



SCHOOL OF  
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MANAGEMENT

# Why Coffee Machine Chats and Laundry Time Matter: Investigating Opportunities and Challenges of Different Work Arrangements

by

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# Abstract

The subject of this thesis is based on a qualitative research study to examine the opportunities and challenges of the three work arrangements, physical in-office work, hybrid work, and remote work, as perceived by employees. Additionally, the perceived impact of those work arrangements on work-life interdependency is explored. As researchers, we have little prior knowledge about how employees perceive different work arrangements and aim for an improved understanding. Studies have shown that different work arrangements pose opportunities and challenges, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, the way employees perceive different work arrangements and the effects on their work-life interdependency remain less understood. We identified a gap in research that we aim to fill. Our findings will be valuable to employees and employers, delivering a connecting point for further research and potentially uncovering practical solutions.

The literature reviews deals with the different work arrangements and provides a theoretical base for our empirical part. It further points out the controversial nature of the topic. The data was collected by conducting seven focus group interviews involving five employees from distinct companies based in Denmark, Germany, Iceland, and Sweden. The study's findings suggest that employees perceive different opportunities and challenges when experiencing different work arrangements. Additionally, the findings emphasise that the employees' perception depends on the employees' situation. What is perceived as an opportunity for one employee can be perceived as a challenge by another. Further, we are aware of differences specific to the industry, company size, and culture. Still, we identified some common themes and patterns among the employees across the different companies and further gained additional insights into the managerial perspective.

With this study, we believe we can provide insights into employees' opportunities and challenges with different work arrangements and their preferences, leading to further research on the field and practical insights for organisations.

Based on our findings, this paper has the title *“Why Coffee Machine Chats and Laundry Time Matter”*, referring to some of the most frequently mentioned opportunities of different work arrangements; coffee machine chats symbolising spontaneous personal interaction when working

physically in the office and laundry time symbolising the increased integration of non-work-related tasks into the workday. However, this depiction is simplified and only focuses on some aspects explored in this paper.

**Keywords:** *Opportunities, Challenges, Work-life Interdependency, Work Arrangements, Physical In-office Work, Hybrid Work, Remote Work, Employees, Employers*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Millions of students graduate from their programs and enter the job market annually. Traditionally, graduates have been limited to job opportunities in their hometowns or forced to relocate to a different location. However, digitalisation and globalisation have brought the world closer together and present increased opportunities for job seekers (Buchan, 2009). As a result, numerous organisations are taking advantage of the opportunities related to different work arrangements. Contrary to the traditional physical in-office work arrangement, alternatives make it possible to take on a new job from the comfort of home or a sunny destination such as Spain. In this study, we will look into employees' perspectives on the three most common work arrangements: physical in-office, hybrid, and remote work (Spreitzer, Cameron & Garrett, 2017; Lenka, 2021). When employees perform physical in-office work, it is usually referred to as a traditional workplace setting where they are required to commute to a physical location, traditionally an office building, and carry out their tasks and responsibilities from a desk (Cappelli, 2021). On the other hand, hybrid and remote work arrangements have become controversial due to the different opportunities and challenges they pose for employees and employers (Beño, 2021; Babapour, Hultberg & Bozic Yams, 2022). For instance, individuals who work remotely, meaning they only work from outside the office - home or other locations, can access job opportunities from anywhere in the world (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea & Walters, 2002; Golden & Veiga, 2005; Cappelli, 2021). In addition, this can open doors to diverse professional experience, and employees can work in their preferred environment since remote work arrangements do not require any specific office (Buchan, 2009; Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea & Walters, 2002). On the other hand, addressing the potential challenges of the work arrangements is essential. For instance, face-to-face collaboration and networking opportunities might be reduced when working from home, leading to social isolation (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

When reviewing the literature, it was brought to our attention that many articles relating to alternative work arrangements included the effects of work-life interdependency and the



importance of work-life balance (Dhas, 2015; Gragnano, Simbula & Miglioretti, 2020; Guest, 2002; Cappelli, 2021). Dhas (2015) claims that work-life balance has consistently been a concern for those who prioritise their well-being, satisfaction derived from their work and its impact on their overall quality of life. According to Allen, Golden & Shockley (2015), work-life balance is a critical factor affecting job satisfaction, employee well-being, and overall performance outcomes. Cappelli (2021) argues that alternative work arrangements can offer potential opportunities and challenges to employees' work-life balance. While working from home can provide numerous advantages, it can also lead to work-related matters intruding into employees' personal lives (Cappelli, 2021). Cappelli argues that when individuals work from home, the boundaries between work and personal lives might blur since individuals conduct their work at home, where they typically engage in personal activities, creating a need for physical and mental separation.

## 1.2 Research Problem Statement

In our rapidly changing world, where technology advances daily and creates new possibilities, many organisations have implemented hybrid and remote work (Deloitte, 2023). Contrary to the traditional physical in-office work arrangements, organisations are now left with a choice and need to face the question of which work arrangement to adopt and how to accommodate their employee's needs (Chaudhuri, Chatterjee, Vrontis & Alessio, 2022; Deloitte, 2023). As Cappelli (2021) argues, uncertainty and controversy are involved when deciding whether organisations should return to the traditional physical in-office setting or alternatively implement a hybrid or remote work arrangement. Considering all available arguments for and against it, this symbolises the research problem. Many organisations are struggling with how to efficiently address employees' expectations with the different work arrangements (Deloitte, 2023). This makes it difficult for employers to create a working environment that prioritises the needs of their employees. Cappelli (2021) further argues that the boundaries between work and personal life are getting more blurred. Despite the existing literature on the subject, there remains a gap in understanding the specific challenges, opportunities and impact on work-life interdependency, as perceived by employees. We, as researchers, have little prior knowledge related to these perceptions and therefore decided to examine them using focus group studies. We critically

discuss the challenges and opportunities of the traditional physical in-office arrangement and the alternative work arrangements, hybrid and remote. Existing studies have provided valuable insights into the impacts of hybrid and remote work arrangements; however, they often use methods other than focus group studies (Harpaz, 2002; Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma & Nwokorie, 2020). We acknowledge the need for more comprehensive research on the opportunities and challenges presented by different work arrangements and their impact on the employee's work and lives (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma & Nwokorie, 2020). It is essential to investigate this subject more extensively and examine its implications on employees. By exploring these aspects, our study aims to provide valuable insights for employers seeking to implement new strategies and a solution catering to the needs of employers and employees. This way, employers can utilise the opportunities and act upon the challenges, creating a work environment where employees can thrive and act in the best interest of the employer and company.. We believe further research is required to fully comprehend the implications and navigate the complexities of alternative work arrangements. Our belief is supported by the current gap in the literature surrounding these work arrangements and the need to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

### 1.3 Research Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges that employees face when experiencing different work arrangements. Further, it examines the impact on work-life interdependency, as perceived by employees. As the reviewed literature predominantly dealt with the three work arrangements: physical in-office, hybrid, and fully remote work, we believe these are most relevant to our study's purpose (Deloitte, 2021). With our study, we believe we can provide valuable insights into the employees' perspective, leading to further research on the field and practical implications for organisations. We used focus group interviews as our research method, which differs from available studies on the topic and could deliver new insights. We conducted seven focus group interviews, to which we invited five employees from each organisation. We categorise all participants as employees, irrespective of their level of experience and the tasks they perform; some are managerial. If at all, we see this as an opportunity to gain additional empirical input from the managerial perspective. By conducting focus-group interviews with employees, our study aims to fill the research gap and increase understanding of

how employees perceive different work arrangements. This will contribute to the existing literature and enable employers to understand employees' perspectives better. Furthermore, it aims at making practical implications aligning with these insights, utilising opportunities and acting upon challenges posed by different work arrangements. This study aims to be a starting point for further research on how employers and employees can develop effective strategies and adapt to the changing work environment.

In order to accomplish the research purpose, we will focus on the following three research questions:

1. *What are the perceived opportunities by employees experiencing different work arrangements?*
2. *What are the perceived challenges by employees experiencing different work arrangements?*
3. *What opportunities and challenges do these work arrangements present for employees regarding work-life interdependency?*

## 1.4 Delimitations

In order to fulfil the research purpose, given the limited scope of the study, we had to make some limitations regarding the content and research design. We came across many relevant aspects during our literature review. However, we have chosen to prioritise the employee's perception of opportunities and challenges and the impact on work-life interdependency due to its profound influence on multiple dimensions. Due to the limited time frame and logistical constraints, we aimed for five focus groups, with a restricted sample size of five participants each. In addition, the time constraints imposed on our study required adherence to a specific timeline for the data collection. Therefore, we could not wait for new participants to join or reschedule the interviews if individuals cancelled their participation shortly before the interviews.

## 1.5 Outline of the Thesis

Our thesis is structured into five chapters, each focusing on specific aspects of our research. The outline of the thesis chapters is as follows:

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter provides an introduction to our research subject, outlining the problem statement, delimitations, purpose of the thesis, and presenting our research questions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, we present an overview of the existing literature related to our research topic. We discuss the work arrangements: physical in-office, hybrid, and remote work. Furthermore, we explore the opportunities and challenges associated with these arrangements, drawing on available literature. The chapter also includes a discussion on work-life interdependency, which includes the definition of work-life balance and the theoretical frameworks of the spillover-crossover model and work/family border theory.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodology we used for our research. We discuss our research philosophy, research approach, research design, data collection method, and data analysis method. We also address the sampling method and provide insights into ethical considerations, quality criteria, and limitations of our study. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary of the methodology used.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Analytical Discussion**

Building upon the information gathered and synthesised in the previous chapters, this chapter presents the discussion and results obtained from the data collected through the focus group interviews. We analyse the findings and provide an in-depth discussion of their implications. The final chapter concludes our thesis by summarising and discussing the key findings.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

In the final chapter we reflect on our findings, answering the research questions and purpose presented in the introduction, leading to implications of practical and theoretical nature. We further propose suggestions for further research based on the outcomes of our study.

## 2. Literature Review

*In the following chapter, we present the three mentioned work arrangements and discuss their opportunities and challenges based on the considered literature. Further, under 2.2, Work-life Interdependency will be introduced, consisting of three subchapters; Work-life Balance, Spillover-Crossover Model, and Work/Family Border Theory.*

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### 2.1 Work Arrangements

The prevalence of different work arrangements, featuring physical in-office, hybrid and remote (See Table 1), has increased significantly after technological advancements and the Covid-19 pandemic, with organisations implementing more flexibility regarding their work arrangements (Deloitte, 2023). According to Davidescu, Apostu, Paul and Casuneanu (2020), flexible working arrangements must be seen as a “business as normal” rather than just a crisis response that organisations use in difficult times. Organisations should prioritise adaptability and flexibility to the evolving needs of alternative work arrangements. According to Cappelli (2021), a “cultural touchpoint” could be lost by the potential abolishment of the traditional office. However, remote work has positive effects, such as related economic and environmental benefits. Licite-Kurbe and Leonovica (2021) argue that resources are saved through reduced commuting when working hybrid or remotely. Another cost factor could be reduced electricity and office costs, which transfer to the employee if not covered by the employer. Mas and Pallais (2020) argue that historically work arrangements have changed, and most workplaces are incorporating more flexibility. Previously, most companies worked traditionally, meaning employees came to the office full-time. Cappelli argues that the pandemic caused traditional office-based organisations to shift towards hybrid or remote work, which disrupted the status quo and prompted a reevaluation of traditional work arrangements (Cappelli, 2021).

Table 1: Alternative work arrangements definition (Hilberath, Kilmann, Lovich, Tzanetti, Bailey, Beck & Woolsey, 2020; Cappelli, 2021)

<b>Work arrangements</b>	<b>Simple Definition</b>
Physical In-Office Work	A traditional workplace setting where employees commute to physical locations, typically the company's office.
Hybrid Work	Combination of remote and physical in-office work where employees have the flexibility to work from the company's office or another location.
Remote Work	Employees can work from anywhere using digital tools and do not have any specific office offered by the company.

### 2.1.1 Physical In-Office Work

Physical in-office work refers to the traditional workplace setting where employees commute to a physical office location and have designated desk spaces to fulfil their tasks and responsibilities (Cappelli, 2021). Employees could benefit from the strict separation of work and private space since the blend of home and office can have negative health consequences (Staglin, 2020). Working together in one office allows for spontaneous, interactive collaboration. This can include using a whiteboard and developing ideas together. Companies who want their employees to return to their offices often use these arguments. In the past many companies have thought of convincing incentives, such as free breakfast and lunch, to keep their employees at the office (Cappelli, 2021). Cappelli argues that employees who work from the office are more visible to the management and more aware of opportunities. “Managers tend to attribute more positive personality traits and less negative ones to the employees who spend more time in the office” (Cappelli, 2021, p. 20).

## 2.1.2 Hybrid Work

Choudhury, Khanna, Makridis and Schirmann (2022) describe hybrid work as the compromise between physical in-office work and remote work, meaning that employees split their working week between these two options, which promises more flexibility and work-life balance. The hybrid working model has resulted in significant learning and has become the most frequently encountered working model today (Sokolic, 2022). This model is the most effective option for a majority of organisations as it allows for greater flexibility and work-life balance while enabling collaboration and connection among team members (Hilberath et al. 2020). The opportunities of hybrid work could increase flexibility and decrease isolation, which workers might experience when working solely remotely (Choudhury et al. 2022). However, critics express concerns about decreased collaboration and communication between colleagues, with some employees being in the office and others in front of the screen, having a negative effect on productivity and results (Yang, Holtz, Jaffe, Suri, Sinha, Weston, Joyce, Shah, Sherman, Hecht & Teevan, 2021). David M. Solomon, the CEO of Goldman Sachs, is a prominent example of a manager who criticises the lack of innovation and collaboration through hybrid working and wants employees back in the office (Choudhury et al. 2022).

## 2.1.3 Remote Work

Remote work, sometimes called telework or telecommuting, can be described as a work arrangement that provides employees with the flexibility to perform their tasks from home or another location outside the office (Nickson & Siddons, 2012). Remote working has been shown to have multiple positive effects on work-life balance. By eliminating the need for daily commutes, remote workers can therefore save valuable time and transportation costs. In addition, remote work has been linked to increased empowerment and autonomy for employees, as it can lead to increased levels of job productivity and satisfaction (Sullivan, 2012). Various companies have succeeded with fully remote working models, but there are some related challenges remaining (Hilberath et al. 2020). While remote work can provide employees with more flexibility and convenience, Moss (2018) emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing the challenges that remote workers face, such as time management. The achievement of remote work is contingent on effective time management, which includes the implementation

of scheduling regular breaks, setting clear goals and priorities, utilising technology tools to manage tasks, and communicating with co-workers (Moss, 2018). Significantly, remote work arrangements can impact collaboration, limiting face-to-face interaction, unlike office-based work where employees frequently engage with their co-workers during the work week (Moss, 2018). Cappelli (2021) argues that remote employees are less visible to management and therefore miss out on information, promotional opportunities, and decision-making processes. Larson, Vroman and Makarius (2020) highlighted the importance of clear communication and expectations that remote employees should consider when working remotely.

Elshaiekh, Hassan and Abdallah (2018) argue that technology can be challenging for some people, and remote employees may experience technical challenges, such as connectivity issues. In addition, external distractions and interruptions can influence remote employees' productivity, such as family members, pets, or household tasks (Elshaiekh, Hassan & Abdallah, 2018). It can be challenging to maintain work-life boundaries when working fully from a remote location and may lead to isolation and disconnection (Hilberath et al. 2020). To ensure remote workers can work efficiently and avoid isolation, it may be necessary to provide additional training and support. This may include training on new technologies, effective communication, collaborative techniques, and time management strategies. Each employee may require customised training to address their specific needs and to help them thrive in a remote working environment (Nickson & Siddons, 2012).

Furthermore, Larson, Vroman and Makarius (2020) discuss the importance of training for remote workers. They suggest that managers should provide ongoing training, feedback, and support to help the employees achieve their goals. They recommend managers should regularly communicate with remote workers to inquire about their progress and well-being in order to ensure they feel included and engaged. Additionally, Agrawal and Stark (2022) mention the importance of acknowledging that remote working can create tax implications. Due to the variations in tax regulations between countries, obtaining professional tax advice is essential to understand the applicable tax authorities and obligations related to remote work.



## 2.2 Work-Life Interdependency

The increased blurring of work and life (Cappelli, 2021) raised our interest in examining the opportunities and challenges of different work arrangements, impacting work-life interdependency. By this, we mean the interdependency of work and life, how both aspects influence and potentially blend in with each other. This includes the theoretical framework work-life balance (2.3), the spillover-crossover model (2.4), and the work/family-border theory (2.5).

### 2.2.1 Work-Life Balance

Work-Life Balance (WLB) has been defined in many ways, yet there is no direct well-developed measure of the concept (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). One example of WLB from the employee viewpoint is “the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities” (Lockwood, 2003, p.3).

In our fast-paced society, prioritising WLB has become an essential topic for research (Guest, 2002). For numerous individuals, the idea of working from home presents a great solution to deal with the demands of a full-time job and managing household responsibilities (Cappelli, 2021). However, research has shown a growing number of employees who acknowledge their challenges in maintaining a healthy WLB (Lockwood, 2003). In the 1990s, the discussion around WLB expanded to include issues faced by both women and men (Dex & Bond, 2005). The growing awareness of employee well-being and the negative effects of long working hours led to increased empirical attention. However, in the early 2000s, when the technology and use of the internet were spreading, new challenges were introduced to WLB. For instance, the overlapping of work and personal life boundaries (Dex & Bond, 2005).

Still today, an exemplary employee is often defined as someone who is always available and ready to take on tasks (Williams, Berdahl & Vandello, 2016). Studies suggest that employees that work long weekly hours are more likely to face more challenges when attempting to establish a WLB (Dex & Bond, 2005).

