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## **The Feeling of a Lost Community**

*A Case Study of How Knowledge Workers Interpret Motivation When Working  
From Home due to COVID-19*

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# Abstract

<b>Title</b>	The Feeling of a Lost Community: A Case Study of How Knowledge Workers Interpret Motivation When Working From Home due to COVID-19
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<b>Purpose</b>	The purpose of our study is to examine and gain insights into employees' interpretation of today's remote work-life, resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. We want to contribute with a deeper understanding of knowledge workers' perceptions of working remotely from home and the pandemic's implications on the motivation at work. Further, this will enable us to provide leaders in KIFs with valuable insights into how they could make sense of the situation and manage their employees during and after the pandemic.
<b>Methodology</b>	Our research is a single case study of qualitative character with an interpretative and abductive research approach. The empirical data consists of ten semi-structured interviews at our case organization.
<b>Theoretical Perspectives</b>	The main theoretical framework consists of literature within motivation, particularly Alvesson and Kärreman's (2018) motivation theory. Additionally, the study draws upon the theory of remote work and organizational change as well as the existing, although limited, research on the interrelation between remote work and motivation.
<b>Contributions</b>	Our study contributes to the literature by giving a deeper insight into how employees in KIFs interpret motivation during mandatory remote work from home. We also contribute to the research field by reconceptualizing Alvesson and Kärreman's (2018) motivation theory by adding a new dimension that allows motivation become a result from other factors than social interactions during remote WFH.
<b>Keywords</b>	Motivation, working from home, COVID-19, employees, knowledge-intensive firm, knowledge workers

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We hope that you will enjoy our paper!

*Ebba Kraaij & Hedvig Spenner Crona*

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## Abbreviations

KIF	Knowledge-Intensive Firm
WFH	Working From Home
ICT	Information and Communications Technology

## Definitions

COVID-19	The global pandemic of the coronavirus. COVID-19 is a disease that is linked to the SARS-virus where ”‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus and ‘D’ for disease” (Bender, 2020). COVID-19 has caused a global pandemic which in this essay will be referred to corona, coronavirus, the pandemic, COVID-19 crisis. The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused radical changes in the workspace and forced organizations worldwide to establish mandatory remote work from home in order to prevent the spread of the virus (Anwer, 2020).
Lundgren’s Recruiting	Lundgren's Recruiting refers to our case organization, which this research is based on. Lundgren's Recruiting is within the staffing and recruitment branch.

# Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background and Problem Statement.....	1
1.2 Aim of Study and Research Questions.....	2
1.3 Research Outline .....	3
<b>2 Literature Review .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Organizational Change.....	5
2.2 The Practice of WFH.....	7
2.2.1 Remote Working .....	7
2.2.2 Benefits of WFH.....	8
2.2.3 Drawbacks of WFH .....	9
2.2.4 Work-life Balance .....	9
2.3 Motivation Theory.....	10
2.3.1 Inner Motivation: Humanistic Psychology.....	10
2.3.2 Instrumental Motivation .....	11
2.3.3 Interactive Motivation .....	11
2.4 Summary of Literature Review .....	13
<b>3 Methodology .....</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 Philosophical Grounding.....	14
3.2 Research Approach .....	15
3.2.1 Research Context - Background of Case Organization.....	16
3.3 Data collection.....	17
3.3.1 Sample .....	18
3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews.....	19
3.4 Data Analysis .....	20
3.5 Reflexivity and Ethical Principles.....	21
3.6 Limitations and Critique of the Study .....	22
<b>4 Empirical Findings and Analysis.....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 Lundgren’s Recruiting COVID-19 Crisis Response.....	25
4.1.1 Efforts to Maintain Normality .....	26
4.2 Prerequisites for Maintaining Normality.....	28
4.2.1 Living Conditions .....	28
4.2.2 Work Conditions .....	30
4.3 The Outcome .....	34
4.3.1 Social Deficit .....	34
4.3.2 Blurred Boundaries Between Work and Private Life .....	36

4.3.3 <i>The Flexible Workweek</i> .....	40
4.4 Summary of Empirical Findings and Analysis .....	42
<b>5 Discussion</b> .....	<b>44</b>
5.1 Remote WFH and Its Implications on Employees .....	44
5.1.1 <i>A Mental Barrier When Managing Remote WFH - Organizational Change at Lundgren's Recruiting</i> .....	44
5.1.2 <i>The Feeling of not Having an Office - A Conflict Between Work and Private Life</i> .....	45
5.1.3 <i>The Emergence of Other Motivation Factors due to COVID-19</i> .....	47
5.2 The Feeling of a Lost Community - Interactive Motivation During COVID-19.....	50
5.3 Summary of Discussion .....	53
<b>6 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>54</b>
6.1 Empirical Findings .....	54
6.2 Theoretical Contribution .....	56
6.3 Limitations .....	57
6.4 Future Research.....	58
6.5 Practical Implications .....	58
<b>References</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>65</b>
Appendix A - List of Interviewees .....	65
Appendix B - Interview Guide .....	66

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Overview of the Literature Review.....	5
Figure 2: Overview of Empirical Findings and Analysis.....	26
Figure 3: Overview of the Result of Empirical Findings and Analysis.....	42

# 1 Introduction

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*This chapter includes a background and problem statement, highlighting this research's importance. Furthermore, the aim of study will be presented, which culminates in our research questions. Lastly, the research outline for this study is provided.*

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## 1.1 Background and Problem Statement

*“I’ve had very mixed feelings when it comes to working from home because of corona. Honestly, during the beginning of spring 2020, it was very tough. I mean, you lost physical contact with your colleagues, did everything at home, and nothing was as it used to be.” - Anna, recruiter at Lundgren’s Recruiting (interview, 1th of April, 2021)*

