees living in Denmark?

Telework plays an active role in many of the work arrangements within the context of this study, in which employees use it as a means to participate in an ever increasing complex work environment, by allowing themselves to structure their work according to their own needs. Previous studies have already proven the potential of teleworking to improve the work-life balance of workers (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė and Goštautaitė, 2019; Raišienė et al., 2021; Tremblay, Paquet and Najem, 2006), but the results of this study also show that this process is by no means passive. Teleworking is in that sense a structuring tool, used actively by employees to schedule their work weeks alongside their private lives. Paid work is matched with unpaid work, making it possible for employees to carefully balance both private and professional domains. Apart from being a great tool to employees for them to actively and dynamically plan their time, it also offers the option to arrange work according to one's own character traits. The general office culture might not fit every person's character traits. Interviewees have indicated that teleworking allowed them to find a better fit between

the job and themselves, because teleworking was an available option. Some days employees might need less communication in order to get the job done, whereas on other days extra social input greatly benefits the work experience. These considerations were part of the weekly planning process for some of the interviewees. By utilizing teleworking this way, it could be regarded as a tool to customize the work experience for every individual, shaped by their own character traits and needs.

The themes from the interviews have also shown that communication processes have become asynchronous and complex, demanding not only knowledge of ICTs, but also the ability to skillfully utilize them. Furthermore, because of varying teleworking schedules, co-workers often need to alternate between ICTs and face-to-face communication in order to keep the exchange of information in the modern workplace going. One day one co-worker might need to talk to colleagues who are both physically present in the office, whereas another colleague would telework and thus appears on a computer screen instead. Oftentimes other employees' telework arrangements would indirectly influence the work experience of their colleagues. These observations made by some of the interviewees show us how socially and technologically complex workplaces have become. Additionally, it illustrates how a modern-day employee not only communicates as part of the job, but also has to continuously communicate about their work to facilitate work processes like hybrid work arrangements.

While teleworking can be seen as a tool for employees to efficiently schedule their own time, it does mean workers often need to compromise on space. The office space generally provides the necessary facilities and technology to facilitate a work environment that seeks to improve the work, whereas oftentimes teleworkers need to facilitate that work environment themselves. The interviews conducted for this study show that more than often telework is performed in the domestic sphere, e.g. the kitchen table or even the bedroom. A variety in workplaces due to teleworking might not be new information, but most surprising is the fact that this dynamic is still the same even after Covid-19. During the pandemic, the number of teleworkers significantly rose to higher levels, arguably pushing teleworkers and their employers to seriously review their teleworking spaces. The fact that teleworking still requires compromises regarding space and facilities shows that there is still some

improvement left. In this case, companies could take an active position to provide proper work facilities such as chairs or a desk. However, as previously mentioned, in a city environment like Copenhagen space is scarce. Oftentimes employees simply do not have any other space available, such as an office room, in their own homes to perform work in. This renewed realization that recourses are limited meant that interviewees were also reconsidering their own domestic space. The scarcity of recourses such as space adds to the level of privilege that comes with teleworking. Thus, apart from exposing the privilege that comes with certain jobs, teleworking also exposes the privileges of available domestic space and other resources.

### **Who Can and May Telework?**

The third and last research question was designed to investigate the process of negotiation of teleworking within the Danish work environment. It might be true that Covid-19 has shown to many people the possibilities of teleworking, but to what extent have these possibilities influenced people's decisions to keep teleworking after the pandemic? Earlier research has shown that oftentimes management is the main obstacle for employees to start integrating teleworking in their work arrangement (Peters, den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2010), is this still valid in the post-pandemic context? Apart from determining to what extent negotiation still takes place, the results also described the policies in place at the respective companies where the interviewees were employed.

RQ 3: To what degree is telework negotiated by stakeholders in the Danish work environment?

Telework is no longer continuously negotiated, in a sense that telework arrangements are a possible option for most employees who took part in the study. It shows how normalized and integrated teleworking is in most companies represented in the conversations. However, the office space is not left out of sight. Companies are still evaluating the value of the office space, making sure it keeps fulfilling its purpose of facilitating a functioning work environment. Telework and the office both take part in a weighing process in which the value of both spaces is continuously weighted by employees, depending on the work tasks and

communication demands at hand. The company policies in place ideally facilitate this process, rather than obstruct it. Rigid policies have shown to be inefficient, whereas flexibility to alternate between options proves to be a very useful method, at least for the employees. This process continues to drive the philosophical discussion on what the office actually is, and means.