According to Cappelli (2021), previous research has shown that the autonomy level and the flexibility schedule towards employees significantly influence their working effectiveness from home in promoting WLB. Felstead and Henseke (2017) argue that people working from home

are more likely to have longer working days and expend voluntary effort. Cappelli (2021) argues that performance management, in the form of monitoring and micromanaging employees, might hinder employees' benefits when working from home. He further emphasises the potential blurring of boundaries between personal life and work, when working from home. Employees could experience the benefits of a personalised work environment, comfort, reduced distractions and commute time. However, the boundaries between work and personal life can be interrupted by work-related matters in employees' personal life, as it can also influence their affective states and well-being (Cappelli, 2021).

### 2.2.2 Spillover-Crossover Model

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the significant impact of affective states experienced at work on an individual's personal life (Culbertson, Mills & Fullagar, 2012; Rodríguez-Muñoz, Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti & Bakker, 2014). The Spillover-Crossover Model (SCM) provides a framework that examines how individuals' experiences and emotions can extend beyond the boundaries of work and personal life. Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler and Wethington (1989) distinguished between two situations: “Spillover” and “Crossover.” Spillover refers to the transfer of experiences, emotions and resources between work and non-work domains. However, Crossover emphasises the transmission of experiences, emotions and resources between individuals who work closely together. Bakker, Westman, and Hetty van Emmerik (2009) mention that Spillover occurs from work to home and from home to work for the same individual. In contrast, crossover is conceptualised as progress occurring from one individual at the workplace to their personal domain. That indicates that spillover affects only the individual and crossover can affect the group. Emotions and behaviours are difficult to separate and translate from one sphere to the other, meaning that a bad day at the office can have an impact on the quality of your private life and vice versa (Staines, 1980).

### 2.2.3 Work/Family Border Theory

Even when separating professional and personal space, meaning that people go to the office to work and come home and leave the workplace behind physically, a crossover is inevitable. According to Clark 2000, work and family are interdependent; one influences the other. Clark

developed the border theory on a work/family basis, which explains how individuals manage work and family in order to create a balanced life (Clark, 2000).

On the basis of this, it stands to reason that, due to the increased use of alternative work models, work and private life are more blended than ever.

## 3. Methodology

*In the following chapter we present and argue for the methodology we used for our study. Additionally, we present the methodological decisions that we made to serve our study's purpose. We start with briefly describing the research approach this study takes while defining the research design, data collection, and analysis. After the research methodology discussion, the chapter assesses and criticises the study in terms of ethical considerations, limitations and the quality criteria reliability, validity, and replicability.*

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### 3.1 Research Philosophy

“Ontology is concerned with theorizing about the nature of reality” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022, p. 27). Ontological considerations can be relevant when determining the research purpose. Objectivism, as one ontological consideration, perceives phenomena as objective external facts (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). This is not relevant to our study. Contrary, constructionism as an ontological consideration is relevant. It is based on the assumption that “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022, p. 28), “made real by the actions and understandings of humans” (Bell, Bryman & Harley et al. 2022, p. 28). In our focus group study, humans express their perceptions and actions, which are under constant revision, as constructionism suggests. Moreover, it channels the clear hierarchies and structures objectivism suggests and argues that social structures are constantly revised (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022), which was also reflected in our focus group interviews.

## 3.2 Research Approach

We chose to utilise a qualitative research approach, as it offers unique advantages in uncovering and understanding individuals' insights that might be challenging to investigate through quantitative methods (Maxwell, 2008). Qualitative research allows a better understanding of conscious and subconscious behaviours and individuals' perspectives, thoughts and reflections. Furthermore, Maxwell (2008) argues that it enables the exploration of complex problems through group discussions or observations, which justified our decision for a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach is well-suited when seeking a deeper understanding of a specific subject; therefore, it fits well with this study to fulfil the purpose and research interest. While exploring suitable qualitative methods, we initially examined the differences between individual and focus group interviews. After having further researched various approaches and consulted with our supervisor, we concluded that the focus-group method would be well suited for our research. The focus group study offers several advantages and disadvantages (Described in 3.4.1). However, Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) argue that this method is more time-consuming compared to other methods, as it requires coordination with the participants to find a suitable time and place to meet simultaneously. According to Gill and Baillie (2018), qualitative studies usually employ face-to-face interviews, which means it can be time-consuming to schedule the meetings and commute to specific locations. However, digital technologies provide the opportunity to conduct the interviews online, regardless of location. After facing difficulties assembling those focus groups, we considered doing individual interviews. However, after completing the first focus-group interview and evaluating the valuable insights gained, we persisted and ultimately achieved our goal of conducting seven focus-group interviews, aiming at five participants each.

## 3.3 Data Collection Method

### 3.3.1 Focus Group Interviews

The research was conducted qualitatively through focus group interviews, which can help investigate collective perspectives, experiences, attitudes and behaviours (Gill & Baillie, 2018).

Researchers can collect rich and meaningful data by conducting a focus group study, observing and listening to participants providing different insights (Tremblay, Hevner & Berndt, 2010; Gill & Baillie, 2018). We selected this method as it facilitates the opportunity for an interactive dialogue and conveys diverse insights, and can produce relevant insights (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). They can facilitate richer discussions and deeper exploration that would not have been gained when questioned individually, since it allows participants to share their perspectives and experiences in a supportive environment (Rabiee, 2004). Therefore focus group interviews can be useful when exploring complex or sensitive issues. The interactions in focus group interviews can create safety and spontaneity, leading to more candid statements (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014; Kelly, 2003), which is relevant to our study's purpose of exploring employees' perspectives. Additionally, the potential advantage of focus group studies lies in producing data and insights through group interaction, creating a "synergistic group effect", which refers to the actual outcome or result of the interview, stimulating new ideas, and encouraging others to share their candid statements (Morgan, 1996). However, Catteall and Maclaren (1997) argue that there are some potential disadvantages associated with focus group interviews. For example, the "group effect" can lead to conformity, where the participants express views they believe are popular or socially acceptable. Furthermore, according to Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022, focus group interviews pose a high investment of time and effort and can lead to participants cancelling shortly before the interview, which can only be avoided by over-recruiting. After researching this method and reading more about the potential benefits, we decided that focus group interviews are a suitable method to fulfil our research purpose, providing more insights and perspectives, given the interactive nature.

### 3.3.2 Interview Settings

In total, we conducted seven interviews that lasted for approximately 1.5 hours. When conducting long interviews, the researchers must be well-trained in the interview process, which includes initiating the interview, encouraging the participants to provide answers, and effectively concluding the interview (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Both of us participated in all interviews except for two of them since they were scheduled simultaneously. When we got the participants' contacts, we offered them to conduct the interviews in person or digitally, with participants

potentially joining on Zoom or Microsoft Teams, depending on which platform the participants were familiar with. Three interviews were conducted in person, and the other four via Zoom (See Table 2). Due to different work arrangements, where some employees worked on a hybrid schedule or remotely, and conflicting schedules, some interviews could only be conducted via digital video interview. This consequently saved resources, for instance, time and cost for us as researchers and CO2, since we did not have to travel to the interviews. The introduction was structured the same way in each interview in order for all participants to receive the same information about our study, where we explained the purpose of the interview, assured confidentiality, and asked participants for permission to record (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). When designing the interviews, we articulated a degree of structure with subjects and questions to cover, including an introduction (See Appendix 2) and individual questions to briefly gain information about the participants' backgrounds (See Appendix 3). However, the discussions between the participants, led by our group questions, built the core of the interviews (See Appendix 4). Sometimes we had to adjust the sequencing of our questions based on the participants' responses and discussions to aim for flexibility in the line of questioning. The flow of focus group interviews can evolve organically, allowing adaptability and the opportunity to follow the conversation's natural flow. The industry was not a selection criterion, as well as company size or primary location.

*Table 2 - Overview of Interview Settings*

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Interview 5	Interview 6	Interview 7
In Person	In Person	In Person	Digital Video	Digital Video	Digital Video	Digital Video

### **Differences between In Person Interviews and Digital Video Interviews**

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016) when comparing different interview methods, it is essential to consider the advantages and limitations of each method. For example, face-to-face interviews are considered synchronised in both time and place, which makes that method advantageous. However, digital interviews are characterised by simultaneously communicating in time rather than in terms of place. When conducting face-to-face interviews, interviewees have the advantage of detecting any problems, stress, or discomfort through body language and facial expressions. The non-verbal social signals can be readily apparent, providing valuable

insights. Additionally, the direct interaction between the interviewees and participants will likely create a safe and comfortable atmosphere, with no delays caused by technical difficulties. However, face-to-face interviews can be more time-consuming and expensive since individuals have to commute to specific locations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). On the other hand, digital interviews require reliable technology, which means that individuals must have a good quality camera, microphone, and stable internet connection (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). One of the main advantages of digital video interviews is that individuals can participate regardless of their location, eliminating the need for commuting (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Another aspect is that video interviews allow for flexible changes, which could lead to participants joining and dropping out spontaneously. The convenience of video interviews can lead to flexible participation and might encourage people to join due to a low inhibition threshold (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). However, participants might feel uncomfortable or excluded if they encounter technical difficulties or lack access to the required technology. When conducting digital interviews, especially when discussing sensitive topics, confidentiality must be considered, and the participants should be informed about the measures taken to ensure their privacy and confidentiality (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022), video interviews can pose challenges of connection quality and interruption, which was the case in three of our interviews. In the interview with Company E, one participant could not connect to the audio sound for a few minutes and could only join the conversation afterwards. The same happened in the interview with company G but was resolved more quickly. In the interviews with companies G and F, the connection was sometimes lost, resulting in participants freezing and disrupting the flow of conversation. Due to these difficulties, we believe some of the digital video interviews did not proceed as organically as the ones conducted in person. In summary, both face-to-face and digital video interviews have advantages and limitations, and we agreed on both methods being feasible for our study.

## 3.4 Research Design

### 3.4.1 Selection & Sampling

Due to the limited time frame, we used “convenience sampling”, which is one of the most effective and efficient methods of collecting data quickly (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). We contacted over 70 persons from various companies and different industries via LinkedIn (See Appendix 1). During this procedure, we encountered some challenges, as further described in the limitations 3.8. With careful consideration and based on the most reliable information available, we purposefully reached out to companies that represented diverse industries, locations, and sizes (See Table 2). By aiming for such diversity, our aim was to gather a wide range of insights and perspectives. Focus group interviews traditionally feature an interaction between six to ten people, and the questions should be open-ended and carefully selected (Morgan, 1996; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). However, it has been recommended to choose smaller groups when topics are controversial or complex (Morgan, 1998, cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Due to this recommendation, our limitations, and in agreement with the companies, we decided to aim for five participants per focus group. The selection has been made according to diversity regarding position, hierarchy, and experience to include diverse perspectives. Some of the contact persons who confirmed their interest expressed individual incentives for attending the interviews. They considered it an opportunity to gain insights into the employees’ perspective and draw conclusions for future work arrangements. Participants A1 and F3 aimed to explore the employees’ perceptions from an HR perspective, potentially gaining valuable insights for future coordination of hybrid work. They assessed it as a relevant topic and also considered it when assembling the focus groups. Participant B3 expressed the wish for more hybrid work opportunities, and the focus group interview served as a basis to discuss further arrangements with their employer. All participants expressed interest in reading the completed research project in order to reflect on and discuss the topic.

Since we aimed to include diverse perspectives but did in most cases not have information or contacts inside the organisations, we asked the contact persons to use stratified random sampling when collecting five random participants from different departments. According to Sekaran and



Bougie (2016) stratified random sampling strands are more time-consuming than other sampling methods. However, it stands out as the most efficient sampling design, as it ensures that groups are sampled in a representative manner that enables meaningful comparisons among them (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). We explained our approach to the contact person who assembled the focus group accordingly. By asking the contact persons to collect the participants for the interviews, it is difficult for us to confirm the sampling design method used, since we did not conduct it ourselves. If it was not conducted accordingly, it may introduce sampling bias which can lead to certain groups being underrepresented or overrepresented in the sample. However, in all our interviews, there was always someone who did not work in the same department, presenting some diversity regarding positions (See Table 3). Further men and women were both included in the focus groups. However for the presentation of our results, we chose an approach in which the participants' gender was not considered. We are aware of delimitations and that some focus groups consist of employees with the same titles or members of the same team. Still, given the limited scope of our study, we reflect on our final selection as being as diverse as possible, including companies from different industries, locations, and sizes; and within the focus group, a certain degree of diversity.

*Figure 1- Distribution of Different Work Arrangements among Participants*

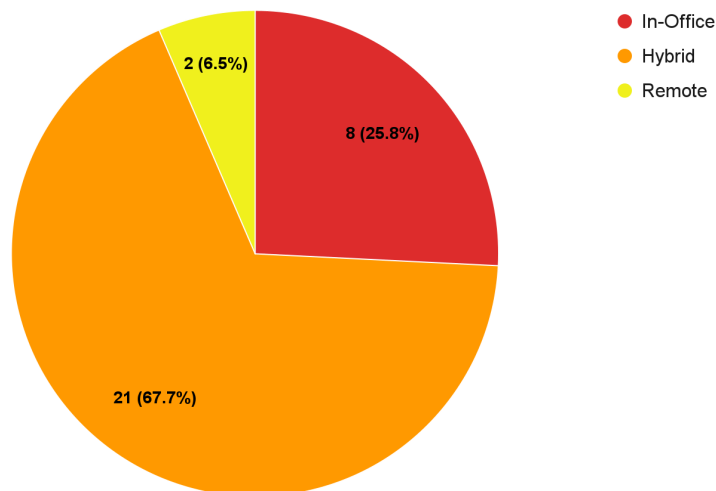


Table 3 - Selection of Companies

<b>Code</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Employees</b>
Company A	Professional Service Network	Denmark	~2.000
Company B	Legal Tech Startup	Germany	9
Company C	Local Tourism Board	Sweden	27
Company D	Fishery Management	Iceland	75
Company E	Engineering and Design Company	Sweden	~19.000*
Company F	Carbon Tech Startup	Germany	31
Company G	Furniture Retail Company	Denmark	~8.000+

\*Globally

### 3.5 Data Analysis

To analyse the data, we recorded the interviews in compliance with NDA regulations and subsequently transcribed and coded each of them, extracting relevant quotes. We coded in order to draw meaningful conclusions about the data. This entails assigning numerical values to participants' responses with the purpose, in order to present the collected data effectively (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Therefore, we could draw the conclusions based on patterns observed in the condensed dataset. Since we conducted focus group interviews, it took a significant amount of time dedicated to transcribing the interviews. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) when transcribing interviews, researchers must do it thoroughly to avoid mistakes and errors. After conducting and transcribing the interviews, we identified the common and recurring themes and new insights, forming our findings, as presented in 4.8. The process was time-consuming since we had to make sure to complete one interview transcription before moving to the next one to avoid impacting the analysis of the data. As researchers, we are aware of the potential biases that may influence the data collection and analysis process. These biases can include personal beliefs or prior knowledge that might affect our interpretation of the

findings. In order to mitigate these biases, we took precautions to maintain confidentiality and impartiality during the research process, where we adopted an open-minded attitude, set our personal opinions aside, and focused on our participants' perspectives rather than posing our own biases (Thomas, 2022). Ensuring these factors is crucial in mitigating biases in research.

## 3.6 Ethical Considerations

### 3.6.1 Data Protection

When contacting the potential participants we assured them to conduct the interviews in compliance with their data regulations, presenting the results anonymously (not naming the companies or employees) and offering them to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).

*“The interviews will be held in compliance with your data regulations, the results will be anonymised and we are happy to sign an NDA. Please feel free to contact us regarding any concerns”* (See Appendix 1).

Some companies required us to sign an NDA, in collaboration with other companies the written agreement of us conducting the interviews in compliance with their data regulations (See Appendix 1) was sufficient. When conducting the in-person interviews, we asked the participants if everyone agreed to use voice recording, for the sake of transcribing the interview and gaining results. When displaying the results we asked participants for their titles and for how detailed those could be presented to assure their anonymity. We also mentioned the possibility of proofreading their parts, allowing for last changes before publication. Some companies made use of this offer.

### 3.6.2 Research Method

In addition to the guaranteed data protection, the chosen research method of focus group interviews provides different opportunities and challenges for the participants. On one hand, it offers less anonymity, and participants could potentially fear voicing their opinion in front of their colleagues and superiors, fearing negative consequences for their careers. On the other hand, it enables a naturally flowing discussion between employees of the same company.

### 3.6.3 In-Person versus Digital Video Interviews

All interviews were conducted either in person or via digital video interviews, and none via other means of communication, such as telephone. When conducting video interviews, we had previously asked the participants if they agreed to screen-record them. The screen recordings made exact transcription of the interviews possible. An ethical consideration of video interviews is that visual cues, for instance mimic, gestic and reactions can be picked up, however, this might impact the objectivity of the interviewer (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Therefore all interviews fall under this bias. In addition, the participants were screen recorded instead of only being voice recorded, making it easier for us to match the statements to the participants. Through the steps taken to ensure the interviewees' anonymity, we encountered no issues when gaining participants for our focus groups. However, we encountered challenges listed under the 3.8 limitations.

### 3.6.4 Culture

The interviews were conducted with companies based in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Iceland. Additionally, the participants had different ethnicities and were based in different countries. This could lead to cultural differences, which adds to the ethical considerations. Further, the interviews were conducted with companies of different industries, as researchers we are aware of the possibility of different company cultures. Due to the limited scope of this research, it can not further be discussed but could pose an interesting angle or specialisation for further research.

## 3.7 Quality Criteria

Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) emphasise that for qualitative research it is relevant to be aware of **validity** and **reliability** and **replicability** as quality criteria.