Today, COVID-19 is a subject on everyone's tongue, and Swedish organizations are highly affected by it where major parts of the society had to adapt to the situation. Employees were required to work from home to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and remote working became the "new normal" almost overnight. When employees are forced to work from home due to the pandemic, it might affect their motivation (Kniffin et al., 2020). Prior to the pandemic, few employees had remote working experience. In addition to that, the employees and their organizations were not prepared for managing or supporting this practice since remote working was not a widely used practice before the COVID-19 outbreak (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). In fact, remote working was previously a "luxury" for affluent citizens (Desilver, 2020). However, today, the COVID-19 outbreak has forced employees all over the world to work from home, which has led to a global experiment of remote working on a larger scale than ever before (Kniffin et al., 2020). The situation is permeated by radical changes and challenges for employees and organizations to cope with the new ways of working and above all, how to maintain the employee motivation when working from home.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis and extensive use of home offices have forced people to recalibrate, or perhaps even lose grip over the previously carefully planned work life-balance since the boundaries between work and life have become relentlessly more blurred than ever before



(Anwer, 2020). Beardwell and Thompson (2017) define the term work-life balance as the balance between work and life, where work and non-work activities can reside side by side. According to a study conducted by Wolor et al. (2020), work-life balance is positively correlated to employee motivation and performance. Hence, it has become a global problem for employees and organizations to manage remote working from home and maintain motivation due to the pandemic.

Needless to say, the pandemic has resulted in times of rapid change and erased the old ways of working at the office. In turn, the motivation and productivity at work might decrease among the organizational members (Wolor et al., 2020). Hence, organizations that rely on their workforce for competitive advantage are especially vulnerable, thus, in particular knowledge-intensive firms. According to Alvesson (2004), *knowledge-intensive firms*, also known as KIFs, are defined as “organizations that offer to the market the use of fairly sophisticated knowledge or knowledge-based products” (p. 17), in which the employees are defined as *knowledge workers*. Moreover, knowledge work relies on the knowledge workers’ attitudes, behaviors, and motivation (Newell et al., 2009). Thus, when coping with a global pandemic and forcing employees to work from home and avoid social interactions, it is critical to maintain motivation and positive attitudes within the organization and its workforce. In short, the COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in challenging and demanding times for organizations worldwide, particularly in KIFs where the motivation and attitude among the employees are crucial for competitive advantage.

## **1.2 Aim of Study and Research Questions**

Ever since the pandemic hit the world at the beginning of 2020, a growing discourse on remote working from home has made the subject a trend in both organizational and academic fields (Holmberg & Petrelius, 2020; Desilver, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2020). Last year’s changes in the global workspace have made remote work intensify to an extent never seen before. Considering the large number of studies on remote work (e.g., Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Lewis & Cooper, 2005; Morgan, 2004), we can assume that management scholars know a lot about working remotely and its effect on employees and organizations. However, those studies were conducted during times when remote working from home was practiced at a limited scale. Today, the pandemic has resulted in a global quarantine and mandatory work from home. Therefore, there might be a lack of contextual relevance in the previous knowledge on remote working in the

present COVID-19 crisis. Hence, we aim to examine how these new circumstances have shaped employees' interpretation and understanding of motivation during remote working from home.

Furthermore, remote work from home is not a new phenomenon. However, scholars in this field have not yet adequately addressed the challenges with maintaining a high focus and keep motivated at work when employees are required to work from home full time. The aim is to add insights into employees' interpretation of today's remote work-life, resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. We want to contribute with a deeper understanding of knowledge workers' perceptions of working remotely from home and the pandemic's implications on the motivation at work. Further, this will enable us to provide leaders in KIFs with valuable insights into how they could make sense of the situation and manage their employees during and after the pandemic.

In light of the above, we conducted the following research questions for our study:

1. *How do employees in knowledge intensive firms interpret motivation when working from home due to COVID-19?*
2. *What is the significance of social interactions for motivation among knowledge workers?*

### **1.3 Research Outline**

In this section, the intended outline for our study is presented by describing the chapter layouts. Following this introductory chapter, we continue with *Chapter 2*, including a literature review of theoretical concepts we found relevant for our research. Hence, this chapter provides the theoretical framework intended to steer the discussion (*Chapter 5*). In *Chapter 3*, the study's methodology is presented, including the research approach and method for data collection and empirical analysis. Additionally, we also bring up the importance of reflexivity and ethical principles during our study, as well as the potential limitations and critiques of the research. *Chapter 4* provides our empirical findings and analysis of the empirical data collected from interviews with employees at our case company. Here we explore how the employees perceive working from home due to COVID-19 and how it has affected them. In *Chapter 5*, a discussion is provided, in which the empirical findings are interpreted and related to our theoretical framework.

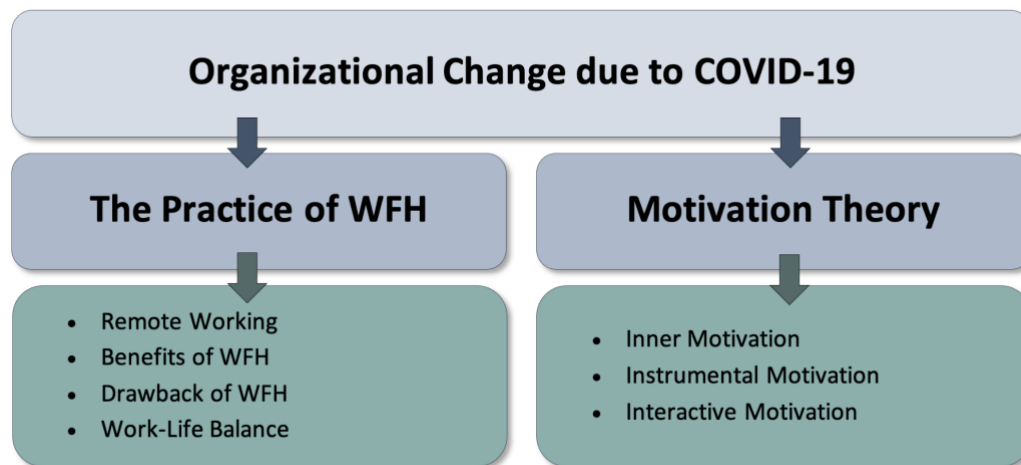
To conclude, we summarize our key findings and theoretical contributions in *Chapter 6*. In addition, we present our reflection upon the study's limitations and suggest future research opportunities. Ultimately, we describe the relevance of our findings by discussing practical implications.