The considerations from the interviewees expose a delicate balance between their happiness with the work arrangement on one hand, and the need for companies to be able to function and drive business forward on the other hand. In every work context trust is a vital factor in order for the negotiating processes to run smoothly. It is a process in which different stakeholders might have different perspectives, but ultimately all work towards the same goal. Employers want their employees to both be happy and at the same time deliver productive and quality work. Flexible telework arrangements are still a privilege in the larger context, but simultaneously an incredibly effective tool to make modern workplace demands attainable for people. Among other factors, both trust and high liveability scores characterize the Danish work culture, presumably contributing to a healthy teleworking climate overall. All of this tells us that teleworking is definitely here to stay, potentially altering and developing our expectations of what paid office work might look like in the future.

What many interviewees have mentioned during the conversations, is their appreciation for the simple option for them to include telework in their work arrangement. Having the option to telework increases space and time flexibility, and at the same time enhances the mutual trust between employer and employee. Telework is only possible when both parties trust each other in the process, whereas having the actual option at the same time improves that same mutual trust. One method interviewees have shown to use in obtaining that mutual trust is a consistent flow of communication between them and their superiors. In this context, communication takes place not only to be able to perform telework, but also to inform others about the teleworking process itself. Shared calendars and communication channels facilitated this updating process, integrating it in the daily work processes of employees and their employers. The meta-layer of communication has arguably always been present in work environments, but according to the conversations in this study, these meta-communications



have become increasingly more complex. Teleworking, despite its asynchronous potential, still demands from people to be on high alert for emails, unexpected teleconferencing calls and check-in meetings with management. Almost as if the traditional communication dynamics of the office space slowly flow back into teleworking processes.

The final process of negotiation within teleworking did not take place between employees and their superiors. Oftentimes the act of teleworking included negotiation with other people in the private sphere: partners, other inhabitants of the household or sometimes family members. This second chapter of the negotiation process included an exchange of time, but also space. Time negotiation meant for the interviewees determining who would telework on what day of the week. The time negotiating would go hand in hand with the space negotiation. Space negotiation meant for the interviewees determining who could use which space (and when). After all, some paid work tasks need a quiet space, whereas other tasks can be done at the kitchen table with a little bit of noise in the background. Apart from the negotiation processes, interviewees would also mention that the coordination of teleworking days also resulted in a richer relationship with their partners, ultimately having more time left to meet each other for breakfast, or spend more time together at home. The fact that negotiating processes stretch further than simply between employees and their managers perhaps tells us that the increased use of teleworking might have made the planning of the workweek more complicated. Additionally, it can be argued that the increased teleworking activities have shown employees the limits to their (domestic) recourses, both in time and in space.

This study set out to find out how teleworking has a place in Danish workplace arrangements, attempting to map the entire concept with relation to a number of relevant concepts. The results and conclusions give a good sense of how important teleworking is to employees in the Danish tech and information sector. Furthermore, it provides insight into what aspects of teleworking are functioning well and have obtained a permanent place in people's work arrangements, as well as display what does not function properly or needs more attention in order for teleworking to function even better.

Situated in a post-Covid timeframe, the present study moves the field of corporate communication research further by providing a deep and detailed understanding of the motivations, experiences and opinions of a variety of employees active in the Danish labor market. By having conducted extensive semi-structured interviews, the study also contributed new empirical evidence for the further integration of teleworking in the tech and information sector. Not only that, it also discussed what matters to people, actively using teleworking as a means to balance both work and private activities in their daily lives. Furthermore, it showed that teleworking, albeit a part-time form, is a permanent and an integral part of work arrangements in the Danish corporate sector.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Regardless of the amount of effort put in the research project, some flaws have to be mentioned. First of all, the sample size of the study is of course limited. The conducted research was a one-person project on a time schedule, ultimately resulting in a sample size that is sufficient for the goals of the research, but might need further investment in the future of telework research. The location of the recruitment has both its benefits and its disadvantages. On one hand it provided a good framework to execute the recruitment in, because most people working in the same building had similar working conditions. However, the downside of course is that the sector representation is limited. In future research it would be valuable to investigate the teleworking habits and preferences of employees working for companies in different sectors (e.g. finance or law). This research project acknowledges also the fact that teleworking is still a privilege, and many sectors are not able to perform any type of teleworking at all.