### 3.7.1 Validity

Validity is a strength of qualitative research and is achieved “when the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the reader of an accountant” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, cited in Creswell, p. 201, 2014). Throughout the interview the quality criteria of

validity were granted through established “trustworthiness,” “authenticity” and “credibility” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, cited in Creswell, 2014). This was granted by the researchers through the research design. We asked the participants to have a casual conversation, creating a setting in which everyone could feel comfortable voicing their opinion. It was important for us to ensure that every participant felt comfortable because only then valid data could be produced. By discussing contrary information, opportunities versus challenges, and aiming for diverse perspectives, we could further add to the credibility (Creswell, 2014). By assuring the participants of presenting the findings in an anonymised way and offering to sign an NDA, as described in 3.8 limitations, we aimed at gaining the participants’ trust. Throughout the interview, we also offered to leave out certain parts or statements, if the participants did not feel comfortable sharing them. We further offered the participants to double-check the content and make final comments after having transcribed and analysed the interviews. However, not all companies followed up on this offer. Due to the limited time and extensive follow-up communication between us as researchers and all participants, we did not get the opportunity to gain feedback from all respondents, which would have increased the validity. The companies that did not follow up claimed that they trusted us and felt comfortable with what was said in the interview - the anonymisation indeed helped to gain their trust. Still, the gained feedback from the companies who followed up on the offer, was positive throughout, hinting at a certain degree of validity. Given an extended time frame we would have taken more time for structured follow-up interviews and debriefing to increase the validity even more.

### 3.7.2 Reliability

“Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, p. 48, 2022). Our research method is qualitative and explorative - we are collecting individual perceptions through a focus group study. Perceptions cannot be measured, do not remain the same, and can therefore not be repeated. Due to this we also decided to display our findings in a non-quantitative way. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), one approach to assessing the credibility of collected data is by examining the degree of correlations among responses obtained from different sources and through various data collection methods. We identified common themes and some participants came up with responses that were similar to those given in other interviews. However other responses deviated and largely depended on

external variables. The findings stress the relevance of individual situations, perceptions, and preferences of participants which are subject to change. Therefore, we only claim limited reliability.

### 3.7.3 Replicability

Replicability is a quality criterion and means that the study must be capable of replication (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Through a detailed description of the research procedures, we aim to increase the replicability, enabling further research to be inspired by our research design. However, we do not claim this quality criterion. Our research was dependent on many external variables - additionally, human perceptions are subject to change and depend on changing situations. The participants produced relevant findings and some themes were mentioned more frequently, repeating in other interviews; however, studies of other companies might produce entirely different results. Replicability was not the goal of our research, we aimed for an original angle to investigate a research problem that has not been examined in this way before. Focus group interviews provide certain opportunities and challenges that have been reflected upon in 3.4.1. However, we aspire our research design and procedure to be an as inspiration for further research.

We do not claim our findings to be transferable, as they acknowledge variables specific to company size, industry, culture, personality, and personal situation. Nonetheless, we identified common themes and saw potential relevance in a comprehensive study conducted on a larger scale. Another option for further research would be to focus on a specific industry or only investigate a specific industry.

## 3.8 Limitations

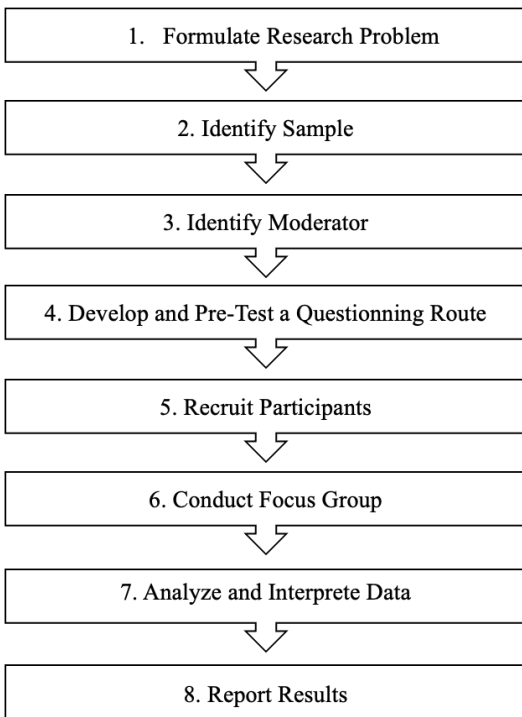
Initially we faced difficulties when assembling our sample size. We contacted over 70 people via LinkedIn in March 2023, but did not get as many responses as we had hoped for. Due to LinkedIn filtering messages of unknown persons, we saw that in spite of getting the LinkedIn premium function, most of the messages did not go through and were not read by the recipients. Many HR managers got back to us, highly interested in participating in our study but then had to cancel as they could not assemble other participants. Our research method included assembling

five employees simultaneously, which posed a challenge to some organisations. Either they did not have the resources to make five employees available simultaneously, conflicting schedules made it impossible for employees to agree on a timeslot, or the HR managers simply did not find enough potential participants. This way we only acquired one focus group interview. After encountering the challenges of assembling participants we decided to include other methods of sampling. In addition, we published posts on LinkedIn, which were shared by our supervisor. Through comments under this post, we gained two focus group interviews. Further we contacted companies within our personal networks and gained four more focus group interviews. Our sampling process was therefore not consistent, but due to time restrictions, we accepted this limitation, leading us to the final sample size of seven companies. With our goal being the conduction of five focus group interviews, we finally managed to conduct a total of seven focus group studies. Unfortunately, some participants had to drop out due to illness or conflicting schedules. The focus group interviews with Company C and D only had 4 participants, and the one with Company F only had 3 participants. The remaining four groups had five participants each. Our research design was aimed at five participants per group, which we fulfilled five times. Facing difficulties due to dropouts, we decided to still include the focus groups with fewer participants in order to gain more data. However, we are aware of limitations due to potentially changed group dynamics and quality criteria. As reflected in 3.4.3 the conduction of the interview was not consistent, which could reflect limitations regarding the research method. We had hoped to conduct our interviews in late April and early May in order to have enough time for the analysis of the data. The chosen research method involved a lot of planning and time investment. We underestimated the high planning effort involving many stakeholders. We were highly dependent on external decisions and the follow-up conversations after confirming their interest in participation took up to three weeks. Uncertain about the implementation of our method, we considered switching to individual interviews at some point, as this involved less planning. Through communication with the contact persons, we learned that it was a challenge for them to assemble five employees who could cover the same time slot. Many contact persons agreed on being part of the individual interviews but cancelled when failing to assemble 4 more employees. In consultation with our supervisor and after reviewing the literature and methodology part, we decided that in order to fulfil our research purpose we had to stick to our initial approach. Through extensive follow-up communication and continuously contacting more

companies at a later point, we managed to conduct seven interviews. Our interviews were conducted on May 3rd, May 9th, May 16th, May 17th, May 24th, and two were conducted on May 26th. This left us with relatively little time to transcribe and analyse our results, and gather feedback from participants; but due to continuous work and an intense work period in late May, we managed to sufficiently finish our study. However, for further research, we would recommend an extended time frame.

### 3.9 Method Discussion

*Figure 2- Focus Group Steps by Tremblay, Hevner and Berndt (2010)*



According to the focus group steps by Tremblay, Hevner and Berndt (2010) we began by formulating the research problem as displayed in 1.2 and 1.3. Afterwards, we identified a sample, as displayed in 3.4, with us functioning as moderators. We then developed our questions, finalised the recruitment of participants, and finally conducted the focus group study. We transcribed, analysed, and interpreted the data and finally reported our results as displayed in 5. and 6.



## 4. Results and Analytical Discussion

*In the following chapter, we present the findings and results of the focus group interviews, which were conducted according to the methodology presented in 3.1-3.8. Our findings are presented and simultaneously followed by an analytical discussion. The 31 participants have worked with different work arrangements (See Figure 1). We examined the opportunities, challenges and impact on work-life interdependency of different work arrangements: physical in-office, hybrid and remote. To ensure a coherent representation of our results, we decided to present the findings tailored to alternative work arrangements, and discuss these opposing the traditional physical in-office model.*

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### 4.1 Company A

In this section, we present insightful findings from the participants belonging to Company A, a professional service network company located in Denmark. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as Participants A1 to A5 (as listed in Table 4).

*Table 4 - Participant Information from Company A*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
A1	<i>HR Consultant</i>	<i>Physical In-Office</i>	<i>8 years</i>
A2	<i>HR business advisor in Audit</i>	<i>Physical In-Office</i>	<i>Almost 1 year</i>
A3	<i>Recruiter</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>5 years</i>
A4	<i>People &amp; Person Strategy Team</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>7 years</i>
A5	<i>Privacy Consultant</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>1 year</i>

Through the interview, it became evident that employees at Company A positively perceived alternative work arrangements, adding variety to the traditional physical in-office work model

and bringing opportunities. However, the participants also reflected on the challenges posed by alternative work arrangements. They evaluated the opportunities and challenges differently, reasoning it with their personal situations and preferences. When reflecting on opportunities, the most common recurring themes were flexibility and time efficiency, more family time, less commuting, decreased pollution, an expanded pool of international applicants, and task-specific efficiency. However, when discussing challenges, the most common recurring themes were personal contact and social interaction, mental health, collaboration, quality of communication, the difficulties of managing oneself, and a lack of managerial guidance. The participants also hinted at a generational gap and decreased women's visibility, posing a diversity challenge. Some topics were evaluated ambiguously, both as an opportunity and a challenge. One example is the changed handling of sick days and the decision of working or not working from home when sick. All participants confirmed the increased blurring of work and life and evaluated this differently. Alternative work arrangements lead to increased opportunities for employees to reconcile work and life, but simultaneously create a challenge for separating those entities and setting boundaries. The participants had different perceptions and opinions on availability after work, some valuing a strict separation of work and life, setting boundaries in the form of automated out-of-office emails, the use of two phones and others not minding the blurring of work and life, checking emails and taking calls out of curiosity, reasoned by wanting to be kept in the loop or the fear of missing out on crucial information. They reflected on their individual perceptions of this, being influenced by their personal situations and preferences. Especially participants who have children reported that they value the flexibility provided by work arrangements alternative to physical in-office work, as it enables them to reconcile family and work, being able to divide their days into two parts if needed. Overall the participants argued that they value it highly to be given the choice, flexibly deciding between physical in-office, hybrid and remote work. In the following, the most common recurring themes are mentioned and exemplarily underlaid with direct quotes from the employees.

## 4.1.1 Perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements

The participants reported that flexible work arrangements make it possible to split their working hours, allowing them to take on relevant appointments, settle chores and spend time with family, for instance picking up their kids from school. *“I love the flexibility it provides, even though I prefer being in the office”* - Participant A4. S/he reported the possibility of working from home and splitting work days in order to prioritise family time is a privilege. Most participants said that not having to get ready in the morning in the same way, leaving the house, and commuting to work saves them a lot of time they can use wisely otherwise. *“When I work from home, I can use the time to work, which I would use to shower, dress up and get ready to go out in the world. It doesn't take that long, but just the fact that you don't have to get ready for the whole day ahead - I feel like there is something psychological about not going out. And of course, I don't use all my working hours doing laundry, but you can do small things around the house in between. Instead of talking to a colleague, you start the laundry or dishwasher and that saves a lot of time at the end of the day”*. - Participant A4. Participant A5 agreed and added: *“There are certain things that require you to be home. For instance, taking a package, starting the laundry or dishwasher or putting something in the oven that needs to be there for two hours. It doesn't take long to just press a button or open the door; but you can't really do that when you come home at 6 pm”*.

### **More time for family - *“I have two small kids and I try to split my day”* - Participant A4**

Participant A4 works from the office and from home, s/he described time efficiency and family time as the opportunity when working hybrid: *“I try to stay at home one or two days a week. I do that primarily because it saves me time. I have two small kids and I try to split my day. I usually take breaks for 4 hours during the day or work hours, but then I spend time in the evening instead, when my kids go to bed. Before the pandemic I don't think I've ever worked from home”*. - Participant A4.

### **Less Commuting - *“I can save a little bit of time by working from home”* - Participant A3**

The participants reported more time efficiency and flexibility also linked to their means of transport: *“It takes me around 1 hour to get to the office, therefore I can save a little bit of time by working from home, maybe in the morning and then go to the office around midday when the traffic is not as bad”*. - Participant A3. Participant A5 argued that the employees can save time by not commuting to the office and back daily, enabling them to use their time more efficiently. . Therefore they can use time more efficiently. Besides the time, it also saves money spent on transport and fuel. Additionally, it means less traffic and pollution, positively impacting the environment.

### **Changed Meeting Culture and Less Pollution - *“Sometimes flying to China for a meeting”***

#### **Participant A2**

The participants reported that some meetings can be done equally well online. They also reflected on meeting culture in general and on them spending a lot of time in meetings that are not always productive and keep them from other tasks. *Participant A2* reflected that back in the day, employees had to commute long ways for meetings or interviews, *“sometimes flying to China for a meeting”*, which of course, reflected in cost, time, and CO2 pollution. Online meetings instead of in-person meetings can save time by not commuting.

### **International Pool of Applicants - *“We can meet many international candidates”* -**

#### ***Participant A3***

When hiring people, The HR department is provided with a bigger pool of international applicants, making it possible to hire talent globally and pick the best candidate available, disregarding the location. Participant A3 argued: *“We can now conduct interviews online. This way we can meet many international candidates”*.

### **Task Specific Efficiency - *“I stay home some days and do the work where I really need to focus. Otherwise, I’m running in and out of meetings”* - Participant A4**

Some employees reported that they are able to focus better when performing certain tasks from home. Participant A4 said that s/he likes to stay home some days and do the work where s/he has to focus, because when at the office s/he is running in and out of meetings and it is harder to focus.

## 4.1.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements

### **Contact, Social Interaction and Personal Connection “First time I met my coworkers was when I was already employed” - Participant A5**

Participant A1 prefers physical in-office work because s/he is better connected with colleagues. Participant A1: *“I mostly work in-office and that's my own choice. It's not that anyone has told me that I need to be here for a certain amount of days, but I feel that that is the best way that I can bring value to my role and thereby also perform best towards my teams. I have chosen to go to work so I can be closer to the people”*. Participant A2 agreed and said: *“I like to get into the office because my work is to be close to the managers and help them do their job as managers. And for our relationships, it is better if I am close to them”*, Participant A2 added: *“You need to earn the trust of your colleagues as well”*. Being hired remotely could also mean that you do not meet your coworkers before starting to work for the company. Participant A5 reported their personal experience: *“First time I met my coworkers was when I was already employed”*. The participants claimed that getting to know their real-life colleagues is a valuable experience and improves professional collaboration. The participants argued that the individuals who only or primarily work remotely only build personal relationships with their coworkers to a certain extent. In order to meet physically from time to time, Participant A5 reported: *“We usually all try to come in on Fridays. Usually it works and we all have an in person team meeting”*.

### **Quality of Communication, Collaboration, and Mental Health - “They call it Zoom or Teams fatigue” - Participant A5**

One challenge that all the participants mentioned is the quality of communication. When sharing one physical space, communication can be conveyed on a deeper level, including face-to-face, mimic, gestic, humour, and body language. Participant A5 reflected on physical and online meetings: *“I think the physical meetings bring something different, some humour, some body language, the personality that Teams and Zoom just cannot do”*. Also, communication and collaboration can occur more spontaneously, initiated through random chats at the coffee machine. S/he also reflects on the aspect s/he misses most when working from home, which is the random conversation in the canteen, by the coffee machine or in the elevator. *“I have met so many people working on relevant projects because I have overheard something, said something,*

*or just sat next to me. And then we actually worked on the same thing and later collaborated on something because of these random conversations". - Participant A5.*

Working from the office increases networking opportunities. Additionally, it can increase the bonding and building of personal relations, team bonding, and trust between workers. Participant A5 added: *"Online meetings as the only form of communication can result in Zoom or Teams Fatigue", and even lead to a decrease in mental health, feeling alienated and isolated.*

### **Managing Oneself = More Freedom = More Responsibility**

When working from home, the participants reported they are not monitored and do not monitor strictly as long as projects are finished and desirable results are achieved. They argued that decreased supervision could pose a challenge and requires discipline, structure, and self-management. It could lead to employees working too little, taking advantage of the provided flexibility, or working too much, experiencing confusion, overload, and burnout. Employees have more freedom but, therefore, are also responsible for creating their own work-life balance and boundaries. For this to work, the participants emphasised the need of taking on more responsibility, also holding managers and employers accountable for supporting and guiding other employees. They argued that especially new employees needed guidance and support when learning to work for the company. The participants reported that they feel trusted by their superiors and trusted their inferiors, but this trust needs to be earned.

### **Lack of Managerial Guidance - *"When You're Working From Home, You Don't Have Your Manager Close By"* - Participant A3**

Some of the participants expressed that working in a hybrid arrangement has become increasingly important but also challenging. Participant A4 mentioned that having a manager nearby provided structure and helped setting to prevent excessive work. Participant A3 added that working from home can offer freedom, but some employees may struggle with their self-discipline and feel pressured to put in extra hours. They emphasised the need for a manager to establish guidelines and rules to avoid overcommitting or getting overwhelmed with work and online meetings. *"When working from home, you do not have your manager nearby which gives you a lot of freedom, but some people could have difficulties handling that. Moreover, there could be a downside for them; they could feel like working two extra hours. Because time is running*

*from them, they could feel like they need to put extra effort in"- Participant A3.* Participant A4 agreed and highlighted an intriguing aspect, raising the question of whether employees were able to define their own work hours and establish a work-life balance without direct supervision. S/he emphasised that this responsibility extended also to the employers, not only the employees. Participant A2 argued that many employees, especially the new ones, need help to structure their work from home: *"Another challenge of hybrid working is onboarding. It is a challenging process for onboarding. Some employees are young and inexperienced; maybe it is their first job out of school or university. Maybe they have a hard time working from home because they do not have any task unless someone is helping them or supporting them. Still, of course the grownups need to help the young ones or the new employees to learn how to work and assist them in their work. Moreover, that does not work if people work three days from home because they are not supporting the rest of the group"*. Additionally, Participant A5 mentioned they have a rule within the company, that new employees are required to work from the office for their onboarding process. This indicates the importance of physical attendance during the initial stages of joining the organisation. However, Participant A2 critically questioned: *"Where is the line when you are new and now you are not new anymore?"*.