## 2 Literature Review

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*This chapter provides relevant literature used in our case study analysis. Firstly, we explain the concept of organizational change and its impact on organizations and its employees. Secondly, the theoretical framework's core is based upon the literature of remote work from home, including subchapters describing the definition of remote work, the benefits and drawbacks of working from home, and work-life balance as a result of working from home. Thirdly, we provide literature on motivation theories, as this is the key concept in our study. Lastly, we conclude by summarizing the presented theories.*

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*Figure 1. Overview of the Literature Review*

### 2.1 Organizational Change

In this research, motivation is examined in situations of radical change due to COVID-19. Therefore, this subsection will present theoretical concepts of organizational change to analyze its effects on motivation. Implementing change within an organization can be difficult. However, when the change succeeds, it can bring the organization to a better outcome, with managers and employees feeling that they have succeeded. This can, in turn, generate a stronger culture, higher goals, and achievements. Due to COVID-19, organizations were forced to change quickly. Even though organizational changes generally take years to implement, the pandemic required rapid changes, which took place in only a few weeks (Holmberg & Petrelius, 2020). According to

Palmer, Dunford, and Buchanan (2017), change can be hard to deal with in stable times, particularly when the success rate when implementing change is only at 30 percent. The authors also mentioned that too much change could induce initiative fatigue and initiative overload. Kotter (2012) states eight main failure factors towards change; lack of urgency, no supportive coalition, no vision, poor communication, obstacles to change not removed, no wins or achievements to celebrate, declaring victory too soon and not embedding the changes. On the one hand, Kotter (2012) suggests that organizations are advised to change rapidly or perish. On the other hand, Bruch and Menges (2010) argue that organizations should avoid the risk of implementing too extensive and rapid changes. Palmer, Dunford, and Buchanan (2017) argue that people who are happy with how things are, will be more likely to be reluctant to change. The authors also state that while rapid changes might be necessary, particularly in a crisis, implementing too much change at a quick pace might be destabilizing.

Moreover, Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis (2013) talks about the importance of acknowledging individual readiness for change. The authors suggest that readiness for change is an individual attitude, with both cognitive and emotional dimensions, based on five underpinning beliefs:

1. *“Discrepancy: The belief that change is needed”*
2. *“Appropriate: The belief that the proposed change is an appropriate response”*
3. *“Efficacy: The individual’s perceived capability to implement the change”*
4. *“Principal support: The belief that the organization (management, peers) will provide” resources and information”*
5. *“Valence: The individual’s evaluation of the personal costs and benefits; no benefits, no overall positive evaluation of readiness” (p.122)*

When the individual readiness for change is high, changes might be easy to implement. However, when change readiness is low, change is harder to implement successfully and more groundwork is needed to increase the readiness among those affected (Rafferty, Jimmieson & Armenakis, 2013).

Furthermore, Newell et al. (2009) suggest that using information and communications technologies, called ICT, may potentially support organizational changes in KIFs. ICT refers to

technologies that, through telecommunications, provide access to corporate information. It resembles Information Technology (IT) but concentrates on communication technologies, including the internet, wireless networks, telephones, and other communication tools. ICTs can be particularly necessary in times of mandatory remote work from home, as it allows many knowledge workers to decide when, where, and how to work without requiring physical presence to have access to organizational information. Besides, Newell et al. (2009) suggest that a problem when implementing change might be the lack of motivation to participate. The authors argue that this lack of engagement reflects human nature, where individuals only become interested in something when they can actually learn about the new practices through participation. Moreover, although employees genuinely want to participate, they are usually distracted by other urgent things they face, particularly for knowledge workers who are known for being busy. In short, using the right technology is crucial when managing remote knowledge work, and without participation and engagement from employees, there is a risk of decreased motivation and challenges to implement the change.

## **2.2 The Practice of WFH**

### **2.2.1 Remote Working**

Due to COVID-19, employees were forced to work remotely, to a greater extent than ever before. Today's technology has enabled new ways of working and has provided opportunities for workers to work remotely from any location at any time. The definition of remote working varies, and there is no explicit agreement regarding the term's meaning (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013). An early definition of remote working, provided by Morgan (2004), describes the term as "using telecommunications devices as e-working, teleworking and telecommuting." A later definition is provided by Kniffin et al. (2020), describing the term as a broader category that includes "work from anywhere" and not necessarily from home.

Remote working from home, also abbreviated as remote *WFH*, was previously a response to employee preferences, where some employees got the opportunity to work remotely if they wanted or needed it. However, the standard was to work at the office as many do not have space or opportunity to work from home for various reasons (Kniffin et al., 2020). Before the COVID-19

pandemic in 2020, some, but not all, organizations provided the opportunity to work remotely, as it led to savings for organizations (Lewis & Cooper, 2005). For the last couple of years, the trends towards a more digitized and virtual working environment have accelerated. However, the COVID-19 outbreak forced organizations worldwide into mandatory remote WFH on a scale never seen before (Kniffin et al., 2020). Employees often perceive it challenging to maintain boundaries between work and private life when working remotely from home (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Nevertheless, when the pandemic hit the world in 2020, it became mandatory to work from home, which further complicated this issue (Kniffin et al., 2020). Additionally, remote WFH has been discussed as a practice that is negatively affecting motivation and job effectiveness (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013), which might be another growing issue for employees in today's remote workplace.