The interviews conducted in this study were of mixed modes. Two interviews were conducted face to face, whereas the majority of eight interviews were conducted online. Although this is not necessarily a limitation, some of the online interviews were interrupted by a poor internet connection, and one time by a disturbance on the interviewee's side. Furthermore, future research could perhaps focus more on the work arrangements of employees, by for instance visiting them in their work environment. The online interviews already provided a unique perspective on the telework arrangements of some of the interviewees, so new investigations

could make use of that opportunity. Although the case study in the Danish context is valuable, future research could look into different national cultures and their teleworking climates. Denmark is a prosperous Western economy, with a high standard of living. It would be interesting for future studies to focus on different nations or economies, further elaborating on the communication dynamics, ICT usage and teleworking.

As the section has now reached its final paragraph, what is left to mention is the importance of the empirical material that lies as a foundation to these conclusions. The empirical material consists of human evaluations, thoughts and opinions. All employees who assisted in the interviews participate in a dynamic, continuous process of reevaluating telework. By doing so, they emphasize the fact that telework is not just an independent concept on its own, but is given meaning by using it in daily work arrangements. Lastly, it is possible to conclude that teleworking is here to stay. Nevertheless, oftentimes while investigating a concept like telework it is easy to forget what group of people can actually make use of it. A number of preconditions have to be met before telework becomes a viable option. First, one must be working a job that actually practically allows for telework, e.g. a job in the information or tech sector. Secondly, they must be working in an area that facilitates telework, both on a technological level but also on a policy level. Thirdly, their superiors or managers must also believe that teleworking is going to help them perform their job better. Having summed up all of these requirements, it becomes clear that teleworking is still somewhat of a privilege, reserved for a small group of people in the labor market. Or, as Lund et al. formulated in their paper published during Covid-19: “Hybrid models of remote work are likely to persist in the wake of the pandemic, mostly for a highly educated, well-paid minority of the workforce” (Lund et al., 2020).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interviews overview

	<b>Length (mins)</b>	<b>Interview mode</b>	<b>Data consent</b>
Interview 1	44:41	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 2	44:09	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 3	34:32	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 4	25:01	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 5	45:27	Physical interview	Yes
Interview 6	39:06	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 7	45:51	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 8	42:13	Virtual interview	Yes
Interview 9	43:55	Physical interview	Yes
Interview 10	40:46	Virtual interview	Yes

## **Appendix B: Interview guide**

### **Theme 1: Start**

Could you describe the kind of work you do? Your job?

Follow up: *Why, how, description, to get the conversation started*

### **Theme 2: WFH**

Could you tell me, in a general sense, what kind of work activities you perform?

*Meetings, programming, calls, writing, managing*

How much do you work remote/not in the office?

*Frequency, per day/week/month, why, when, how, where*

Did you work from home during Covid-19?

*Yes > how was that experience?*

*No/unsure > for what reason?*

~~Are there any specific reasons why you would choose not to work remote?~~

~~*Why, how, when, the opposite*~~

To what extent have non-work related activities an influence on your day when working remote?

*Kids, breaking the rhythm, chores, other environmental factors, living status*

How much do you feel like you need to keep work and non-work separate?

*Strategies, devices, technology, spaces*

### **Theme 3: Space**

Could you give me a description of how your workday starts when you work remote?

*Space, activities, rituals, rooms, priorities, how did you choose the space*



How do you experience the communication with your colleagues when working remote?

*Communication technologies, efficiency, quality, satisfaction, channels, technologies*

How do you compare working in an office space compared to working remote?

*Downsides, upsides, comparison, space*

#### **Theme 4: Managing & Performance**

How do you experience the role of your employer/manager when working remote?

*Trust, communication, performance*

To what extent does the support from your employer play a role in your ability to WFH?

*Material support, mental support, managing styles*

Anything you want to mention?

**NB: Focus on the interviewee, not the rest of the company**

## Appendix C: Consent form

### Consent form

**This goal of this research is investigate the experiences of workers practicing working from home (WFH) in the Danish context.** I will ask questions regarding WFH and your personal experiences and opinions around it. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. The data will only be used within the confinement of the thesis project at the Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University.

I would like to record the interview and use the dialogue to present my findings in a final report. The interview will be recorded and transcribed only with your written consent. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer questions, or to stop the interview at any given time.

All of your information and responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Your identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research.

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign below.

**Full name:** .....

**Date (dd/mm/yyyy):** .....

**Signature:** .....

## **Appendix D: Transcript sample**

This is a transcript sample of the second interview (conducted virtually, 44:09 minutes). Only a limited selection is shown.