### **Generational Gap**

During the interview, some of the participants mentioned a generational gap and employees having varying levels of ambition and perspectives on work-life balance according to their age. Older employees tend to hold onto traditional work arrangements and are reluctant to alternative ones. However, according to Participant A2, s/he has experienced seeing younger employees as less ambitious and belittling their work ethics when working non-traditional times or remotely. The generational differences among employees are a relevant topic for company A, which regularly publishes studies on the topic. The discourse further evolved, concluding that employees belonging to new generations may be faced with more pressure due to their upbringing in a high-performing environment and external issues such as social media, climate crisis, inflation, and war.

**Diversity: Women's Visibility and Career Progression - "Becoming less visible in the company"- Participant A3**

Participant A3 raised the issue of women's visibility and career progression, since s/he has experienced that women make use of alternative work arrangements more often. This would further decrease the visibility of women on the job: *"One extra diversity and inclusion challenge is gender visibility. It can be important in career progression. There has been a concern about how women might take up the chance to work from home more often than men, and in that way, becoming less visible in the company, impacting them negatively in terms of career progression in general. We are still struggling with getting more gender balance at the top of our organisation, and this can be something that can challenge that diversity goal."*

### **Managerial Challenges**

The participants reflected on managerial guidance being essential to all employees, especially those new to their roles or the company. They perceived managerial guidance as more challenging to perform remotely, as *"When you are working you are home, you do not have your manager close by"*- Participant A3. Participant A2 added to that: *"It is a huge responsibility for the leaders, actually teaching all our young colleagues how to navigate work-life balance. It is so individual what fits them. Our managers really need to learn how to do it"*. Participant A3: *"Furthermore, I think there are some situations where you, for example, as a manager, need to be aware of your talents, your employees, to help them with creating a good structure and creating them so it can work for them"*. The participants also stressed that careful management and an increased effort when scheduling, planning and communicating were needed.

### **4.1.3 Ambiguous Perception (Opportunities and Challenges) of Alternative Work Arrangements**

The participants expressed different perceptions about working arrangements and evaluated them differently. Participant A2 argued that having all the possibilities or options does not necessarily result in improved work performance. Instead, it introduces the challenge of making choices among the alternatives.

**Opportunity: Working While Being Sick** *"You're not a hero anymore if you go to the office with a fever"* Participant A2



Most of the participants reported having worked while being sick because of personal pressure and fear of losing track of work. They perceived working while sick as an opportunity to support their team and do some work, but emphasised that there was no external pressure from the managers. Due to the pandemic and the opportunity of remote working, the participants reported that they did not feel pressured to come into the office when feeling sick.

*"I think things have changed in a positive direction that you stay home more often. I remember five years ago having job interviews and being close to the deadline. So I went in with the fever. When I look at it now, that does not make sense. However, that was just how things went,"- Participant A2* S/he sees an opportunity in flexibly working from home instead of coming into the office: *"It is not black and white. I would say there is this grey line where you are not that sick. However, I can't work 8 hours in the office because either I am contagious or I am not able to concentrate for 8 hours, but I know that some of my coworkers work from home when they are sick, only for a few hours or to attend meetings"..*

**Challenge: Not Working While Being Sick** *"I never really tell people if I am only sick for one day"- Participant A1*

The participants also reflected on possible downsides; not taking their time to rest and working while being sick prevented them from getting healthy again. All of them reported that they would try not to work if they were severely sick. However, they agreed that they would try to catch up with work and work from home when sick unless they were really sick. *"Actually, to be honest, I never really tell people if I am only sick for one day with a cold. I would probably work, but if I am very sick, then I of course, tell my colleagues that I cannot work"- Participant A1.* However, all of the participants reported that they would most likely work a bit from home when sick, only for their own purposes of keeping track of what is happening and retain some sense of control. They mentioned that when people are for many days, it can take a lot of time to get back into everything and regain a complete overview. Different opportunities and challenges were identified, caused by the changed approach of sick leave: *"I see a challenge when it comes to sick days. They seem to be blurring out because of the hybrid work."- Participant A5.*

In addition, they emphasised that there has never been any elevated pressure from employers to work when being sick or unavailable for other reasons. Participant A4: *"You would never hear an employer say to you: even though you are really sick, I need you to work. That would not be the*

*case, but if you had that client deadline, you are just doing it because you want to be a team player"*

#### 4.1.4 Work-Life Interdependency

##### **Opportunities: Increased Flexibility**

The participants acknowledged the opportunities and positive outcomes associated with alternative work arrangements, emphasising the notable improvements in their work-life interdependency. They expressed that the increased flexibility and enhanced time efficiency afforded by these arrangements increased work-life and work-family balance: *"I would argue that people's work-life interdependency has increased, but that also depends on your mental health. Establishing boundaries is crucial, but the opportunity to accomplish tasks from home provides numerous benefits"*- Participant A5.

##### **Challenges: Availability and Creating Boundaries**

When we asked about working outside the office, Participant A3 answered: *"I think it is about balance and boundaries, right?"*. Participant A5 added: *"If you are not good at keeping boundaries, it is probably way worse for you"*. Along with increased freedom and responsibility, the participants discussed the challenges of setting boundaries and limits to availability. With some participants splitting their work days, working in the mornings, keeping the afternoons free for family activities and household duties, and then working again in the evenings, the question was raised if they felt pressured to respond to emails sent late in the evening, during their sick leave or vacation. *"I would argue that people must have some structure in their mindset. What do I do when I receive an email at 8:00 pm? Do I answer it? Do I read it? Do I wait for the next day? For some people, it is natural; others work more because they work from home. That is one of the challenges"*. The participants discussed different perspectives, from creating strict boundaries, having two phones, and not responding to work matters when being off work, to checking in out of curiosity and feeling pressured to keep track and respond immediately. They discussed strategies, from automated out-of-office notices to different phones and logged-out accounts. *"I have both my private email and my work mail on my personal phone, but I do not get notifications. I just really like to have some extent of overview and control, but that does not mean that I answer the emails. It is just that I like to be aware of what is going on and what*

*emails are coming in”- Participant A4.* Additionally, s/he mentioned that every Friday afternoon, s/he shuts down the work email which ensures s/he does not get any information from the work unless actively logging into the account. This can be a way of creating a clear boundary and taking a break from work-related communications. Participant A1 shared their experience of setting boundaries when it comes to work emails and mentioned that s/he does not receive any work email on his/her phone. Sometimes s/he actively chooses to log in to the work email. The participants argued that when individuals consciously decide to check the work email based on expectations and priorities, they take control of their time and avoid being constantly interrupted by notifications .

Participant A1 then acknowledged, depending on the importance of the email, that it may still influence employees by its content. Participant A4 added: *"When I work long hours, I rather stay at the office because if I would work from home these days, I would never feel like I had time off. I would much rather sit here until late in the evening and then go home knowing I am done with my work"*. It became evident that clear communication played a vital role in effectively coordinating different work arrangements. The participants emphasised the importance of employers clearly conveying their expectations to employees, particularly regarding the need for a response or respecting employees' personal time. Open and clear information exchange was identified as a key aspect of fostering a work environment where boundaries are respected and employees' private time is valued: *"I think the important part is to communicate with your team. I usually look at my emails and answer them immediately, but that is my way of working and my way of structuring my things. However, I do not expect them to answer my emails when they are not working"*- Participant A3. Generally, the participants reported that no one was expected or should feel pressured to respond in their free time. Participant A4 reflected that setting boundaries can be challenging especially when starting a new job: *"It is important to say to yourself, now I am closing my computer, because people can easily end up working a little bit all the time, and I think that is unhealthy; at least, it is for me"*.

## 4.2 Company B

In this section, we present insightful findings and results from the participants associated with Company B, a legal tech startup located in Germany. The entire team works physically in-office,

although they are allowed to work from home in special situations or when necessary. Furthermore, one participant is currently undergoing a trial period of working from home one day per week, in order to facilitate a better balance between work and her role as a parent. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as B1 to B5 (as listed in Table 5).

*Table 5 - Participant Information from Company B*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<i>B1</i>	<i>Project manager</i>	<i>Physical In Office</i>	<i>3 years</i>
<i>B2</i>	<i>Working Student Customer Service</i>	<i>Physical In Office</i>	<i>1 year</i>
<i>B3</i>	<i>Working Student Customer Service</i>	<i>Physical In Office</i>	<i>2 years</i>
<i>B4</i>	<i>Customer Service Manager</i>	<i>Physical In Office</i>	<i>1,5 years</i>
<i>B5</i>	<i>Marketing Manager</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>1,5 years</i>

The participants of Company B have only limited experience with different work arrangements, making it hard to critically question aspects. However, all of them have experienced it, at least during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the only option was working from home, or during physical injuries. Only one employee could experimentally stay away from office, in consultation with the CEOs and company management. Since it is a personal setting, people know each other well on a personal basis and have already established a trust base. The team is young, with all participants being 25-35. Company B is a small company with flat hierarchies, all participants reported having a strong team bond, and all of them are friends outside of work. The participants enjoy coming to the office and attribute high significance to the social aspect of work. All participants reported that working from home seems possible, but it poses a challenge to the team dynamics leading them to prefer working physically in-office. Ideally, the participants would choose to work from home once a week or work remotely every other week. They suggested that a “me day” every other week would be beneficial to plan appointments such as “handicraft appointments”, doctor’s appointments, or following simple household chores such as accepting a parcel or doing laundry. They also considered the opportunity to work from

abroad and go on workations when desired, but stressed that this ideally would include all employees to not create discord and improve the team bond even more.

## 4.2.1 Perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work

### Arrangements

#### **Flexibility and Time Efficiency - “Having family, time efficiency is key”- Participant B5**

When working with alternative work arrangements during the Covid-19 pandemic, participants recalled that they could finish household chores such as doing the laundry or fixing other appointments, contributing to more time for other activities. *“When I can work from home sometimes, I am more flexible. I would argue when having a family, time efficiency is key. On the days I work from home I can start work earlier in the morning and finish earlier, which sometimes makes it possible for me to have the whole afternoon off for my family”- Participant B5.*

#### **Family Time - “More quality time with my family”- Participant B5**

Only participant B5 is a parent, therefore s/he has the exceptional opportunity to work from home. Being allowed to work from home some days makes it possible for the participant to spend more time with family: *“Working from home gives me the opportunity to spend more quality time with my family. If I work from home I can work in the morning, then spend the afternoon with my daughter and then in the evening I can get some more work done, when my partner gets back from work and can take care of our daughter”- Participant B5.* Participant B4 expressed his/her perspective on that, acknowledging that while it would be nice to have the opportunity to work from home, s/he personally enjoys going to the office to meet the people. Additionally, participant B4 considered it fair that B5 has the privilege of being the only one allowed to work from home since s/he is currently the only employee that has family responsibilities: *“If I was in that situation I would also like to enjoy the same privileges”- Participant B4.*

#### **Less Commuting - “These 2 hours I lose every day”- Participant B5**

The office is located in a big city, and most participants reported that it takes them around a 1,5-2 hour drive to and from the office every day. When working remotely, they save a lot of time driving, which increases time spent on other activities. Participant B4 said the long driving time would be the main argument for her/him to sometimes work from home: *“I drive 40 minutes each way, if one bus is delayed or I need to make an errand on the way, it definitely takes me 2 hours in total”- Participant B4.* Participant B5 agreed and added: *“The way to the office is quite long, depending on traffic it can take 2 hours or more. These I lose every day and could use for other aspects in my life”.*

### **Working When Sick - *“When I was injured, I was grateful for the opportunity to work from home”- Participant B2***

The participants emphasised that when they are injured, they were able to perform tasks from home which contributes to their recovery, instead of commuting to the office. Furthermore, the participants of Company B reported that clear communication is key to successful planning of shifts and collaboration. Although all the participants acknowledged the opportunities for alternative work arrangements they all claimed to prioritise the opportunities of physical in-office work over the opportunities for alternative work arrangements. Both participants B2 and B5 had different sports injuries since starting work at the company, and both were able to perform their tasks from home, supporting their team and not missing work. *“I was not in great pain, and I was feeling completely fine otherwise. Commuting to the office would have been painful and annoying, so I was grateful for the opportunity to work from home. If I had been in great pain I would not have worked. But I was fine, and would have just been bored with nothing to do”-Participant B2.* S/he highlighted that benefit benefit of being able to complete tasks without having any safety risks due to commuting to the office. Participant B3 further elaborated *“If I am severely sick, I would of course not work. But if you I work a bit from home, I would of course support the people in the office”.*

## **4.2.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements**

### **Quality of Communication - *“It all just takes longer”- Participant B5***

The participants of Company B reported that communication was not as easy and efficient when working alternatively and argued that some questions that would take few minutes in person,

would usually require more extensive communication via communication channels such as slack or calls: *“Sometimes you send a message on Slack, and then the person doesn’t see it right away and then you wait and if it’s urgent you have to call the person and it all just takes longer”*- Participant B5. Participant B1 agreed and mentioned face-to-face communication as one of the main opportunities when working physically in-office, resulting in improved team bonding.

**Decreased Contact and Social Interaction - *“I enjoy having personal chats and socialising, instead of only sitting in front of the laptop alone”*- Participant B3**

Participant B3 mentioned that s/he enjoys socialising at the office and missed it during remote working during covid regulations: *“During the Covid-19 Pandemic I attended classes online and realised that it is not great for me. I sat at home and felt unmotivated when there were no people around. I enjoy having personal chats and socialising, instead of only sitting in front of the laptop alone. This way I will usually have a more pleasant day. That is why I prefer working in-office”*- Participant B3.

**Structuring and Administration - *“The office would be empty”*- Participant B2**

The participants reported that structuring home office days could pose a challenge. Due to the nature of their work, some people need to be in the office and collaborate with others since the company only has 9 employees. They argued when working from home, it could be a challenge to coordinate when everyone is working from the office: *“We are too few people and a lot of us only work 50%, so it would not be possible for everyone to stay away one or multiple days a week, then the office would be empty”*- Participant B2.

**Team Building - *“We eat lunch together almost every day. Our daily lunches have become a tradition that I don’t want to miss”*- Participant B4**

The participants argued that team building can be challenging when people work from home. They reported, when they had to work remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic, the team bond suffered. Additionally, they reported that when working in-office they have a strong bond and sense of belonging, with daily lunches together, after-work beers, and other activities: *“We eat lunch together almost everyday, and it has become a tradition that I don’t want to miss. We also try to do a team activity at least once a month”*- Participant B4. Participant B2 added: *“Since we*

*are all friends outside of work (and have either been previously or became friends at work), we also do spontaneous activities outside of work without much planning. We go for after work drinks or meet on the weekends*". The participants pointed out the potential challenge of integrating someone in the team who would be the only one not participating in office activities. They argued that having all employees working in-office and engaging in activities fostered a sense of belonging within the team.

### **Managerial and Common Challenges**

Participant E3 emphasised that having a regular hybrid work arrangement for the employees would require a lot of planning effort from the management. However, the participants recognised that this was not only the manager's responsibility, but due to the small company size and flat hierarchies also the employees' responsibility. The participants acknowledged the whole team's responsibility for making alternative work arrangements successful in the long run.

## **4.2.3 Ambiguous Perception (Opportunities and Challenges) of Alternative Work Arrangements**

### **Task Specific Efficiency - "At home there is less distraction"- Participant B5 versus "At home I get distracted more easily"- Participant B2**

The participants argued that some tasks could be performed more in peace when at home, since there may be distraction at the office. Some participants expressed their personal experiences, stating that they feel more productive when doing physical in-office work compared to working from home. However, *Participant B5 mentioned: "I feel like it really depends on what I am doing and how much I have to focus. If I want to collaborate with others, then of course it's better to do it from the office, but I must also admit that I think I would get some tasks done quicker when at home. When I am at the office I catch myself chatting with the others, having an extended lunch, coffee or cigarette breaks - at home there is less distraction"*.

Some of the participants work in customer service, making calls on a regular basis. Therefore, some said they could focus better when working from home, instead of a noisy office: *"We have been provided with good headsets, so it is possible to make the calls from the office. But of course the office can be a noisy place, and if many people talk at the same time, it can feel like a*



*call centre. Sometimes I feel like making calls would be something I could do more quietly when working from home”- Participant B2.* Participant B3 added that there are some tasks s/he could easily perform from home. Therefore s/he would appreciate having the option of mostly working from the office but also sometimes working from home, depending on the task and also how s/he feels.

## 4.2.4 Work-Life Interdependency

### **Increased Work-life Integration**

All participants reported that alternative work arrangements could give them the opportunity to combine chores and appointments with work, leading to a changed work-life interdependency. They would not have to take vacation days when doing chores such as quick appointments or errands. The flexibility and time efficiency mentioned under 4.1.1 would contribute to an increased work-life balance, especially in the context of spending more time with family. None of the participants reported having a work phone and do not feel the need to separate work and private life more. As mentioned before, the participants mentioned the close relationship they have with each other, which also leads to the blurring of work and life. They argued that answering a text or sending a voice message after hours did not feel like a commitment since they are often in touch privately as well: *“When we have a vacation, we try to not be available, and for me, it works. However, we are aware that if there are any problems that the person on a vacation can help with, it would not be a problem to reach out to that person, since we are also connected privately.” Participant B1.*

## 4.3 Company C

In this section, we present insightful findings and results from the participants belonging to Company C, a Local Tourism Board located in Sweden. Unfortunately, participant C5 could not participate in our interview due to illness. Therefore, this interview proceeded with four participants instead of five. However, we ensure the valuable perspectives from this interview provided us good insight for our study. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as C1 to C4 (as listed in Table 6).