### **2.2.2 Benefits of WFH**

The practice of WHF has become the standard way of working due to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Kniffin et al., 2020). Moreover, WFH comes with both benefits and drawbacks, resulting in some preferring it and others not (Wienclaw, 2019). There are various reasons for those preferences. One main reason for preferring WFH rather than working at the office is the opportunity for flexible scheduling. According to Lupu (2017), flexible scheduling provides employees with autonomy in planning their everyday lives, including activities facilitating their needs, such as going to the doctor or managing a family. Ford and Butts (1991) argue that WFH enables employees to modify their working schedule daily and even hourly. The benefits of flexible scheduling are listed by Wienclaw (2019), saying that it enables employees to sleep and work late, start and end work early, work more hours per day and fewer days a week, schedule personal appointments, and work in the evenings not to use any vacation days. Additionally, WFH allows employees to save time in commuting to work and avoid traffic during rush hour. According to Ford and Butts (1991), the ability to eliminate stress when avoiding rush hour traffic is perceived as the main benefit of WFH to several employees. In line with this, Wienclaw (2019) argues that employees have more time to spend with friends and family when not commuting.

Furthermore, there are financial benefits of WFH. Wienclaw (2019) suggests that employees can save money “by dispensing with the commute to the office”, including savings in gasoline and

vehicle wear, parking costs, or other transportation costs. Ford and Butts (1991) also claim that employees can save money by reducing lunch and office clothing costs. Furthermore, Lupu (2017) claims that another financial benefit is the reduced costs for kindergartens, babysitting, and afterschool programs. WFH also benefits new parents or physically limited who find it challenging or cannot leave home but want to be part of the workforce (Ford and Butts, 1991). Another benefit is the ability to provide care for sick children or elders (Wienclaw, 2019). Furthermore, it is an opportunity for people living in isolated areas to work and be employed as WFH is location independent (Lupu, 2017).

### **2.2.3 Drawbacks of WFH**

WFH also comes with several drawbacks for employees. According to Lupu (2017), some drawbacks are "the technical problems that cannot be solved remotely, the unequal salaries between employees working in the office and teleworkers; employee isolation, limitation of normal interaction with the colleagues and difficulties in organizing union activities". Moreover, Ford and Butts (1991) argue that WFH can hinder career advancement, such as promotions, with support from the saying "out of sight, out of mind". They suggest that employees are more likely to be known and get promoted quicker when working at the office due to the management's lack of information about the home working employees' interpersonal communication skills and relationships. Another drawback of not working at the office concerns the lack of informal communication with colleagues. Without such communication and informal interactions, employees risk feeling alienated from the organization and colleagues (Ford & Butts, 1991). Additionally, the lack of informal interactions with colleagues might result in decreased motivation, as motivation comes from social interactions (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

### **2.2.4 Work-life Balance**

Work-life balance is defined as the friction between work and personal purposes (Quick et al., 2004). According to Hill et al. (2001), work-life balance is the extent to which an individual can balance the emotional, behavioral and time requirements of paid work, family and personal duties. Moore (2007) claims that organizations that give long-term work-life balance cultures create loyalty and positive attitudes among employees to work. Moreover, Beardwell and Thompson (2017) describe work-life balance as an organizational competitive advantage since studies show



that most people care more about their work-life balance than their pay. Work-life balance can also provide advantages indirectly to organizations through enhanced well-being, reduced job stress, and lowered burnout of its employees (Parkes & Langford, 2008). According to Noon et al. (2013), work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to run their working life and non-work life without either of them detracting from the other. The authors also argue that the problem lies within the increased digitalization, which has made work and non-work aspects of life increasingly intertwined and overlapped since employees are available virtually at all times. According to Anwer (2020), the work-life balance is more challenging to manage today due to COVID-19 and remote work since the boundaries between work and private life have been blurred out. Holmberg and Petrelius (2020) further argue that the challenges with maintaining a work-life balance have intensified during the crisis. Nevertheless, according to Wolor et al. (2020), work-life balance is positively correlated with motivation. Thus, the authors further argue that work-life balance directly affects motivation and if there is a balance between work and private life, the motivation to work can increase.

## **2.3 Motivation Theory**

According to Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), motivation theory can be divided into three main themes. The first focuses on inner motivation, so-called humanistic psychology. The second refers to the instrumental motivation that emphasizes an individual's orientation towards gaining rewards and avoiding punishment. The third claims that motivation arises in an interplay between the individual and the environment. The latter view on motivation offers a framing of motivation in a specific context.

### **2.3.1 Inner Motivation: Humanistic Psychology**

One of the most well-known humanistic motivation theories is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), based on human needs. In this theory, Maslow orders all human needs into a hierarchical manner from the lower to the higher classification, consisting of five identified levels of need. Those needs are physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. The theory implies that when a specific level of need is fulfilled, it no longer motivates the individual. Then, the individual tries to satisfy the next higher level of need in order to feel motivated. However, Maslow admitted in his earlier work that he may have given

“the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges” and clarifies that the satisfaction of needs is not an “all-or-nothing” phenomenon (Maslow, 1987, p. 69). Nevertheless, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) state, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs has gained a foothold in the public consciousness, and the theory is given much space in textbooks and in different workplaces. However, they also point out that the idea is rather mechanical and tends to make human behavior more enigmatic than explanatory.