### **Speaker 1**

Yeah, well, what were the obstacles you ran into? If you compare sort of back then when you worked for like a month from home, how do you compare that to how you sort of design your work day now? What kind of obstacles did you meet?

### **Speaker 2**

I think the biggest one was not having the option to just, you know, get up from my desk and ask questions from other departments in the company. I think that would have been very useful, especially since I just started, so I would say that was the. The biggest one also. I mean I was saying that now since I'm a team leader, I'm having more meetings. But I could also see that even back then, even though I was a a part timer, I was having way too many meetings compared to how many I should just because people wanted to schedule meetings so that if there's anything to discuss, it was just in the. There, and oftentimes it happened to be that it was scheduled. We had the call for like 10 minutes. We realized that there's nothing to discuss. And it kind of just breaks, you know your workflow when you're really into one task and then you have to go to this 10 minute meeting when you're just like. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Everyone is good. Everybody's fine. It was nice to have a check in, but still, it just kind of broke your your workflow. So I would say that those were the two bigs just not having the, just not having that personal connection with with my colleagues.

### **Speaker 1**

Right. Yeah. Just not being able to like you said sort of walk to this other colleague, that's normally just a few desks away and now there's this whole very communication barrier that you have to overcome, right?

### **Speaker 2**

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

**Speaker 1**

I I recognize that too and and sort of for your own, maybe for your own work. Rhythm. How how did that? How did that compare to what you do now? Because. I can I can sort of imagine that. So all those quick meetings, communications, it also impacts your your rhythm, right in the day.

**Speaker 2**

Yes. And I think I work way longer. I'm not sure if I worked way more, but I did work way longer on those days, like just the fact that you get out of bed at maybe 7:45 and then at 8 you're already at. Your desk, and oftentimes I was working until a bit later because maybe, you know, you take one hour to make your lunch and then that's longer than the usual half an hour break, but also. Also, like I said, you know, with these little meetings sometimes. Get out of like, get out of. This I hate to use this word, but you know the flow of like when you're really into into doing 1 task. So I ended up definitely working longer hours, but I'm not sure if it was. Actually more work, or at least it didn't feel like it. I still felt like, oh, maybe I haven't done everything I should have done today. I don't know. I don't know why that was the case.

**Speaker 1**

And sort of going back to today because obviously you prefer the office compared to working, working remote, but still you have people calling in into, into meetings from other places because of the international nature of your company. How do you think that? Works. How? How do you experience that?

**Speaker 2**

I think it's a bit better today because at least then you know maybe it's two different offices, but at least the two different offices, it's just literally one call because they are sitting in the maybe US and we are sitting here in Denmark and then we are having a call or someone in Australia. We are here in Denmark and then having that call. So at least. At least you have some people in the room with you, and the same goes for the other side. That's one part. The other part is that you know now we can take those from the meeting rooms that we have in

the company. We like the proper equipment like. That goes for sound, camera, everything, and you don't have to worry about. Your computer camera not working or the sound messing up with your headphones for some reason? Yeah, that's. I think it it's it's just much easier to have these from from the office, yeah. And the other thing is that meetings are not going so much overtime because you have the meeting room booked. So someone's going to kick you out if it's it's going overtime. So you really try to keep, you know, like to the point and. More efficient, yeah.

**Speaker 1**

Yeah. Yeah, you you stick to the schedule rather than.

**Speaker 2**

Yeah, basically, there's more agendas now. There's much more agendas now.

## Appendix E: Codebook

Codes	Categories	Themes
Asking permission to work remote Argument against remote work Argument for working in the office Argument for working remote Being able to work online - downsides Being in favor of remote work Going to the office for lunch Having better equipment in the office High level of trust Liking the option to work remote Negotiating remote working Reason for going to the office - lunch Reason for going to the office - socializing Reason for going to the office - team communication Remote vs office - collaborating with a colleague Remote vs office - seperating spaces Thinking remote work does not work Wanting to come to the office Work suitable for home Working remote as a goal Working remote because of small company	Negotiating processes	
Being able to work from home Company investing in remote tools Contract says primarily work in the office decision autonomy Different policies within the company Employer - allowing remote work Employer - recommended office days Expectations from employer Having an office first policy Management allowing remote work Having the option to work remote Having to come to the office Management allowing remote work Management wants people in the office Not being allowed to work remote Not having a policy Manager-employee relationship Not a goal of having people in the office No full remote options No need to ask permission to work remote Not having to be in the office Updating the manager on remote work Wanting people in the office Wishing for a policy Working remote not part of the contract Working remote part of the contract	Policy processes	<b>Policy &amp; negotiation</b>