Table 6 - Participant Information from Company C

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Position/Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<i>C1</i>	<i>Project Manager</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>10 Years</i>
<i>C2</i>	<i>Head of Administration</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>15 Years</i>
<i>C3</i>	<i>Project Leader</i>	<i>Physical In-Office</i>	<i>12 Years</i>
<i>C4</i>	<i>Project Leader</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>1 Month</i>
<i>C5</i>	<i>Participant cancelled due to sickness</i>		

The participants at Company C reported that there are no fixed working times and they are able to more or less make their own schedule, depending on meetings and appointments. They can flexibly choose to work from the office or remotely, with the only rule being that all employees are physically present at the office Tuesdays and Thursdays. Some meetings require their physical presence, but usually, they can join the meetings from any location. They argued that the office space is open and a great place for collaborative activities. However, when having to focus on individual tasks, they preferred working from home. The participants perceived flexibility and time efficiency as the biggest opportunities. Due to different habits and traits, they can meet their individual needs. Only one of the participants works physically in-office because s/he prefers to do it that way. The participants mentioned hybrid meetings being a challenge, both technologically but mainly socially.

While flexibility was perceived as a positive aspect by most of the participants, one of them emphasised that at least similar working times and fixed office days are necessary for successful work. Since the company is involved in event management, it provides flexibility, but also requires the employees to give back to the company by working evenings and on the weekends if required, meaning that flexibility goes both ways.

### 4.3.1 Perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements

#### **Flexibility and Time Efficiency - “People have different habits”- *Participant C3***

The participants mentioned the privilege of working from home when they want to and the trust they receive from their employers. They all agreed on the importance of trust in making their own schedules which increases their self-esteem as employees. Theoretically all employees can choose their work times flexibly. Participant C1 emphasised the importance of “social acceptance”: *“If everyone always worked roughly from 9-5 and one person always worked at night, that could be difficult to organise and probably would not be appreciated by other colleagues and the management”*. Participant C2 reported that sometimes s/he splits her day into working from home in the mornings and coming into the office later, while participant C1 comes into the office very early and leaves accordingly. However, Participant C3 comes into the office later but stays the longest. S/he used to previously work in the municipality of a big city, where people were expected to be there at certain hours. *“There is no regime in this company, but since people have different habits, it will sort itself out naturally, even without regulating it. That is an interesting reflection that no such regulation regime is necessary, it might be done organically”*- Participant C3. S/he still chooses to work physically in-office. However, s/he appreciates the theoretical flexibility of being able to book doctors’ appointments, then completing the tasks from home on those particular days. Participant C2 reported that the work hours vary and are not strictly 9-5 due to events and meetings. This provides flexibility for employees but also commitment outside the traditional work hours, with sometimes being required to work in the evenings and on weekends. *“The flexibility goes both ways. We can decide our working hours, but sometimes we are required to give back and work flexibly during events that are not strictly 9-5”*- Participant 2.

**Less commuting (Saving of resource, including money, environment) - *“The time I don’t have to commute to the office, I can use for other things”*- Participant C4**

Participant C4 emphasised the positive implications when working from home and mentions saving time through less commuting and being able to focus on other things: *“The time I don’t use commuting to work, I can use for other things such as chores around the house. This way I use my time more efficiently and have free time after work”*. Participant C1 highlighted an important perspective, emphasising that employees are also individuals with personal lives and own responsibilities. The participants recognised the value of time spent on commuting and

saving time.s. Employees better utilise their time for various aspects of their lives, thereby enhancing their overall work-life balance and well-being.

### 4.3.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements

#### **Task Specific Efficiency - *“The open office atmosphere can take a lot of energy and it is a privilege to work from home when I need to focus”- Participant C1***

The participants argued that they prefer to do certain tasks from home and others from the office. Participant C1 admitted that the open office atmosphere can take a lot of energy and it is a privilege to work from home when s/he needs to focus. If there were more opportunities for quiet rooms s/he would come to the office more often. Participant C3 pointed out that there are two conference rooms that employees can book, but they are usually used for meetings. S/he is more disciplined when s/he works from the office, because from home she does other things that can be distracting.

#### **Hybrid Meetings as a Challenge - *“If you are the only one on Teams, you can feel left out and it creates a tricky situation”- Participant C1***

The participants discussed the relevance of every employee being equally present in the meeting, either physically or remotely. Participant C1 emphasised that hybrid meetings pose a special challenge: *“It is easier to have everyone on Teams, if you have everyone in the room and one person joining on Teams, it can seem imbalanced and can pose a problem. Additionally, if you are the only one on Teams, you can feel left out and it creates a tricky situation”*.

The participants expressed concern over equal quality of the meeting when people joined online. Discussing the challenges of hybrid communication, Participant C2 added that the day prior to our interview, they had a team meeting where 5 employees joined physically and 3 people joined remotely via Teams. The leader of the meeting advised the people who were physically present to take out their computers and join the meeting via Teams because they did not have a big screen available. Despite attending the meeting physically, those 5 employees were still asked to join remotely. Participant C4 added that it depends on the kind of meeting and the context. If it is a small meeting where everyone knows each other it might not be as challenging, as when the group is bigger and people are not familiar. Participant C1 said that Zoom meetings generally pose a challenge: *“It is a big step in general to speak in the Teams meetings. When you*

*sit here, we fill in the words and we laugh a little bit and you interact with each other and you feel the room. However, if you join a Teams meeting, it can be a bit awkward; Should I speak now, should I raise my hand? That could make people more quiet in general”.*

**Decreased spontaneous Collaboration- “You might not spontaneously bump into your colleagues”- Participant C3**

Participant C3 emphasised the challenge of not knowing when he/she is going to be seeing his/her colleagues again and not spontaneously bumping into your colleagues. However after the organisation established fixed office days, which are Tuesdays and Thursdays, people could plan physical meetings ahead. Participant 1 also reported that they use a calendar filling in when they are working from home and the office, for others to know.

**Working from Abroad- “Going To Spain Because Of The Good Weather is Not An Option”- Participant C1**

The participants mentioned that one previous colleague worked from another country for one month. The company would allow people to work from somewhere else for a few days, but not longer: *“Going to Spain because of the good weather is not an option, because we are not allowed to work remotely full time”- Participant C1.* Additionally, the participants claimed that working from another location for a longer time would be challenging, as the nature of their job requires them to physically plan and join events in the city where the company is located and the surrounding areas.

Participant C4 has experienced working from another country before starting the job at the company, and enjoyed having the privilege of working from another location. S/he would enjoy working from another location and sees it as a positive element provided by the flexibility and stretched geographically. /S/he added: *“Of course, sometimes I felt lonely and missed my co-workers, but I guess you can get used to that”*

**Managerial Challenges**

Participant C4 pointed out that today, borders of work and life are more blurred: *“Employees are more likely to work from home when they are sick, this leads to new managerial responsibilities and challenges of checking in with employees and making sure employees are taking rest”.*

### 4.3.3 Ambiguous Perception (Opportunities and Challenges) of Alternative Work Arrangements

#### **Working when sick as an Opportunity and Challenge - “When are you too sick to work?”-**

##### ***Participant 4***

The participants reported that the lines are blurred when people are sick: *“If you are a bit sick, people still work and do not take the time to get well. There is less of an inhibition level, to work from home”- Participant C1.* Participant C4 critically questioned: *“When are you too sick to work?”*. All participants agreed on staying home but still working when they had a cold, mostly for their colleagues' sake to not get infected. Participant C2 argued that this is something that has changed after the pandemic. S/he pointed out that people stayed home and did not work when sick, without questioning it. *“It is a controversial topic to decide if people are too sick to work and should rest or could work, the lines are blurred”*. Participant 3 added that on one hand, working from home when sick can be an opportunity when employees need to finish smaller important tasks, keep track of projects or check in with coworkers. The participants agreed on this and said employees were doing that to support the remaining colleagues. *“On the other hand this is a grey area, normalising working when being sick, and not taking time to rest and recuperate could lead to longer lasting health effects”- Participant 3.*

### 4.3.4 Work-Life Interdependency

#### **Flexibility as an Opportunity**

Participant C1 pointed out that the general flexibility provided by the job made it easier to combine work and private life. Although their participants' children are older, s/he still found it beneficial in terms of integrating other commitments.

The participants argued that a hybrid work arrangement brings the opportunity for flexibility and makes it possible to have an appointment somewhere in between the working day and then work more in the evening or on the weekends. The participants make use of the flexibility the company provides.

#### **Separation of Work and Life through (Work)phones**

The participants mentioned having office phones that need to be available for clients between 11 and 3 pm. The participants mentioned that everyone has been given a work phone and can choose if they want to use it or use their personal phones instead. They discussed reading emails and being available after work hours, using two phones and email accounts. Participant C1 reported that s/he reads work-emails after work hours on her/his personal phone, since s/he thinks having two phones is too much. Participant C2 reported that s/he sometimes works after official hours if there is something important going on but when there is not, s/he gets more free time as well. Participant C3 argued that sometimes when she is bored, s/he might check the work- related emails, and had to choose actively not to engage in work activities. She is trying not to do it too late in the day. Participant C4 then added: *“For me, having two phones can be helpful to separate work and private life, when you only have one phone, it can be challenging to know if people are calling you for private or professional purposes”*. Participant C1 engaged in that: *“Oh yeah, one time I was in Brazil on vacation and got a call from Sweden, regarding our opening hours of the ice rink in the city”*.

## 4.4 Company D

In this section, we present insightful findings and results from the participants belonging to Company D, a Fishery Management company located in Iceland. Unfortunately, the fifth participant had to cancel their participation at the last moment due to illness. Therefore, this interview proceeded with four participants instead of five. However, we ensure the valuable perspectives from this interview gave us good insights for our study.

To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as D1 to D4 (as listed in Table 7).

*Table 7 - Participant Information from Company D*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<i>D1</i>	<i>Software Developer</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>1,5+ Years</i>
<i>D2</i>	<i>Project manager of data analytics for surveillance</i>	<i>Hybrid (Remote in the past)</i>	<i>5 Years</i>

D3	Fishing Inspector	Hybrid	4 Years
D4	Software Developer	Hybrid	2 Years
D5	Participant cancelled due to sickness		

The work arrangement at Company D is hybrid, although Participant D1 mentioned: “*There is a grey rule that allows working from home once a week, but we have the freedom to do it as often as we want*”. Due to the trust of their employers, employees can choose flexibly and mostly choose how they work. All the participants work hybrid and often utilise that opportunity to travel and work from different locations within Iceland. The participants perceived the option of working from the office and outside the office as an opportunity for increased flexibility and time efficiency. Participant D2 worked remotely from Spain on a permanent basis for one year and reflected on the opportunities and challenges. They reflect on isolation, quality of communication, and decreased guidance as challenges. They evaluated working while being sick and some participants reported focusing better when working from the office, while others did not. Further, they reflect on the changed work-life interdependency.

#### 4.4.1 Perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements

##### **Flexibility and Time Efficiency - “*I can visit my family on the other side of Iceland without taking time off from work*”- Participant D4**

Most of the participants argued that they prefer to perform some tasks from home instead of the office: “*We all have that freedom to work from home when we want to. For me, one of the biggest opportunities with alternative work arrangements is being able to work home when needing to focus on individual tasks. It helps me a lot to just work by myself without any distractions and not having to commute to the office*”- Participant D1. On the other hand, Participant D4 argued that s/he always works from the office, but mentioned: “*I think it's good to have the option to work from home. That means I can visit my family on the other side of Iceland, without taking time off from work*”.

##### **Working from Abroad - “*My Office was at Home, just in Spain*”- Participant D2**



Participant D2 has worked for the company for 5 years. Notably, in 2019, the company allowed her/him to work remotely from Spain for one year, as an experimental project. During that time s/he travelled to Iceland 3 times for meetings and conferences. This was not the first time s/he tried to work remotely. *“My office was just at home, but in Spain. It was enjoyable to try it and see how technology has evolved. It went much better than in 2004, when I tried remote work for the first time. It made a huge difference to be able to see people through the computer, which was not the case in 2004.”* Despite having the office at home, s/he thought about the idea of seeking a separated workspace to establish a clear boundary between her/his work and personal life: *“It can be difficult to have all the work equipment at home and receive emails and decide not to check on them. S/he then reflected on the difficulty of stopping work when the work hours have ended: When you're at home, and you know tasks are waiting, it is easy to continue working”-* Participant D2

#### 4.4.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements

##### **Communication and Guidance - *“Technology will never replace real-life interactions” / “There is a bit of ‘stage fright’ involved”- Participant D3***

One challenge that the participants mentioned when working from home was the feeling of isolation and lacking social interaction. They argued that it was easy to approach someone when working from the office, for instance, *“When you need help with something, but when you work from home, you have to check if the person is busy, decide whether to call them or send a message, or book a meeting”-* Participant D4. All of the participants agreed and mentioned that there is more flow in the conversation when people meet in person. *“When people meet on Teams, they're not actively participating in the conversation because, for example, unmuting the microphone takes time. People just talk one after another, one finishes, and the next one starts, and so on. There's a lack of flow in Teams meetings”-* Participant D2. S/he then argued that sometimes after having a Teams meeting and when meeting the same persons physically *“you can clearly see that many don't dare to express themselves properly online but do not have any problem with that in person”*. Participant D3 mentioned when people talk on Zoom or Teams, they are by themselves in the spotlight and all the attention is aimed at the person speaking: *“there is a bit of ‘stage fright’ involved.”*

The participants agreed that screen-to-screen communication cannot replace face-to-face communication: *“I think technology will never replace real-life interactions”*- Participant D3.

Participant D2 shared their experience when living in Spain for a year, and expressed their belief that the outcome would probably not have been as positive if s/he would not travel to Iceland to meet the people and be physically present. Then s/he emphasised the difference in communication when having a meeting through Zoom, compared to a physical meeting. S/he argued that the formality of online meetings makes people feel the need to adopt a more formal approach during these online meetings: *“I always feel like I need to be more formal when attending a meeting through the screen”*- Participant D2

The participants mentioned the occurrence of an ‘after-meeting’ discussion, where employees that attend the meetings through Zoom tend to leave once the meeting formally ends. However, they highlighted that in most cases people talk more after the meeting formally ends, which means that the employees attending remotely can feel excluded: *“When you never meet people by the coffee machine or if you are not part of these ‘after-meeting’ conversations where people are still discussing something that came up before or after the meeting, you can feel excluded”*- Participant D2.

### **Challenges for the Employer**

Participant D1 argued that the employers may face a challenge when ensuring that everyone is being informed. S/he mentioned the importance of information being equally available for the employees who work physically in-office and outside the office: *“Communication only goes through the phone or computer, which can be challenging. I believe it is very important but also a challenge for the employers to keep everyone informed and have all the information equally accessible for those in the office and those working from home”* - Participant D1.

The participants noted that their employers play a vital role in emphasising the importance of knowing how to work effectively from home. They all agreed that their employers are helpful in promoting a culture that values employee well-being and respects boundaries outside of working hours.

### 4.4.3 Ambiguous Perception (Opportunities and Challenges) of Alternative Work Arrangements

**Task Specific Efficiency - “When I come to the office, I sometimes find it hard to focus”- Participant D1 vs. “When I come to the office, I just have to work”- Participant D3**

Contrary to Participant D1, Participant D3 believes that s/he can focus better when working from the office instead of home: *“I would also say that when I work from home, there are so many other things I could be doing, but when I come to the office, I just have to work.”* - Participant D3.

Participant D1 then argued: *“I believe there are great opportunities in working from home, I can complete more tasks and maintain better focus. I have my home office with two good computers. However, I think it's essential to know what I need to do and be conscious that I have everything in order for everything to work well”*. Participant D1 further reflected on how this observation could be specific to his/her role and tasks, stating that when s/he works from the office, focusing becomes challenging due to the presence of numerous people and distractions. As a programmer, s/he often faces interruptions from colleagues asking for assistance with minor issues, therefore it can be more challenging to stay focused.

**Working while being sick - “Each day sets off a domino effect for the next day”- Participant D2**

Most of the participants reported that they do limited work from home when they are sick, but they all agreed that it can be a significant challenge to not check the work emails and attend Zoom meetings. Participant D1 reflected on that: *“I feel guilty about it. When I'm at home with my sick child, I often check my computer and work but that is because I find it enjoyable to work. However, it can be difficult to maintain a balance between work and personal life”*.

The participants further elaborated that this decision is not driven by external pressure, but rather because of the fear of missing out on important tasks. Therefore, the fear of losing track motivated them to continue working despite being sick. *“Before the alternative arrangements, people were just sick and stayed at home, but now I would say that people are experiencing this ‘hybrid sickness’, people do not come to the office because they are sick but they still can work from home”*- Participant D2. The participants highlighted a common occurrence where

employees attend online meetings even when they are sick: *“It is so easy to just open the computer while laying in bed”*- Participant D4. Participant D2 further elaborated on the challenge of postponing meetings because that can be more time-consuming than just attending the meetings online: *“The nature of work is just changing so much. Each sick day just sets off a domino effect for the next few days. When you miss one meeting, it can have a very cascading effect, and often the perceived cost is less to be sick at home and attend meetings online rather than having to reschedule all the meetings and contact the individuals and so on”*.

Participant D1 added to that: *“Our managers are also good at reminding us that when you're sick, you're sick, and you shouldn't work, even though you can do it from home. Also, when you're on vacation, and something comes up, our managers try to find other ways to solve the problems before calling the person on vacation, which I would say is very good and professional. I think it's more a question of personal pressure that you put on yourself. I am enthusiastic and often feel this pressure from myself to always be available and present, but overall, our managers are good at reminding us to separate work and personal life as much as possible.”*

#### 4.4.4 Work-Life Interdependency

***“It can be difficult to maintain a balance between work and personal life.”- Participant D1***

Participant D1 acknowledged that even when s/he is not working, they often found themselves checking their computer and engaging in work. The participants mentioned that this may not be healthy, but reflected on their personal tendency and approach to work: *“I know it's not healthy, but that's just how I am and I really enjoy my work.”*- Participant D1. Additionally, the participants credited their managers for taking care of a work-life interdependency. *“I think it's very important for the workplace to take care of employees' well-being, managing anxiety, workload, and stress. Our managers are very good at that”*- Participant D2. S/he reflected on her/his previous workplace, where s/he sometimes left the office when the designated work hours were up but some task remained unfinished, and s/he occasionally faced judgement from others for doing so. *“I would say that the HR policies of companies have a significant impact on how people feel at work and how they manage to create a work-life balance when working remotely or hybrid”*- Participant D2. Participant D3 agreed and confirmed its relevance. When the workplace actively encourages employees to prioritise their personal lives and take time off from work, it significantly enhances overall well-being and productivity.