### **2.3.2 Instrumental Motivation**

The instrumental perspective talks about motivation as a result of the individual's orientation towards receiving rewards and avoiding punishments. Thus, the environmental context can affect the motivation through the incentives that are being offered. Motivation comes from salary and other rewards, including avoidance of penalties. Examples of such penalties can be complaints from managers, disapproving employees or clients, and loss of promotions or higher salaries. For example, if an employee is interested in a high commission, the motivation to work more and perform specific tasks in order to reach the goal increases. The strength of the employee's motivation is a consequence of how valuable the goal is for the employee and the estimated probability of reaching that goal (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2018).

### **2.3.3 Interactive Motivation**

When talking about motivation, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) highlight the importance of the social context and point to the interactive dimension of motivation. This interactive motivation is about the individual in relation to social groups and standards, where motivation results from different interactive factors. The authors point at three motivational factors, which are norms, reciprocity, and identity. *Norms* are those who provide standards or ideals on how to behave in a certain context, either within the company or the profession. For example, one norm can be to use the time right and work productively without wasting any time. This can be the result of corporate-, industry- and social group cultures but are also associated with instrumental conditions. The career structure can be an essential explanation for why norms that prescribe hard work gain a foothold. If people are fighting hard for promotion, the effort tends to increase, resulting in a norm of working a lot. Following norms is an important driving force for people, as there is a desire to feel "normal" and live up to the standards to which the person attributes oneself.

The second factor, *reciprocity*, is a rule found in a variety of societal contexts. It is about being socially accommodating and giving a positive response, in any way, to other people who have done or given a person something. Reciprocity contains a moral dimension and is based on the norm of what one should do. The authors also discussed the positive outcome of reciprocity, in terms of loyalty and willingness to help, as more significant than what you get out of an employment that contains a lot of non-monetary. A higher salary might also result in the willingness to perform at work. In the long term, reciprocity within the relationship between the organization and the employees might strengthen the tendency to go that extra mile for the company.

The third motivational factor, brought up by the authors, is the acquired self-perception, referred to as *identity*. Being or perceiving oneself as a specific sort of person implies certain actions. This is based on the question of "Who am I/are we?", which in turn answers the question "How should I/we act?". The identity contains an understanding of what is appropriate and natural, which in turn directs the individual's thoughts, feelings, and values in a certain direction. Thus, the individual regards it as natural to meet perceived expectations and norms in the workplace due to conformity and identifications (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009). An individual's identity at work is mainly connected to an employee's identity at a specific company where the organization becomes the identity source. What affects the identity at work is the profession as well as the organizational culture. According to the authors, identity is a process and not only a stable trait Alvesson and Kärreman (2018). Furthermore, suppose the organizational identity is distinct and tangible in a positive sense. In that case, it can lead to stronger work standards and people feeling that they are willing to make an extra effort for the organization, even if the work is not always so appealing. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) stated, suppose an employee is employed at a high-status company, the willingness to take on boring work tasks is more likely to increase than if the employee works at a less fancy company. This can also mean that simple and repetitive tasks are perceived as more positive, and in turn, perceived as effective and as part of a positive whole, profit-generating and easy, rather than boring and unqualified. The authors claim that their point is that there is an interplay between different elements, which affect the view of specific elements and the motivational effects Alvesson and Kärreman (2018).

## **2.4 Summary of Literature Review**

We began this chapter by examining organizational change, as it is necessary for understanding how employees interpret and manage motivation during the radical changes resulting from COVID-19. Furthermore, we present the relevant literature on the practice of remote WFH, where Wienclaw (2019), Ford and Butts (1991) and Lupu (2017) are regarded as the preferred researchers of Remote Working from Home. The authors conclude that there are both benefits and drawbacks of working from home, making some prefer it and others not. In addition, in the subchapter of Remote WFH, we examined both previous and current concepts of work-life balance, which presented several relevant examples of how work-life balance might be affected by WFH and its correlation with motivation. Furthermore, we recognize a gap that little research, as to our knowledge, has implemented the current effects of COVID-19 on motivation. Thus, the second section of this chapter intends to enhance the understanding of motivation, mainly drawn upon theories of Alvesson and Kärreman (2018). Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) suggest that motivation theories can be divided into three main themes: inner, instrumental, and interactive motivation.

## 3 Methodology

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*In this section, we start by presenting our philosophical grounding, followed by the intended research approach. The research approach includes a description of the research context and the choice of case organization. Moving on, we present the outline for our data collection and empirical analysis. Ultimately, we discuss the reflexivity and ethical principles during our research, along with the limitations of our study.*

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### 3.1 Philosophical Grounding

This study aims to examine how mandatory remote working from home, due to COVID-19, has affected knowledge workers and their motivation. This is done in order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors determining how employees manage their remote work from home and maintain motivation at work. However, motivation is highly subjective and depends on how individuals interpret and create meaning of both their organization and their role, as well as the underlying values and norms. To be able to understand the employees in KIFs and how they interpret those factors, such as mandatory remote WFH and its consequences, we chose an interpretative approach. The interpretative traditions aim to gain insight into the subjective construction of reality, which is highly affected by social dimensions (Prasad, 2018). We have mainly been influenced by the interpretative tradition called Symbolic Interactionism (SI) as it "rests on the belief that objects and events have no intrinsic meaning apart from those assigned to them by individuals in the course of everyday social interaction" (Prasad, 2018, p. 21). Since we aim to gain insights into the employees' various perceptions of working from home, we acknowledged that their meanings might differ depending on the social situation, such as what office they work at and how their living situation looks. In-depth interviews are common in the SI tradition, where the main focus is to discover the underlying meaning in a particular situation by asking "how" rather than "what" (Prasad, 2018). Thus, this influenced us in our interviews since "how" questions are necessary in order for us to gain a deeper understanding of what factors of WFH the employees interpret as unique.