Codes	Categories	Themes
Budgeting Challenges at work Collaborating together Cultural differences Daily work activities Description of the company Friday Bars Having a commute to the office Having informal chats Helping colleagues Looking for colleagues in the office who are remote More coffee in the office Office - Asking a colleague for help Office - Having a break Office - nonwork activities Office - providing structure Office - social relations Office activity Office conflicts Office culture Office entertainment Office is not busy Office small talk Preparing reports Working remote - activities	Activities at work	<b>Work processes &amp; Practices</b>
Comms are lost Comms with externals Communication strategy Liking asynchronous comms Management miscommunication Miscommunication Non-verbal comms Remote work - comms with colleagues Replacing the commute with comms Team communication - inefficient comms Team communication - writing messages Team Communication updating each other	Communication	

Codes	Categories	Themes
1 on 1 meetings Amount of meetings Difference virtual and physical meeting Experienced in online meetings External meetings Face-to-face Feeling energized Having a collective weekly meeting Having a Daily Team Meeting Having a lot of meetings Having different kind of internal meetings Having to attend a meeting Joining a meeting remotely Meeting physically - frequency Meeting with a team Not having too many meetings Preferring in-person collaboration Preparing an external meeting Talking about the virtual background Unnecessary meetings Video call behavior Working in the office - more efficient meetings Working remote - structuring the day with meetings Working remote - having many meetings Working remote - interrupting meetings	Meetings	
Distractions at home don't disturb me Fighting temptations at home Finding the office noisy More energised after working remote Not feeling motivated Not liking office distractions Not really working Remote colleagues being not as engaged Working remote - focus time Working remote - office too distracting	Focus & distractions	

Codes	Categories	Themes
Combating loneliness Fear of missing out Isolation Loneliness Social overload	Psychological influences	<b>Social Influences</b>
Being motivated by others Being social Colleague who works remote most of the time Colleagues leaving the office early Having to wait for other colleagues Missing colleagues Other colleague working remote Working from home - missing interactions Working remote because the rest is too Working remote - not needing others Working remote - missing informal comms	Influences from others	



Codes	Categories	Themes
Feeling part of an organisation Building company culture Internationally diverse company Lacking meaning Not feeling part of the team Team bonding traveling together Work relations - culture Young company Working remote because of talent	Team & culture	
Combining paid and unpaid work Keeping work and private life separate Living abroad because of a partner non-paid work Non-work - taking a break outside Preparing lunch Rituals at home Study next to Work Working remote - being able to work out Working remote - doing the laundry Working remote - keeping work and private separate Working remote - making longer days Working remote - non-work activities Working remote - not taking a proper break	Work-life Balance	<b>Work &amp; Private life</b>

Codes	Categories	Themes
Coordinating remote work days Custom work structures for personalities Deciding on a remote work day Downsides to working structure Figuring out work rhythm Five office days feels too much Ideal working structure Liking a hybrid work structure Not coming in on specific days Liking traditional office hours Not liking traditional working hours Office hours Planning hybrid work Planning of the Work Day Planning the workweek Preferring a hybrid structure Setting rules for themselves Taking less breaks at home Time Division During the Day Work structure deciding process Working remote - starting a bit later working remote - setting tasks for themselves Working remote - setting your calendar	Time & planning	<b>Space &amp; Time</b>

Codes	Categories	Themes
Apartment description Different virtual spaces Disliking the office - environment Design of the office space Going to the office - own place too small Having people in the same room How work in the office feels like Ideal remote work space Liking the office space Meeting a colleague in the office Moved to a bigger office Moving to a bigger place Negotiating space with a partner Not liking the remote work space Office empty - people working remote Pro's of working in a remote space Professional help in space design Remote work conditions Switching spaces in the office Working remote (home) - workplace setup Working remote - designing the workspace Working remote - finding the right place Working remote - places	Space	
Being flexible Disliking flexibility Flexibility Time Devision Liking time flexibility Not having enough flexibility Preferring structure	Flexibility	

Codes	Categories	Themes
Job Description Job promotion Job searching criteria Liking the job Quit the job Reason for quitting the job Working remote as an argument to work for a company or not Working remote because of past experiences	The Job	<b>Work practicalities</b>
Not having the right tools at home Quality of internet connection Romanticizing remote work Tools Working remote - tech problems	Tech & tools	
Work travel Working remote to travel	Travel	
Being more efficient outside of the office Feeling more motivated in the office Getting out of a flow More efficient when working alone Not being able to work in the office Notions of productivity	Productivity	