*“I have started turning off all notifications when I finish my workday, which has helped me a lot with my work-life balance.”- Participant D2*

## 4.5 Company E

In this section, we present insightful findings from the participants belonging to Company E, an Engineering and Design Company based in Sweden. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as E1 to E5 (as listed in Table 8).

*Table 8 - Participant Information from Company E*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Position/Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<i>E1</i>	<i>Group &amp; Section Manager</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>5 years</i>
<i>E2</i>	<i>Project Manager</i>	<i>Physical in-Office</i>	<i>2 Years</i>
<i>E3</i>	<i>Project Manager</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>1 Year</i>
<i>E4</i>	<i>Senior Project &amp; Construction Manager</i>	<i>Remote</i>	<i>2 Years</i>
<i>E5</i>	<i>Project Manager</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>1,5 Years</i>

Some of the participants reported that they can focus better at the office or from home. One of the main opportunities is the decreased environmental impact. They evaluated having the choice of working arrangements as positive. The participants agreed that many meetings can be done remotely, but also added that these meetings can sometimes be more challenging. The decreased collaboration and communication quality was perceived as a challenge, additionally technological issues were brought up.

### 4.5.1 Perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements

**Decreased Environmental Impact - “If you can work 1 or 2 days from home, that will save a lot of CO2”- Participant E4**

The participants emphasised the environmental benefits of alternative work arrangements. They noted that when employees have the option of working from home, it can significantly reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions compared to the entire workforce commuting to the office every day. This perspective highlights the positive environmental impact of alternative work arrangements, meaning that the organisations can reinforce their commitment to sustainability: *“Also from an environmental perspective. If you can work 1 or 2 days from home, that will save a lot of CO<sub>2</sub> We also really support the environment and sustainability milieu” - Participant E4.*

### **Changed Meeting Culture**

Participant E5 mentioned an opportunity regarding online meetings: *“It’s also a choice that makes it easier for us to have some quick meetings. It’s an opportunity. In my opinion, physical meetings are always the best. But Teams and Zoom are good ways to push forward and have quick meetings. For example, if someone in northern Sweden wants to talk to someone in southern Sweden, they don’t have to physically meet but can just go on an online call”.*

### **Having the Choice**

Participant E1 appreciated having the choice between different work arrangements: *“I think it’s amazing that at company E we have the opportunity to choose where and how we want to work. We are a very forward-thinking company and we understand all the complexities of different tasks”.* Participant E4 stated: *“If we need to focus it is better to be home and isolated. In the office you will always be disturbed - it’s more focused on socialising, which is also important. It depends on the personality as well I think. If someone is introvert, extrovert or medium. Company E is a great place because all personalities can be accommodated in the work arrangement”.*

### **Trust**

The participants reported feeling trusted by the company when working alternatively: Participant E4 stated: *“We as consultants have some hours to fill. If you fill the obligations towards the company, then you are done”.* Participant E1: *“We work with goals. It doesn’t matter to the company if you work from home or the office. The goal is more important than how you got there. I think that’s what trust is for us. If you miss your goal, you would perhaps fail your*

*employer's trust and maybe the trust would go away. But initially everyone is trusted to reach their goal". Participant E1 reflected that s/he did feel trusted by the company: "I always feel like we get trusted when we work from home. If you didn't feel that trust, you couldn't work for that company".*

#### 4.5.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements

##### **Quality of Communication: "There is much more flow in a room with people"- Participant E1**

Participant E1 reflected on the role of communication and social interaction: *"I think the biggest opportunity of coming into the office is communication. It is just just more convenient to ask a question and collaborate. People are sitting in the office. I can walk up to the different departments and ask them questions"* Participant E3 claimed that the quality of communication can decrease when not working physically in one space: *"When you are at home, you miss those small moments, like small discussions and creativity that comes when you are in the same room. All those little small questions, I can come over and ask someone"*.

Participant E1: *"In a room you have eye contact, you have body language, you can pass the ball around and give everyone their show. In a Teams meeting that energy is kind of lost. You are isolated and you don't know when you can speak. Someone starts and then someone else starts at the same time. There is no flow in a Teams meetings. There is much more flow in a room with people"*.

##### **Social Interaction and Personal Contact:**

Participant E1 enhanced the importance of a personal relationship with coworkers, which is easier established when working in person: *"Working in the office is a great way to get to know your coworkers. It becomes much more personal. You really get to know your colleagues and form a personal relationship with them."*

##### **Collaboration at the Office**

Participant E2 reflected: *"I like to come to the office. When I arrive at the office I meet other people. We collaborate. I have two screens, and that is sometimes better. At 5 O'clock I finish my day and I go home. If I stay home and work, then I usually work too much". It is sometimes difficult to put a stop to it"*.

### **Isolation and Sense of Belonging**

Potential isolation is another concern, raised by Participant E1: *“I don’t want to be isolated all the time, working in my home”. “I also want to remember and feel like I belong to a big company with all those members. I don’t want to feel like I am sitting home alone all the time.”*

### **Guidance**

Participant E4 highlighted that the impact of remote work varies based on factors such as the position, experience level, and responsibilities of individuals. According to some of the participants, when considering both junior and senior positions, excessive remote work can lead to a gap in communication and support for juniors: *“If a senior sits at home too much, there is a gap, because the junior doesn’t have anyone to ask fast. It’s bad for the senior, the junior, and the company. You don’t have the personal growth of helping others as a senior and the junior doesn’t have the personal benefit to ask seniors to gain more experience. For me as a senior it is very important to let my junior colleagues know who I am and how they can reach me”- Participants E4.*

### **Keeping Balance**

Participant E1: *“I had this challenge with keeping my balance. Availability is the most important aspect of being a manager. I have to be available for those in my charge. If I am not available, they lack managerial support and I also miss the feeling of being in a team. But this is of course very role-specific. It’s the balance that is the challenge.”* Participant E4 agreed *“It’s both positive and negative. You have to find a balance optimised for the individual as well as the company.”*

### **Technology, IT and Hybrid Meetings**

Participant E1 expressed her/his perception of IT challenges in meetings. *““In many meetings the first 10 minutes are spent playing around with microphones and speakers and screens and connection problems. We haven’t solved the technological problems yet, and that is indeed a problem and challenge”- Participant E1.*



Participant E3 shared his/hers viewpoint on the most challenging type of meetings, specifically pointing out the challenges that arise in online meetings where some individuals are physically present while others join from home: *“I think hybrid meetings are the most challenging ones. When some people are in the room and others join remotely it just creates problems in communication and technology”*.

### 4.5.3 Ambiguous perception (Opportunities and Challenges)

***“It is not black and white: at home you are totally isolated, and in the office you have social interaction”- Participant E4***

**Participant E4** stressed that although s/he is working predominantly remotely, it does not mean s/he is isolated or does not communicate: *“When I sit at home, people might think I am isolated, because I don’t have social interaction with colleagues. But I know that when I am home I might be physically isolated, because through the IT system I have so much contact every day. I think it is not black and white:at home you are totally isolated, and at the office you have social interaction . It is just a different way to approach”*.

#### **Working when sick**

Most of the participants would not work from outside the office when they are sick. Only Participants E4 and E5 make exceptions: Participant E4: *“If one has a fever you should not work.”* Participant E5 adds: *“It depends on how sick you got”*.

#### **Task-specific Efficiency “I get less disturbed” - Participant E1**

Participant E1 argued: *“I am more efficient at home, I get less disturbed”* Participant E4 added to that: *“If there is something that requires us to focus intensely, then it is better for me to work from home and isolate. In the office, you have to be more open and listen. There is more of a focus on socialising and connections, which is important. But you will be disturbed and distracted.”* *“The speed and efficiency is totally different from the office. At the office I often find myself listening to what others are saying. It is maybe not negative, sometimes I learn a lot from listening when people talk about something interesting. However, I don’t get as much done”* - Participant E4.

Participant E5 had a different perception on this: *“It’s good to have the choice. But I do have to admit that I think I am more productive when working from the office. It is not the case for me that I can focus better when at home. So when I go to the office I just book a room for myself and focus there. I like it when I am at an office with people, and if I want to focus I can just book a room and focus for 1-2 hours. It depends on the project of course, sometimes you have to be on side. There are always some questions you have to ask your colleagues”*.

### **Online Meetings**

Participant E1 reflected: *“I must say today it has been very good, with everyone speaking after each other. But I witness so many meetings where people all talk at the same time, and if technological problems add to it, the communication is often worthless”*. Participant E5 added to that *“It also depends on who you are meeting with. Some people have efficient meetings and then get to work. But some people cannot make quick decisions and have a lot more talking involved, without getting work done”*.

### **Office Design**

Participant E1 explained: *“We have open landscape offices at Company G, but there are some individual rooms we can rent when we need to focus. However, when I think about the pandemic, then I think about the time I was forced to stay at home and work remotely. If this would be the case again I would wish for the company to invest in equipment. Good chairs and screens, and perhaps also pay part of the electricity bill, because after all the companies don’t realise how much money they save, sending the people home, considering all the coffee we drink at the office”*.

## **4.5.4 Work-Life Interdependency**

### **Separation of Work and Life: “A defined line of work and what I do in my private life” - Participant E1**

The Participants reported different levels of need for separating work and life. Participant E1 reported: *“I just turn my phone off and I’m done. It’s not rocket science. I don’t even send out emails on a Friday afternoon, they are totally worthless. I can plan them on Outlook and schedule them to be sent out Friday afternoon. Why would I send out an email on Friday and*

*spoil their weekend with some bad news? ”. Participant E4 reported: “Exactly. I separate work and life clearly and shut down my laptop and then I’m offline. After 8 pm in the evening, I don’t answer anything, no emails, and no phone calls. I log out at 4 or 5 pm, but if there is something urgent it can come in until 8 pm. It’s better if I read it in the morning”. Participant E5 reported: “I’m a bit “hybrid” there, I can answer Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the evenings. I am more flexible in that case”. In this context the participants brought up the angle of work experience and potential generational differences. When Participant E5 reported his commitment to flexible availability, Participant E1, who separates between work and life clearly, argued: “But you are also from a different generation. You are younger. I am more old school”. Participant E5 believed the reason for this difference were the different levels of work experience: “Yeah maybe it has more to do with that. I am a junior and you are a senior and us juniors still have more to prove and we want to show what we can do in our projects”.*

*Participant E1 reported that their reason for not working remotely is to separate life and work: “I don’t like working from home all the time. Because you then cannot separate life and work. To me it is really important to have a defined line of work and what I do in my private life.”*

**The Importance of Balance: “I think the keyword has to be balance. Balance according to your own situation” - Participant E1**

*Participant E1 emphasised the importance of a balanced approach: “I as a person do need the balance, have the choice to work from a distance if I need to focus and go into the office and have social interaction and collaboration - and have a synergy with coworkers and get all the answers I need. I actually prefer to be in the office, but I like to be in the office maybe one day or maximum 2 days, only if I really need to focus on a project or have a deadline to meet.”*

*Participant E4 stated “I travel all the time. 600-800 km a week and meeting 30 different people and it makes me a little bit tired. So I like to work at home as much as possible. I get tired by travelling 2-3 days a week and that’s why I sit home the other days to do all the administration work”.*

## 4.6 Company F

In this section, we present insightful findings and results from the participants belonging to Company F, a Carbon Tech Startup based in Germany. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as E1 to E5 (as listed in Table 8). Unfortunately, participants C4 and C5 could not participate in our interview, due to conflicting schedules. Therefore, this interview proceeded with three participants instead of five. However, we ensure the valuable perspectives from this interview gave us good insight for our study. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as F1 to F3 (as listed in Table 9).

*Table 9 - Participant Information from Company F*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<i>F1</i>	<i>Business Accountant</i>	<i>Remote</i>	<i>6 Months</i>
<i>F2</i>	<i>Working Student</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>6 Months</i>
<i>F3</i>	<i>HR Manager</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>2 Months</i>
<i>F4</i>	<i>Cancelled due to conflicting schedules</i>		
<i>F5</i>	<i>Cancelled due to conflicting schedules</i>		

Participant F1 is based remotely and works from Mexico, while the other two are working hybrid from the city the company is located in, but still use their flexibility to travel and work from other locations. Participants F2 and F3 perceived the hybrid work arrangement as the ideal solution, while Participant F1 perceived the remote work arrangement as ideal according to his/her personal situation and added that alternative work arrangements require a higher level of autonomy, and motivation, resulting in a sharpened mindset. All participants agreed that social interaction poses the biggest challenge to working hybrid and remotely. Participant F3 stressed that from an HR perspective, the extended talent pool poses an opportunity, but other HR tasks and the creation of a sense of belonging pose a challenge. The participants mentioned the importance of trust, claiming that without trust, alternative work arrangements would not be possible, and reported high levels of trust at their company.

Participant F3 reported that s/he missed drinking coffee with colleagues and Participant F1 also claimed that “teakettle meetings” did not happen in remote or hybrid setups. Online Meetings were seldom booked for casual check-ins and non-factual non-work related chats. Further, s/he discussed alternative means for spontaneous social communication. Participant F2 perceived the increased time efficiency and flexibility as an opportunity to integrate non-work-related aspects into his/her workday, for instance doctor’s appointments, amazon packages or starting the laundry.

## 4.6.1 Perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements

### **Flexibility, Efficiency, and Social Interaction- *“The flexibility and the change of the mindset is the biggest opportunity for me”- Participant F1***

Participant F1 experienced no flexible work arrangements in her previous work: “It was so *old-fashioned, and everyone worked with folders, no one worked with Teams or anything, therefore everything was a bit slow. It sometimes took a week to solve a problem*”. S/he argued that when employees have the opportunity to work with alternative work arrangements, there is a shift towards independent work and a need for an open and flexible mindset. However, s/he mentioned that alternative work arrangements encourage a faster completion of processes and force employees to be more open to new ways of working: “*I think employees need to get used to working this way for a bit. They need to have a mindset switch and then they get more flexible. In my opinion, it makes more sense to work in a hybrid or remote to be more efficient and fast-working*”- Participant F1 Participant F2 added that s/he preferred the hybrid work arrangement, indicating that s/he enjoyed the combinations of working from home and in the office. S/he reflected that during the pandemic she worked remotely, but did not like the lack of social interaction.

### **Family Time**

Participant F1 explains that since he has children, remote working is a privilege. This way s/he can take the afternoon off and spend time with his/her family. In the evening s/he catches up on the rest of the work day.

### **Less Commuting / Time Efficiency**

The participants emphasised the time saved on commuting to the office. They mentioned that usually, it takes them up to one hour to get to the office. *“If you do the calculation at the end of the week, people save 1,5-2 hours on transport every day and can just spend the time in a different way, other than sitting on public transport”- Participant F2.*

### **Trust - “Without trust it's not possible to work remotely”- Participant F1**

The participants highlighted the importance of trust from their employers when working from home, which has never been a problem from their perspective. *“Since day one I have felt welcomed. Without trust it's not possible to work remotely”- Participant F1.* The participants expressed that when working from home, it is easier to feel the trust of the employers. They appreciated the feeling of being trusted to work from home without constant supervision. *“I have always felt very trusted by my manager. I believe giving trust is creating trust itself: in other words, if you empower your employees in this sense they will feel the "responsibility" to meet your trust expectations. Also if you don't work correctly and take advantage of the remote position at one point it will come up”- Participant F2.* Participant F3 mentioned that s/he is fairly new in the company, however, s/he argued that trust plays a vital role in their company culture.

### **Opportunities for HR - “It opens a whole different pool of candidates”- Participant F3**

Participant F3: *“I want to throw in the HR perspective here. From a recruiting perspective, it opens a whole different pool of candidates. It is a lot easier to find talent and people to be interested in your company. Company F is based in a big city, which is generally an attractive point for people to move to. But some other companies could offer the same setup, although they are located in less attractive areas”.*

## 4.6.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements

### **Social Interaction, Motivation, and Sense of Belonging**

Participant F1 highlighted that the main challenge in remote work is the lack of social interaction. S/he argued that casual conversations over coffee with colleagues are missing. Participant F3 confirmed and added to that: *“The tea-kettle meetings don't happen in a hybrid setting and definitely not in a remote setting”*. *“I would say the biggest challenge is the social component, but other than that I don't see big challenges, for me it's perfect”*- Participant F1. Participant F2 added to that: *“I don't work fully remote, I don't have children as F1, yet. However, for me, living alone – sometimes it's hard to motivate myself. I can also get distracted with something happening around the house”*- Participant F2. The participants acknowledged that apart from the social aspect, they don't see many challenges in alternative work arrangements. They mentioned that the unique nature of building connections and relationships are different when individuals do not work from the office. Participant F1 expressed that the technology has improved a lot in the past years and enables remote collaboration across different locations and time zones. However s/he argued that there is still a desire for the face-to-face and personal connections that come when people meet, sit next to each other and eat their lunch together, without the need for long-distance travel.