Furthermore, hermeneutics also influenced our research, which is another interpretive tradition with a focus on textual interpretation (Prasad, 2018). Hermeneutics was a central tradition for us

when analyzing the transcription of the interviews. In order to understand the transcriptions, we altered between what we had transcribed and the context, such as the organizational and cultural context at the case company. This process is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Prasad, 2018). By shifting back and forth between text and context, we hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the actual interpretation of working from home. Furthermore, we found it important to delay the text since, within the hermeneutic tradition, it is a method to uncover the multiple meanings in a text and discover a subtext (Prasad, 2018). This was our way of shedding light on the employees' underlying meanings when applying a specific language, such as expressive words or metaphors that are not literal. Ultimately, Prasad (2018) argues that hermeneutics is depending on the researcher's imagination for texts to be creatively interpreted. We acknowledged that by being two researchers, individual interpretations could be discussed and reflected upon. Thus, we continuously questioned each other's interpretations to obtain more creative interpretations.

## **3.2 Research Approach**

As mentioned earlier, we have chosen an interpretive approach in this study to gain insights into how employees in KIFs make sense of and interpret mandatory remote working due to COVID-19. To answer our research questions and conduct a nuanced analysis, we considered in-depth interviews in a single case study of qualitative character as best suiting.

Furthermore, business research can be approached in three ways: deduction, induction, and abduction (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018; Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). A deduction approach aims to validate a theory through empirical findings, while an inductive approach intends to discover theoretical concepts by analyzing the empirical findings (Bryman, 2012). An abduction approach acts as a combination of both induction and deduction. However, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) imply that abduction is not simply a mix of induction and deduction but adds another layer of understanding. They argue that an abductive approach is multifaceted and “alternates between theory and empirical facts whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 5). Since we wanted to properly understand relevant theories before collecting the data and avoid being influenced by or bound to a particular theory when conducting this study, we selected an abductive approach. However, we acknowledge that being completely unbiased of existing theories is impossible since recently studied theories

during our education might influence us. A single case study with in-depth interviews is considered the most suitable research method for conducting a nuanced analysis. Thus, we chose one company within the staff and recruitment branch as Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) argue that a single case study of one organization results in a more profound analysis of an organizational phenomenon than a multiple case study. In line with this, Yin (2012) suggests that a case study is appropriate when explanatory questions, such as how, what, or why, constitute the research question. With this in mind, we found a single case study to be the most appropriate to answer our research questions regarding mandatory remote work and its effect on motivation.

### **3.2.1 Research Context - Background of Case Organization**

In order to answer our research questions, we got the opportunity to access information from a company within the staffing and recruiting branch in Sweden, further called Lundgren's Recruiting. This data constitutes the empirical material on which the analysis is based on. Since this paper aims to provide leaders within KIFs with valuable information, the employees interviewed in the case organization do not possess a management or leadership role. The interviewees are located in four different offices around Sweden, which has given us valuable insights into the organization as a whole and not only one specific office.

Furthermore, Lundgren's Recruiting is a pseudonym for our case company to ensure the organization's complete anonymity. The pseudonym Lundgren's Recruiting was chosen randomly between Swedish last names. Therefore, Lundgren's Recruiting and especially the Swedish last name Lundgren has no underlying meaning or associations with any organization. Moreover, to better understand the context of this research, some background information about Lundgren's Recruiting is necessary. We had the opportunity to access valuable information through employees, managers, and the organization's intranet. Firstly, Lundgren's Recruiting has a high focus on employees' well-being, where they are offered one paid hour of training per week during working hours. The company recruits its employees on personal fits such as competence, where a background in sports is beneficial, resulting in many employees within the organization being competitive and outgoing.

Moreover, Lundgren's Recruiting possesses a strong organizational culture and team spirit. Their values are about being goal-oriented, reliable, inspiring, and generous, and these values guide their actions. The recruiting process that the interviewed employees work with starts with the key account manager signing a deal with clients. The recruiter then takes over to recruit the most suitable candidate based on the client's requirement profile. There is a broad spectrum of clients, but mainly within IT/Tech, sales and customer support, and business administration. The primary profession at Lundgren's Recruiting is recruiters and key account managers, and the company has around 150 co-workers in total. In Lundgren's Recruiting offices, they have a screen of the office's results, such as those who have signed the most deals. At the end of each month, within recruiting and account managers, that recruiter and key account manager who have been signing most deals among all employees in Sweden receive the title of "Recruiter/Account Manager of the month". All employees are also given a laptop and work phone, enabling them to work remotely, where they do not require a stationary base to access their work system. The interviewees in this study are mainly recruiters and key account managers. As we aim to keep the interviewees fully anonymous, we are not presenting the role of the other interviewees with unique positions. The employees at Lundgren's Recruiting have regular office hours, which are Monday to Friday, eight to five. However, many work more hours than these standard hours to accomplish their processes and gain commission. Their daily work contains many meetings with clients and candidates, and due to COVID-19, all meetings are held online. Otherwise, employees usually visit their clients onsite, and the candidates usually come to the office for interviews. As researchers and due to the circumstances of COVID-19, the empirical material was conducted online through Teams, with video and audio recording. Lastly, we identify Lundgren's Recruiting as a knowledge-intensive firm since they are client-based, problem-solving and output-based. KIFs tend to be service based and the competitive advantage depends on the workforce's "ability to solve complex problems and provide solutions for clients (Newell et al., 2009, p.29). Thus, Lundgren's Recruiting as a KIF is a highly relevant case company to examine in order to answer the research questions.