Codes	Categories	Themes
Corona pandemic - figuring out how to work remote Corona pandemic - upside Covid-19 experiences Started the job during covid-19 Starting a job completely remote Work after Covid-19 Working remote connected to Covid-19	Covid-19	<b>Past experiences</b>
Freelance experiences Freelancing - downsides Having freelance experience	Freelancing	

## Appendix F: Interviewee Recruitment Poster

# Help me graduate!

**Wanted: participants in a study on working from home** 🏠

**Reward: my everlasting gratitude** 🙌

Hi there, I'm Thomas and I work on the 4th floor for Donkey Republic. Right now I'm writing my thesis and I'm looking for participants to interview about their **working from home** experiences, and how it plays a role in their daily lives. The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes and are completely anonymous.

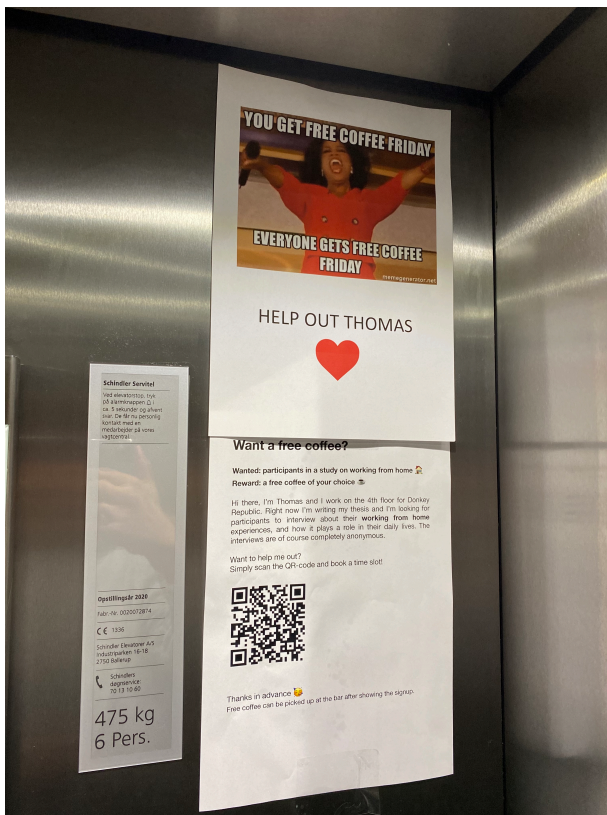
Want to help me out?

Simply scan the QR-code and book a time slot!

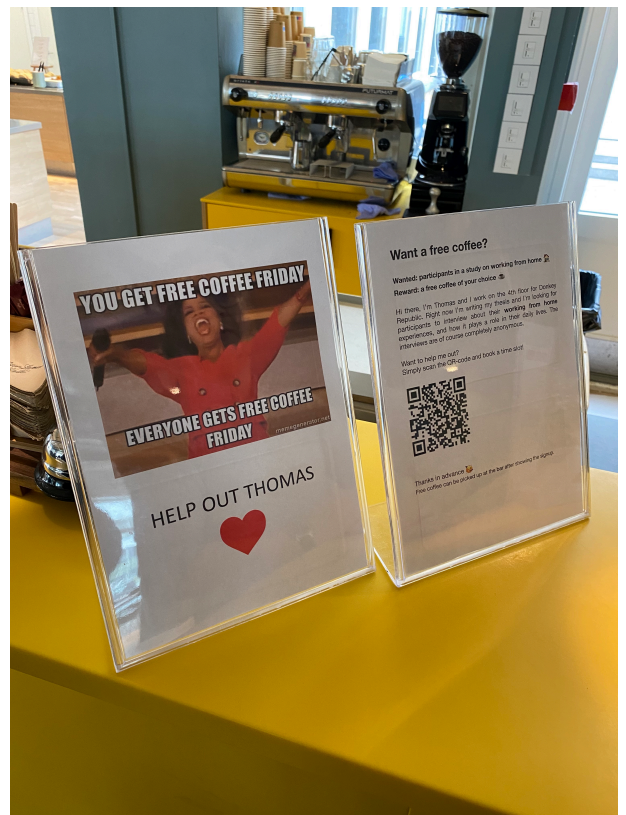


Thanks in advance 🙏

## Appendix G: Images



**Image:** recruitment assistance by the canteen personnel in the elevator of the office building.



**Image:** recruitment assistance by the canteen personnel at the coffee bar.