### **Creating Collaboration and Social Interaction Online**

The participants agreed that meetings typically have a specific agenda or objectives to talk about, and they are usually not used for casual social interactions. Therefore, the participants expressed that when they attend the meetings online, they can feel excluded. However, when people attend the meetings physically, they usually talk to each other before and after. *“You have to create a reason to actually start communicating with each other. This can really challenge the management of group dynamics, the management of group cohesion and interpersonal stuff”* - Participant F3. That means that the interactions become primarily focused on work-related matters, therefore it can be challenging and pose less opportunity for informal social interactions. S/he mentioned that sometimes they use a tool called “wheel of names”, which facilitates short 5-10 minute chats between the employees, encouraging them to have more frequent and diverse

connections: *“That is a great tool but it doesn’t fully recreate the social interaction that needs to happen among colleagues”- Participant F3.*

### 4.6.3 Ambiguous Perception (Opportunities and Challenges) of Alternative Work Arrangements

#### **Collaboration**

The participants reflected on the quality of collaboration when working with alternative work arrangements. Participant F2 highlighted that s/he finds collaboration more challenging when working remotely, particularly due to potential issues related to the level of confidence, and personal understating among colleagues: *“The level of confidence or personal understanding of the colleagues could negatively impact the performance of collective projects. However, I believe that being always able to connect with others no matter the location is very valuable in this sense”- Participant F2.* Participant F1 added: *“I would say that it all depends on the individual's mindset. Especially during remote work you have to be active and try to find solutions”.* Participant F3 expressed that s/he finds it more challenging to collaborate when working with alternative work arrangements, particularly in the HR context: *“I do find it harder. This might be specific or more obvious to the HR function since a lot of my work revolves around getting a better understanding of what is working well and what does not”- Participant 3.* The participants argued that online communication tends to be more formalised and heavily relies on technology and tools.

#### **Working While Being Sick- *“It depends how sick I am”- Participant F1***

The participants reported that they would work from home when sick and see it as an opportunity to still get work done without infecting others. However, they mentioned that it all depends on the type of sickness but usually they would end up working a bit. *“It depends on the type of sickness we are speaking about. For example if I hurt my leg it would be extremely beneficial to have the chance to work from home, since I am just physically debilitated. If I feel sick (for example with a fever), I would of course not work and ask for a couple of days off”- Participant F2.* Participant F1 agreed and said that the decision to work from home or not depends on the level of sickness. Participant F3 mentioned that s/he has a tendency to push through and continue



working even if s/he is sick, but as the other participants said, it all depends on how unwell s/he feels. The participants explained that symptoms such as a sore throat or cold would not hinder them from working, but they would definitely work from home instead of going to the office.

#### 4.6.4 Work-life Interdependency

***“A work-life blend is a lot easier to achieve when working remotely”- Participant F3***

The participants had different perceptions regarding work-life interdependency. Participants F2 and F3 reported that alternative work arrangements give them more flexibility and increase their work-life balance. F1 stated that a work-life interdependency is not desirable for him/her: *“Work is my life, and life is accepted by my work. In my opinion work-life interdependency makes no sense. If you do a good job, you can take your free time. But to do a good job you have to invest your free time”- Participant F1.* However, Participant F2 expressed that s/he believes that personal life should always take precedence over work and that it should not consume one's life: *“In this sense the hybrid set up is really empowering us to create our own balance between the two elements. While a 9 to 5 work fully on-site would dictate your daily routine, our set up enables us to decide what we prefer to do. I love it!”- Participant F2.*

Participant F3 agreed with this and argued that work-life independence is a lot easier to achieve when working remotely, since s/he can have small breaks, for instance, like doing the laundry: *If I compare it to previous jobs where I worked 9 to 5, I needed need to schedule everything that way so that you are not going to be home 9-10 hours a day. Maybe there is an electrician coming or another appointment or simply starting the laundry or receiving an Amazon package. It's a little thing, but still”.- Participant F3* The participants manage their availability off hours differently. While Participant F2 makes a clear separation between work and private life, Participant F1 is available all day and Participant F3 reported that her/his work and life are blended in. *“I have a tendency to always check emails and messages. I have no set start/end times to my work day. It has become more of a work-life blend over the years of working mostly in remote settings. I can have appointments during the day, exercise or take longer lunch breaks and then make sure I finish my tasks for the day later”- Participant F3.*

## 4.7 Company G

In this section, we present insightful findings and results from the participants belonging to Company F, a Furniture Retailer based in Denmark. To maintain confidentiality, we have assigned unique codes to the participants, referring to them as G1 to G5 (as listed in Table 10).

*Table 10 - Participant Information from Company G*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Work Arrangement</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<i>G1</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>Communications Business Manager</i>	<i>7 Months</i>
<i>G2</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>Project Leader</i>	<i>8 Years</i>
<i>G3</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>Project Manager</i>	<i>3 Years</i>
<i>G4</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>People &amp; Culture Business Partner</i>	<i>6 Years</i>
<i>G5</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>Sales Manager</i>	<i>11 Years</i>

The participants from Company G all work on a hybrid schedule and usually work two days from home and three days from the office. The improved management of the office space was perceived as an opportunity. Especially social interaction, personal connection, and the achievement of values were seen as challenges when working hybrid. The participants reported ambiguous experiences when it comes to focus, with some better focusing at the office or outside of it. The importance of trust was highlighted. While seen as an opportunity for the integration of work and life tasks such as starting the laundry machine, hence creating improved balance, the increased blurring of work and life resulting from the hybrid work arrangement was perceived as a challenge.

### 4.7.1 Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements

#### **Task-specific Efficiency “It can be more efficient to work from home”- Participant G4**

The participants all agreed that when working from home, they can focus better on their tasks without any distractions: “If I have admin tasks I constantly work from home because at the

*office, I am disturbed easily which makes it hard to do the tasks I was supposed to do”- Participant G4.*

Participant G5 highlighted that s/he sometimes works from home when s/he needs to concentrate on specific tasks: *“I like to work from home when “[...]following up on presentations for the following week. This is a task I can do from home, without any distractions at the office, as I talk too much to the people around me. Therefore, I try to be home once every week or every other week.”- Participant G5.* Participant G4 agreed and mentioned that working from home can usually be more efficient due to fewer distractions. *“There is very little that requires me to go into the office, but I enjoy going there, I like being there and seeing all the people”- Participant G4.* The participants then mentioned the indirect opportunities and benefits that both employees and employers receive when people work with alternative work arrangements. *“When you look at the public discourse, many famous people are voicing their opinion and are critical about alternative work arrangements as it is not the traditional work arrangement. Sometimes they are missing that although you are giving employees direct benefits, you are also receiving indirect benefits in the long run, and that is sometimes overlooked”- Participant G4.*

**Trust- *“There is a lot of trust shown from the employers to the staff”- Participant G4***

The participants emphasised the presence of trust within the company and highlighted the belief and confidence that the company places in their employees. They agreed on the positive effect of receiving trust from their employers. The employees are more than likely to do their job well because they do not want to fail this trust. *“There has never been a problem with trust. My previous boss worked more remotely than I did, but that worked well and never been an issues”- Participant G5* argued that s/he as a manager, always starts with trust, and s/he follows up on different things like efficiency and performance *“There are no indicators that working from home is less productive”- Participant G5.*

## 4.7.2 Perceived Challenges of Alternative Work Arrangements

**Social Interaction and Personal Connection- *“I believe something is lost when you only work remotely from home”- Participant G1***

The participants argued that one of the challenges when it comes to working with alternative work arrangements, is when certain tasks or activities require physical presence and can not be

easily done from home. They explained the challenge with those tasks, especially when individuals have tight schedules: *“Sometimes employees are planning to work from home or have something else to do, that often pushes the physical timeline”- Participant G4.* Participant G1 reflected on alternative work arrangements and personal connection with colleagues: *“I would say if I work from home for more than 2 or 3 days a week, I lose the connection with the people, because when I work from home, I do not build a trusting environment with the people. I believe something is lost when you only work remotely from home- Participant G1.* Participant G3 reflected on the values that the company focuses on, for instance togetherness. Alternative work arrangements make it more challenging for the organisation as a whole. *“The glue that binds us is not as strong as it could be and that could be a little bit difficult”- Participant G3.*

### **Managerial Challenges**

Participant G5 reflected on various challenges, as being a manager when working with alternative work arrangements. S/he argued that the main challenge when being a manager who does not meet the employees is the establishment of trust. S/he indicated, if there is no trust, everything is going to be challenging when the employees work from home. However, s/he added that there will always be employees who work too much or too little while working from home. *“Of course, everyone should do their work, but I do believe it is more important to have closer look at the people who work too much - because we do not want them burnout or suffer other mental health consequences”- Participant G5.* S/he told us that s/he manages a few individuals who work too much, because they love their job and work in their free time. *“You can’t micromanage the employees. For me, it is important to give them tasks and freedom and then do follow-up meetings to get a status, if needed”- Participant G5.* As a result, s/he then reflected that openness and transparency are key elements in order to face those challenges.

## **4.7.3 Ambiguous Perception (Opportunities and Challenges) of Alternative Work Arrangements**

The participants highlighted that finding a balance between the practical environment of work and the specific demand of tasks and activities is important. They mentioned while working on tasks that involve collaboration, going to the office and being present in the same room allows

for a deeper level of presence and engagement. However, for tasks that do not require collaboration, but instead, more individual focus, working from home may be a good option. *“It is important to find a balance between the practical environment of the work and what the work demands are for the individual for the role and for that activity. It could be a good balance to have”- Participant G3.* Overall, the participants said that hybrid work is beneficial for the employees. However, Participant G2 emphasised: *“Since my employer allows me to work hybrid, I might be more committed to look at my mails even though it's midnight or pick up the phone if it's very late. For me, it is okay because I like to work, but for others it could be a challenge”.*

### **Working when sick**

All participants highlighted that they do not work when they are ill, however, Participant 5 emphasised: *“Sometimes you can feel a little sick, maybe too sick to come into the office, but are fine with working from home”.*

## **4.7.4 Work-Life Interdependency at Company G**

### **Management of Availability / Setting Boundaries Work & Life**

#### ***“Hybrid way of working is extremely beneficial for life balance”- Participant G4***

Participant G4 reported that alternative ways of working make it easier for them to balance work and private life, including doctor's appointments and quality time with the family: *“I would say the hybrid way of working is extremely beneficial to maintain work-life interdependency. This morning I had a doctor's appointment, and working hybrid I could easily fix that and be back at work quickly. The opportunities are great”.* S/he added that being able to visit the family who lives on the other side of the country without taking a day off from work, is beneficial. *“I would say that 90% of my work could be done remotely, so technically I could go on vacation and bring my laptop and do all the work from there, which is so nice”- Participant 4.* The participants agreed and said that it can offer more opportunities to maintain a good work-life interdependency when working from home, since they can take small breaks in between and manage their own time.

#### ***“It has been a blur for many for us”- Participant G3***

Participant G3 reflected: *“It has been a blur for many of us. When does the work end? And when you’re in the same ecosystem at home, where you work but also live - it can be good and practical when you can do chores, start the **laundry** - but it can be challenging and demanding mentally. It’s hard to find that balance. You could do it the way participant G4 does it – when you finish work, you just pack your things away and don’t use them till the morning. But not everyone can do that, so the challenge remains”* Participant G3 added: *“There should be core hours defined. It is a little bit of self-discipline to say “the day ends here”. But that could also mean that you miss out on crucial information. Now I work in a global context, with different locations and time zones involved. And if you set strict boundaries, maybe you wake up and decisions have been made”*.

Participant G4 reflected that s/he has learned to separate work and life in comparison to the beginning of their career. Now s/he sets clear boundaries and manages their availability according to that. Participant G4 then emphasised a different mindset compared to the beginning of his/her career: *“In the beginning of my career I was afraid that the company would burn down if I wasn’t available – but then I figured that it wouldn’t. So, then I realised I needed a life-balance. So now I never work when I’m off.”* S/he then expressed the adherence to her/his boundaries and described that as an approach to maintaining a better work-life interdependency. S/he mentioned that s/he has a dedicated work phone, which s/he turns off after work and does not look at it until the next morning. S/he stated that s/he rarely checks the working email when s/he is not working on vacation, except for special events or important occasions. The participant then mentioned using a calendar to indicate whether s/he works from home or the office and turns on the “auto-reply” function to inform others about her/his availability: *“I also use functions such as auto-reply to let people know if I’m not available in the hours they would usually expect me to be available. I think people would normally expect me to be available 9-5”-Participant G4.*

Participant G1 elaborated *“I think this approach is good. I wish I was that good when it comes to setting boundaries. I have this super bad habit of being available all the time. I don’t have a work phone, so if I get an email, the notification pops up either way. I prefer to be kept in the loop and at least imagine that I have some control. But I must say that it almost never happens,*

*that someone reaches out and needs something urgent after hours. So Even though I am available, I am usually not contacted after hours. I believe at our company at least, there is a strong culture of respecting when other people are off work. The worst thing is to receive an email on Friday, 3 o'clock in the afternoon just before the weekend." But for me it has more to do with the company's culture and not so much with the new ways of working, in my personal experience."*

Participant G2 added: *"I used to be available 24/7, but then I noticed that it was really annoying when people woke me up before my alarm clock woke me up and that affected my mood and performance. And then I decided to switch off the phone when going to sleep. Otherwise no matter if it's a weekday or the weekend – I'm available, via outlook, teams, phone. You can reach me, no problem. I have some agreement with my manager, and again it comes down to trust. My manager trusts me that I'm doing my job well, he doesn't really care what hours I work, as long as I accomplish my goals. A lot of trust and communication are involved."* Participant G5: *"Personally, I respond to mails and calls outside working hours, I have a very fluent schedule. But this is not the case for most co-workers. They have a fixed schedule".*

### ***"Flexibility goes both ways"- Participant G2***

Participant G2: *"We have this understanding in the team that it's fine to work 2 days a week from home, could be more sometimes, but there could also be weeks where it's important to show up to the office every single day. So the flexibility goes both ways: "when I as an employee need it, but also when my employer needs me at the office".*

Participant G2 reflected that if the employer would not provide him/her flexibility, s/he would set clearly defined boundaries of availability: *"If I'm not allowed to work remotely; I will say "after 5 pm my phone is off, my email is off. I don't care about it. It's not my problem". That's the big difference, sometimes we have very time critical projects, and if something doesn't work out and the situation is not resolved - the company could face very high fines. So, it is in the best interest of the employer that employees take care of situations outside of work hours. Flexibility goes both ways"*

## 4.8 Summary Key Findings

In the following the findings of 4.1-4.8 will be summarised regarding the different research focus: opportunities, challenges and work-life interdependency. Presenting the results of our qualitative study, we decided against quantification of the results.

### **Commonly perceived Opportunities of Alternative Work Arrangements:**

- Many participants preferred different work arrangements to better integrate work into their lives and reach an improved work-life interdependency
- One of the opportunities for alternative work arrangements, as perceived by the participants, was the integration of daily chores into the work day (**classic:** starting the laundry machine, receiving an amazon package) **or family time** (picking up the kids from school)
- Increased family time
- Task-specific Efficiency- Many participants reported that they could focus and perform certain tasks better at home, contrary to Elshaiekh, Hassan, and Abdallah (2018), who argue that employees could experience more distractions at home
- An opportunity for alternative work arrangements reported by most participants is the time saved by not commuting (especially in bigger cities, employees could save several hours of daily transportation). They also mentioned a positive environmental effect due to less commuting and pollution
- The participants reported a high level of trust and feeling trusted when working from home and saw this as an opportunity for an improved relationship with their employer

### **Specific perceived Opportunities:**

- From an HR perspective, there is a more substantial talent pool to recruit from and shorter leading times (people do not necessarily need to move)

### **Commonly perceived Challenges:**

- Many participants reported that social interactions, quality of communication and building of relationships have decreased



- Establishing personal relationships
- One of the challenges of alternative work arrangements, as perceived by the participants, was the lacking of spontaneous social interaction (as mentioned: coffee-machine chats, teakettle talks)
- Many participants reported that alternative work arrangements lack the opportunity for spontaneous collaboration.
- Isolation and impact on mental health
- The participants mentioned the challenge of lack of guidance and support, (especially when being new to the job) both for employees and managers
- Technology IT
- Hybrid meetings challenge
- Tax implications

**Ambiguously Perceived:**

- Most participants perceived flexibility as an opportunity, some were more critical and saw it as a challenge for coordination
- The participants had different attitudes towards boundaries and the separation of work and private life. While some prioritised this separation and were eager to set boundaries, others did not mind the blurring of work and life
- Task-specific Efficiency (some participants reported higher levels of focus and less distraction when working from the office, some participants reported a higher level of focus and less distraction when working from outside the office)
- Opportunity and challenge of working when sick

**Work-life Interdependency:**

- The lines between work and life are blurred- even more after implementing alternative work arrangements. Working from home means to live where you work. The participants reported constant availability, and some work days are split into two parts for the sake of reconciling work and life
- The participants reported increased blur/blend/interdependency, depending on their personal situation

- Many participants reported that at the beginning of their career, they were not good when setting boundaries
  - Participant G4: “At the beginning of my career, I was afraid that company G would burn down if I were not available – but then I figured that it would not”
  - Participant A3: “When I was new to the job I was not as good when setting boundaries”
  - Participant A4: “I am available all the time”
  - Participant E5: as a junior s/he still has more to prove and wants to do a good job.
- Flexibility goes both ways
  - Participant G5: *“I am available 24/7. If I want to have the freedom to work remotely, I also need to give back to the company”*.
  - The participants at Company A reported:
    - “Flexibility goes both ways. Sometimes work more, than sometimes less”
    - “If I expect flexibility from the company, I need to give flexibility back”
- Different needs for separation of work and life / Different degrees of availability (discussed work phones, out of-office emails)

## Discussion of Findings

Our findings from the focus group study emphasise that different working arrangements are perceived as opportunities and challenges. They accentuate that the blurring of work and life has increased, creating a changed interdependency of work and life. The participants perceived different opportunities and challenges when experiencing different work arrangements. Our findings highlighted that the perception depends on the employees’ situation (for instance, having children and reconciling work and family versus not having a family), and personal preference (varying degrees of need for social interaction and guidance). All the participants reflected that their personal situation determined their perception of different work arrangements. What is perceived as an opportunity for one employee may be perceived as a challenge by another.