### **3.3 Data collection**

In this section, the collection of empirical data will be examined. The study was conducted with semi-structured interviews as the main empirical data. According to Sthyre (2013), data acts as the "raw material" on which studies are based on. Yet, since subjective beliefs might influence the



interviews, it is necessary to consider and clearly present how the empirical data was collected (Styhre, 2013). We chose a qualitative research method for our study, as we aim to gather in-depth insights into the interviewees' perceptions and social reality (Styhre, 2013). Thus, the empirical data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with employees at Lundgren's Recruiting. This will be done in accordance with Kvale's (1983) recommendation to examine and interpret subjective lifeworlds. Our interviews will be conducted online, as a video call, since physical meetings are not preferable due to the on-going pandemic. The video function will enable us to spot body language cues during the process. Observing the interviewee during the interview will deepen our conversation and result in a deeper understanding of the responding person's feelings. We will also work actively to reduce eventual biases and stay open-minded when gathering empirical material during our research.

### **3.3.1 Sample**

We began the research process by considering different Swedish organizations with clear COVID-19 crisis responses. Since we wanted to receive helpful information during the research process, we opted to choose an organization, Lundgren's Recruiting, accessible through close contact. Through networking, we contacted the manager at Lundgren's Recruiting within the staffing and recruitment industry and gained access to the site. The company was optimistic about our research proposal to give them valuable insights regarding the pandemic. This resulted in us gaining relevant information about the organization through employees, managers, and information on the organization's intranet.

Moreover, we had a quick meeting with the manager at the office that allowed us to send out an e-mail to all employees within the organization, asking for their participation. We then ensured that they had time and resources to participate in the interviews. The employees showed great interest, and we received replies from employees all over Sweden to participate in our study. To be able to reach the research goal and accomplish a feasible sample of interviewees to answer the research questions, the criterion of not being in a manager position was a requirement. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), this research method is a purposive sampling, which suggests that the sample is "conducted with reference to the goals of the research, so that units of analysis are selected in terms of criteria that will allow the research questions to be answered" (p. 391). Hence,

parts of the analysis regarding the criteria allow the research questions to be answered. We established the criteria before conducting the interviews without changing this throughout the process, referred to as a priori purposive sample according to Hood (2007). Firstly, we confirmed the employees in terms of the length of their employment, from recently employed to up to seven years at the company. Secondly, the sample of interviewees varied in age and gender. In our case, we sent out an e-mail to all employees within the organization around Sweden to further contact those who fulfilled the criteria and scheduled the interviews. Here, we chose those employees that were the fastest to respond and showed interest in our study to avoid the risk of favoring and choose the employees we preferred. Thus, we chose those employees who responded fastest and fulfilled our criteria, intending to decrease the risk of biases. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), one difficulty with qualitative studies is to decide the number of interviews before theoretical saturation has been accomplished. In our case, we scheduled ten interviews to achieve sufficient data. No interviews were canceled or rescheduled, depending on the flexibility of having the interviews online over Teams. All ten interviews were held within two weeks with a maximum of two interviews per day, so we as interviewers could receive and transcribe all information and impressions.

### **3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Since this paper is qualitative research, we opted for semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews use an interview guide with prepared questions simultaneously as it is flexible where further questions can be added if required throughout the interview (Bryman, 2012). We created one interview guide for the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting, where we used the same guide for all employees, including recruiters and key account managers. The interview guide consisted of 14 questions where some more minor changes and supplementary questions appeared to achieve sufficient answers. The questions were formulated to be open-minded, with the aim to not guide the respondents towards one specific answer as we wished to get honest answers and results in this paper.

All ten interviews lasted between 20 to 45 minutes, depending on the respondent's answers. The interviews were carried out in Swedish since all the responding employees' native language was Swedish. This ensured that the respondents did not feel restricted in their answers and could

express themselves correctly and nuanced. In the best case, the interviews should be held face-to-face in order to observe fully body language and impressions. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, this was not possible. Additionally, since almost all respondents worked from home during the period, the interviews were held online. We scheduled the interviews through Teams, with video and audio, since this is the communication platform within the organization. This further enabled us to interview employees from four different offices around Sweden. The interviewed employees were either in their home atmosphere or in a conference room at their office, with no other people around, which excludes the risk of the respondent's answers being influenced by the environment or other individuals in the area. According to Voegl (2013), to interview professionally, face interviews are essential to observe the interviewees' body language and facial expressions. We were not able to read their body language entirely since the interviews were held online. However, the video allowed us to observe facial expressions and body language to some extent. During the interview, we took two different roles. One researcher took notes, and the other led the interview by asking questions, simultaneously as both observed body language and other impressions. In order to transcribe the interviews in detail afterward, all interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Collecting qualitative data implies a certain amount of disorder. Hence, a qualitative research method requires a strategy for sorting and reducing the material in order to analyze it and arrive at findings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Thus, when the empirical material was gathered, all interviews were transcribed and coded into broader themes. Both researchers sorted and coded the interviews individually to avoid collective interpretations of the material and enable separate coding. The transcription was conducted in its original language, Swedish. Further, when the transcription was done, we selected notable quotes and translated them into English. When translating into English, there are some limitations. For example, when translating Swedish words into English, the sentence might not have the exact same meaning since Swedish and English differ. Therefore, we strived to translate the quotes as precisely as possible with the aim to include accurate words and meaning.