The most frequently mentioned **opportunities** include flexibility and time efficiency (through less commuting); some participants reported saving many hours per week when not commuting,

resulting in more time spent on other aspects of life as well as further economic and environmental benefits. Especially those who have children reported that they value the flexibility provided by work arrangements alternative to physical in-office work, as it enables them to reconcile family and work, flexibly dividing their days into two parts if required by other chores. Furthermore, many participants perceived the trust they received when working from home positively. They reported that there have not been any issues and it motivates them to not break their employers' trust. Contrary to the assumption that working from home poses more distractions and interruptions in the form of family members, pets, or household tasks (Elshaiekh, Hassan & Abdallah, 2018). Many participants reported having better focus when working from home and avoiding distractions at the office in the form of coworkers and social interaction. An opportunity specific to HR responsibilities is the extended talent pool when hiring new applicants and shorter leading times due, to the opportunity to start working alternatively from a different location. The increased autonomy and empowerment of employees working remotely, as argued for by Sullivan (2012), has been confirmed by Participant F1.

However, alternative work arrangements come at a cost and create specific **challenges**, with the main challenges being quality of communication, guidelines, lack of social interaction, and personal connection. The participants reflected on the importance of guidance, creating a sense of belonging and trust. They further stressed the importance of clearly communicating expectations as was already hinted at by Larson, Vroman, and Makarius (2020). The participants criticised the lack of guidance especially when working with people new to the job, making it difficult to explain processes and onboard them. Many of them reported that screen-to-screen communication could not replace face-to-face communication. They also reported that the quality of communication has decreased, with information exchange taking longer due to response times and not being able to occur spontaneously. In addition, the participants miss the spontaneous interactions they encounter at the office. Participant F1 said that: “*Sometimes I miss talking to a colleague on the side, having a **coffee** and a little chat*” and Participant F3 said that “*The **tea-kettle meetings** do not happen in a hybrid setting and definitely not in a remote setting*”. Participant D2 argued that “*When you never meet people by the **coffee machine** you can feel excluded*”. Many participants perceived hybrid working as an advanced challenge, due to technological difficulties and the troubles of integrating a single person in front of the screen.

Tax implications pose a challenge to permanently working from abroad, which was mentioned in some of the interviews. The participants confirmed the statements Yang et al. (2021) made, referring to hybrid working posing a special challenge, decreasing collaboration and communication, with some employees being in the office and others in front of the screen, having a negative effect on productivity and results (Yang et al. 2021). Some participants reported technological challenges, which confirmed the arguments made by Elshaiekh, Hassan, and Abdallah (2018). Two focus groups additionally mentioned the challenge of tax implications, confirming the challenge brought up by Agrawal and Star (2022).

Some aspects were perceived **ambiguously** both as an opportunity and a challenge. While most participants perceived flexibility of alternative work arrangements as an opportunity, some of the participants were more critical due to more difficult coordination and scheduling of collaboration. The participants perceived the option of working when being sick ambiguously; they set varying boundaries and availability. While all participants reported that they would not work if they were severely sick, many participants reported working while being mildly sick. Most of them witnessed feeling personal pressure and fear of losing track of work. They perceived working while sick as an opportunity to support their team and do work away from work. They also mentioned the need for control and staying up to date but said there was no external pressure from managers. Some of the participants have experienced physical injuries and seized the opportunity to work from home. Other participants assessed not taking time to rest and recover as something negative, potentially leading to long-term health issues. Some of them reflected that it could be challenging to decide if they should work when being sick, depending on the sickness, stating that this also depended on projects, clients, and deadlines.

Another ambiguously perceived topic is efficiency at the office versus outside the office. Many participants reported better focus when working from home, avoiding distractions at the office in the form of colleagues. Others reported having better focus at the office and avoiding distractions at home. Many participants related it to specific tasks, stating that they preferred to work alternatively if they had to focus on tasks and preferred to work physically in-office if it was a collaborative task, which involved interaction and cooperation. The participants further stressed the need for specific training, as argued for by Participant G5, confirming the arguments by Nickson & Siddons, 2012 and Larson, Vroman, and Makarius (2020).

Many participants reported a changed work-life interdependency through the increased blurring of work and life, posing opportunities as well as challenges. Regarding work-life interdependency, many participants reported that alternative work arrangements allowed them to flexibly integrate other tasks (for instance, laundry time, doctor's appointments, and receiving packages) into their work days. They perceived it as a positive opportunity leading to more time efficiency. But generally the blurring of work and life was perceived ambiguously. While some employees focus on incorporating appointments and chores into their workday, perceiving it as an opportunity to save time, other employees struggle with the blur of work and life and desire clear separation. Ultimately, these arguments lead to a controversy about increased or decreased work-life balance and changed work-life interdependency through the ability to unify work and private life, weighing the pro argument of time efficiency, and the con argument of blurring, leading to constant availability and never really finishing work. The challenge of separation between work and life through the blending of work and home has been discussed in previous studies (Staglin, 2020). The participants confirmed the increased blurring of work and life but assessed this change differently. The participants had different perceptions and opinions of availability after work, some valuing a strict separation of work and life, setting boundaries in the form of automated out-of-office emails', the use of two phones, and others not minding the blurring of work and life, checking emails and taking calls out of curiosity or the fear of missing out on crucial information. Their perception depended on their personal situation and experience. Some participants reported the setting of boundaries as desirable and explained that at the beginning of their careers, they were not good at setting boundaries, but improved when setting clear boundaries with more work experience. The participants reported that flexibility goes both ways. When given more freedom to work flexibly and the option choose the most suitable work arrangement, they felt more committed to offering their time to the company, including working overtime, in the evenings, or on the weekends.

Reflecting on our research method, it was beneficial that the focus groups consisted of employees and managers of different experience levels within the company. Our research aimed at the employees' perspectives. However, since the focus groups included employees with managerial roles, the participants also discussed opportunities and challenges for people with

managerial responsibilities. The gained insights demonstrate how valuable focus group interviews are as an explorative method, as new insights and perspectives were gained through the interaction of the employees.

Discussing the Opportunities and Challenges of hybrid and remote working alternatives to traditional physical in-office work, the lack of managerial guidance and support was frequently mentioned. Contrary to that, we came across the theory of Self-Management (Drucker, 1999) which argues that individuals can manage themselves, without having an external manager. This could be investigated further, by studying employee's self-assessment of their managerial skills. Another angle for future research could be the focus on the managerial role. When focusing more on the managerial role, McGregor, 1966, argues that managers have a Theory X or Theory Y mindset in regard to employee motivation. The theory X manager's mindset believes that workers do not want to work and need to be managed, motivated through incentives and punishments, and monitored in order to work (Belling, 2021). They lack discipline and independent working ethics and need structure and supervision in order to be productive and achieve desirable results (Belling, 2021). Theory Y manager's mindset believes that people like to work and "find satisfaction and self-expression in working" (Belling, 2021, p. 68). Belling argues that based on theory X, freedom and autonomy that come with alternative work arrangements could be abused by workers who lack self-discipline. Theory X workers will struggle to do so and be less productive than in an office setting (Belling, 2021). Conversely, people who believe in theory Y argue that employees are more likely to thrive in alternative working arrangements, such as remote working, using their freedom and flexibility to achieve greater results (Belling, 2021). In a survey, one could investigate managers' perceptions of employees in the context of alternative work arrangements.

## 5. Conclusion

Concluding our findings, we have gained more understanding of the research topic and exposed that different work arrangements pose a number of opportunities and challenges for employees and affect their work-life interdependency differently, which answers our research questions 1-3. With our paper *"Why Coffee Machine Chats Matter - Investigating Opportunities and*

*Challenges of Different Work Arrangements*” we want to create an increased understanding of these aspects, raise awareness and encourage public discourse. We aim to address all members of the workforce, but especially employers, enabling them to utilise the opportunities and face the challenges, in order to make choices regarding an improved work environment, in which employees can thrive, achieving individual goals in the best interest of the organisation. As Cappelli (2021) argued, the controversy surrounding different work arrangements could be a good point to redefine the meaning of work. Speaking with 31 employees and witnessing the interactive discourse through focus group interviews, has demonstrated the relevance of the topic, the need for discourse, and further research. Demonstrated by the personal interest in participating in the focus group interviews and the various insights gained, we believe that our research could be valuable to every employer. We further believe that exchanging information between different companies, internally and externally (also among different scales and industries) could be valuable, as many employees reported similar challenges and different solution approaches such as our own.

Concluding from the discussion of our findings in 4.9 overall we conclude that employees perceive the option to flexibly choose different work arrangements as positive, posing many opportunities for employees (and employers). However, employers need to be aware of perceived challenges and changed work-life interdependency. And further find potential solutions together with employees and other employers. One key lesson is that employees perceive different work arrangements differently, depending on their personal situation, personality, and preferences. When discussing opportunities, challenges, and the effect on work-life interdependency, the participants reflected on varying needs for social interaction, related to different personality types (extroverts and introverts), and need for guidance (often related to their level of work experience) personal situations (family commitments) and varying efficiency (with some employees being more focused when working from the office and vice versa). Further opportunities and challenges related to specific positions (HR executives perceive the extended applicant pool as an opportunity, but perceive the nature of their job of being close to the people as a challenge) and varying needs for setting boundaries between work and life were discussed. Some participants did not desire a separation of work and life. Others reported a higher need for control, resulting in them checking their emails off hours. Others claimed

availability to be a way of giving back to the company when receiving the flexibility to choose their work arrangements. Overall most participants appreciated being given a flexible choice of different work arrangements.

### **Conclusions for Employers**

Throughout our research we became aware of the differences between employees, as described above. We, therefore, recommend employers seek a dialogue with their employees, reflecting together on different options of work arrangements, suitable to their personal situation and professional position, as Participant F3 told us, that from the point of view of an experienced HR executive, there is a need for discussing this topic more intensely. This could enable employees and employers to experience direct and indirect benefits, utilising the opportunities of different work arrangements and potentially enhancing the employee's satisfaction and performance. We recommend employers to get to know their employees and establish a personal relationship, aiming at the creation of mutual trust. Smaller organisations with flatter hierarchies might be at an advantage, given more opportunities for personal contact. In bigger companies, in which personal contact is not feasible due to practical reasons, we recommend that employers educate managers on this matter, who can function as surrogates. Another option would be to assess employees' perceptions based on a survey.

The challenge of creating a sense of belonging and togetherness was mentioned by participants. Therefore, we suggest employers come up with incentives to strengthen these aspects. **Common office days**, where all employees are required to work from the office location, as implemented by Company C are a good approach to give opportunities for collaboration and social interaction. The definition of **core hours** was further mentioned as a relevant method to ensure collaboration. Related to the discussion about task-specific efficiency and office capacity, employers could reassess their **office spaces and meeting rooms**. Some participants reported challenges of limited workspace or not enough private meeting rooms to book for quiet working space. The participants perceived the collaborative nature of open space offices as an opportunity for cooperation, but as a challenge for quiet efficiency. Many of the participants claimed to be distracted or disturbed by coworkers when in the office; although the social interaction is given. They named it as the reason for working from home. With employers being aware of it, further



measures could be taken. With decreased social in-person contact, alternative ways to **increase collaboration** must be found. With spontaneous collaboration and communication being a challenge, alternative tools were mentioned by Participant F3 mentioning “Wheel of Names”. This may require creativity, as information exchange in real-time is not always possible. It was mentioned that alternative work arrangements require careful management and an increased effort when **scheduling, planning, and communicating**. The participants mentioned the relevance of managerial responsibilities for employees to facilitate different work arrangements effectively. The employer, and managers as a surrogate can be responsible for **providing guidance**, especially to new employees. With the increased implementation of alternative work arrangements, alternative ways to provide need to be found. It is important for everyone to know how to work. Especially when not physically present, it is important for employees to know they can reach out to their managers. They might need to help create a structure and ensure that employees are not working too much or too little. It is essential to build trust between employees and employers. With the distribution of information having been mentioned as a challenge, managers need to find **new tools for the distribution of information**. Another aspect is education. Alternative work arrangements demand **different ways of training employees**. As Participant G5 mentioned: “Managers receive training sessions to navigate remote leadership”. Further, a diversity challenge was mentioned. With more women taking on the opportunity to work from home or remotely, they become less visible at the offices. Managers and leaders need to be aware of it and consider this in their aims for **gender visibility and diversity**. Participants hinted at a **generational gap**, with people of different age groups perceiving work arrangements differently, with older employees being more used to “the traditional way of working”, and potentially being unfamiliar with using technology as their main communication channel. Managers and leaders need to be aware of this and act on it. Through a survey, managers could investigate the reasons for resistance to alternative work models, and education and training could present a possible solution. The potential effects of alternative work arrangements on **mental health** were also mentioned, although this aspect has not been investigated in more depth, it has been mentioned by the employees. Not setting boundaries and an increased blend of work and personal life could lead to burnout. Remote work and decreased social interaction could lead to isolation (Participant G5; Participant D3). When evaluating different work arrangements, hybrid work stood out as posing specific challenges but also symbolising the

compromise of different needs. Through exchange with other stakeholders, an improved option for hybrid meetings could be found. After all, the participants appreciated being given the option and flexibly being able to choose between different work arrangements.

### **Limitations and Outlook Future Research**

We do not claim our findings to be transferable, as we acknowledge variables specific to company size, industry, culture, personality, and personal situation. However, we identified common themes and some insights confirmed and saw potential relevance in a comprehensive study conducted on a larger scale. Therefore, we acknowledge our work as a connecting point for further research regarding the organisation of future work. Our study could be relevant to employers, employees, and organisations.

Due to the limitations of the thesis, we could only investigate certain aspects of alternative work arrangements. During our literature review and the focus group interviews, other aspects have been brought to our attention additionally. In the frame of this thesis, we could only focus on opportunities and challenges and the effects on work-life-interdependency. For further research, we suggest investigating other aspects that we have not looked further into within this research. The findings hint at personal differences, further research could include personality tests, interrelating to the perception of different work arrangements. We would also suggest combining quantitative and qualitative methods, starting with a survey among employees and continuing with individual and focus group interviews. The scale of the study could be changed, and the focus group formed bigger in order to gain more relevant data. Future research could also focus on a specific industry or position. Through the focus group interviews, it was brought to our attention that some industries and positions naturally required more or less in-person contact. It would also be interesting to focus more on other aspects mentioned, for instance, team building and designing a question catalogue, specifically investigating the effects of different work arrangements on team building. Further, we recognise the relevance of comprehensive research on the relevant sub-topics such as “mental health”, “gender visibility”, “effects on employee satisfaction”, “effect on productivity”, and “generational gap” and assemble the focus group according to it. Unfortunately, we can not elaborate more in this thesis due to the limited extent of it but we assess them as relevant findings.

We believe that the increased awareness, desired balance, and choice between different work arrangements can pose a challenge itself, but if utilised in the right way employees, employers, and organisations can experience direct and indirect benefits. Combining our findings in the literature and our empirical study, we believe there remains information to be exchanged, lessons to be learned and research to be done. Our study aims at stimulating the discourse between employer and employee; and externally between stakeholders of different organisations. Revealing new approaches to employees and employers, raising awareness of individual differences and motivating the dialogue, finding balanced solutions that cater to employees' and employers' needs. Employers and employees need to find out what works best for them, specific to a number of variables. Because after all, **coffee machine chats and laundry time** may not be the only aspects that matter.

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# Appendix

## **Appendix 1 - First Contact with Potential Interview Partners**

Hey, we are Natalia & Larissa from Lund School of Economics and Management.

We are currently writing our master's thesis and would love to include XY in it!

We are conducting focus group interviews and aim to explore the challenges and opportunities of alternative work arrangements (in-office/hybrid/remote). We have already interviewed a few companies and are looking for some more participants!

What are we looking for? **5 employees** (any experience level), **discussing alternative work arrangements!** It will be **one interview/group discussion**, can be conducted in person or via Zoom/Teams, and can take from half an hour up to 1,5 hours - (depending on how much people have to say)! The participants can be from different departments and teams.

The interviews will be held in compliance with your data regulations, the results will be anonymised and we are happy to sign an NDA. Please feel free to contact us regarding any concerns.

If you are interested in participating, please reach out. We hope to gain valuable insights, not only for us but also for you as a company!

Thank you!

Natalia & Larissa

## **Appendix 2 - Introduction Focus Group Interviews**

Outline of Focus-Group Interviews

“Hey, we are Natalia and Larissa from Lund School of Economics and Management. Thank you so much for participating in this focus group study! It is very relevant to our thesis, and we believe it will provide interesting insights for everyone involved! The interview will take from 1 hour and maximum 2 hours. In the beginning, we will ask each of you individually to **BRIEFLY** tell us a few details about you and your job please:

### **Appendix 3 - Individual Interview Questions**

Start with individual questions (2-3 minutes per person)

<i>What is your job title?</i>
<i>How long have you been working for X company?</i>
<i>How do you mostly work now? (e.g. physical in-office, hybrid, or remote)</i>
<i>What changes have you noticed in your work arrangements after experiencing different alternative work models?</i>

### **Appendix 4 - Focus-Group Questions**

“After the individual part, we will ask you to discuss certain topics in the group. We would like you to know that this is an open dialogue and we would preferably hear everyone voicing their opinions. There is no right or wrong and we are interested in including everyone and gathering different perspectives.”

<i>What opportunities do you see with working physically in-office/hybrid/remotely?</i>
<i>What challenges do you see with working physically in-office/hybrid/remotely?</i>
<i>Have you ever had the opportunity to work from a different location? If so, what were your experiences?</i>
<i>How would you describe the level of trust demonstrated by your managers towards you and your colleagues when working from outside the office?</i>

*Is your day strictly divided into work and off hours?*

*How do you manage your availability after work hours? (e.g., via emails, work phone or other communication platforms)*

*Would you work from home when you are sick?  
And if so, what factors influence your decision to work or not work?*

*Considering our discussion on challenges and opportunities - what impact are different work arrangements having on your work-life interdependency?*