We continuously carried out analytic bracketing when ordering the collected qualitative data in order to understand what is being said by the respondent and gain deeper insight by interpreting how the respondent communicates it (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Thus, attention was paid to what the interviewee communicated, as well as how they say it. The empirical analysis becomes increasingly nuanced when sorting and interpreting both the whats and the hows (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Additionally, we chose to analyze at different levels to discover key themes and subthemes. We opted to find central themes by a first-order analysis, using open coding when transcribing the material (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Thus, this first-order analysis was partly accomplished when transcribing, and afterward, we discussed the apparent themes we had found in the material. Interestingly, the detected themes varied in importance between us, and we chose to conduct a second-order analysis that concentrates on developing the central themes and interpreting the various dimensions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). We then discussed and questioned each other to emerge our interpretations into broader themes. We found it beneficial to be two researchers when conducting the analysis, as it generated more creativity and reflexivity. Additionally, the analysis is based on grounded theory, which provides an explanatory framework that grounds the concepts that emerge in the voice of the interviewee (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It enabled us to be open to what the interviewee revealed regarding the discussed topic and develop a theoretical understanding in the area of interest. As we aimed for a nuanced analysis, we followed the presented steps above thoroughly during the empirical analysis. Ultimately, we ensured that each statement was referred to, and excerpt-commentary units were created as we wanted to state and discuss our analytical points (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). That allowed us to evaluate the empirical data structurally. By following this procedure of arguing and taking an active role by analyzing and critically interpreting the statements, we ensured that the statements were spoken for and did not have to speak for themselves (Styhre, 2013).

### **3.5 Reflexivity and Ethical Principles**

Acknowledging that interpretation is fundamental in this research, flexibility is, therefore, a requisite. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018), reflexive research consists of two characteristics: careful interpretation and reflection. The first concentrates on the significance of awareness of how external factors influence interpretations of empirical data, such as theoretical premises, occurring pre-assumptions, and the importance of language. The other characteristics

can be regarded as an interpretation of the interpretation, by examining how the researchers interpret the empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Considering we are two researchers in this paper, we acknowledged that we encouraged each other's reflexivity by continuously questioning and challenging the other. We repeatedly discussed how we interpreted the data in order to acknowledge any pre-existing assumptions. We also found that having the ability to communicate in our native language, Swedish, heightened the reflexivity resulting from the opportunity to describe our interpretations in a more straightforward and nuanced way.

According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019), the awareness of ethical principles is essential during research in order to reduce ethical risks. When sending out the e-mail to all employees within our case company, we received answers from those interested in participating in our study. Thus, receiving the employees' replies can be seen as their consent to be interviewed. We opted to follow the ethical principle of informed consent in accordance with Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), who suggests that this can be achieved by assuring that the respondents receive enough information to make a decision. Accordingly, we started each interview by explaining who we are, what we study, and how the interview would look. Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) further suggest the ethical principle of being aware and minimizing the respondent's risk of being harmed. With this in mind, we clarified in the e-mail we sent out when asking for participation that the organization, as well as the respondents, will be anonymous. We also explained that the employees would be anonymous and given a pseudonym in this research before each interview. With the aim of their answers not be tracked back to them. Additionally, from an ethical perspective, we asked each respondent for their permission to record the interview.

### **3.6 Limitations and Critique of the Study**

Acknowledging the limitations of the research is of great importance. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that case studies are helpful when aiming for a deeper understanding and can certainly be a suitable method for quantitative studies within social sciences. Even though case studies are not perceived as formally generalizable, slightly illustrative case studies can indeed contribute to scientific innovations. Flyvbjerg (2006) further claims that context-dependent knowledge, which is conducted through qualitative case studies, provides a more profound understanding of a complex phenomenon. In line with this, Prasad (2018) argues that qualitative research should not be

oversimplified due to its complex nature. Thus, the findings in this research do not aim to represent the entire case organization nor the employees working at Lundgren's Recruiting. The study's findings are intended to mainly identify the theoretical interferences likely suitable and generalized for the organization.

Furthermore, the interviewees' answers are subjective and might therefore be misleading, which is another limitation of qualitative research. It is essential to make the respondents comfortable expressing their feelings and opinions in order to sustain the study's validity. Thus, we assured the respondents that their answers would be completely anonymous, which minimizes the risk of receiving dishonest answers and enhancing the validity of the research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Nevertheless, the authors argue that qualitative studies do not need to be based on validity or reliability but rather aim for authenticity. Therefore, to maintain the study's authenticity, we opted to present significant background information, including the culture and structure of Lundgren's Recruiting, as we consider that as important factors for understanding the empirical findings. An additional limitation of qualitative research is the risk of too much subjectivity as the findings depend on what we, as researchers, interpret as important (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). To minimize subjectivity, we opted to show rather than tell in the empirical analysis (Tracy, 2010). With this in mind, we were aware of the risk of being subjective when presenting the empirical findings. Thus, we opted to be highly reflexive during the empirical analysis. The intention is to enable the reader to understand the empirical findings, leading to our discussion, by combining the empirical finding with the empirical analysis.

Ultimately, we find the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic essential to address since it might affect the study. The COVID-19 outbreak mainly affected the data collection for this research. Together with the manager and employees at Lundgren's Recruiting, we decided to conduct the interviews as online video calls and gain access to valuable information from their intranet. By this, we could gather necessary information about the organizational atmosphere, culture, leadership, and strategy for the COVID-19 response, which are generally intangible factors and difficult to describe. The purpose of using multiple sources of data, also referred to as *triangulation*, was to enhance the study's credibility by double-checking the empirical data

(Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). However, as a result of the pandemic and needed safety measures, we could not conduct face-to-face interviews, which made the study's credibility less desirable.

## 4 Empirical Findings and Analysis

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*In this chapter, our analysis of the empirical material will be presented, divided into three main themes. The first theme focuses on Lundgren's Recruiting's COVID-19 crisis response and the employees' strategy for coping with the radical changes and mandatory working from home. The second theme highlights the prerequisites for maintaining normality during the pandemic. In the third theme, the outcome of working from home due to COVID-19 and its effect on employees is presented and analyzed. To conclude, we provide a short summary of the empirical findings.*

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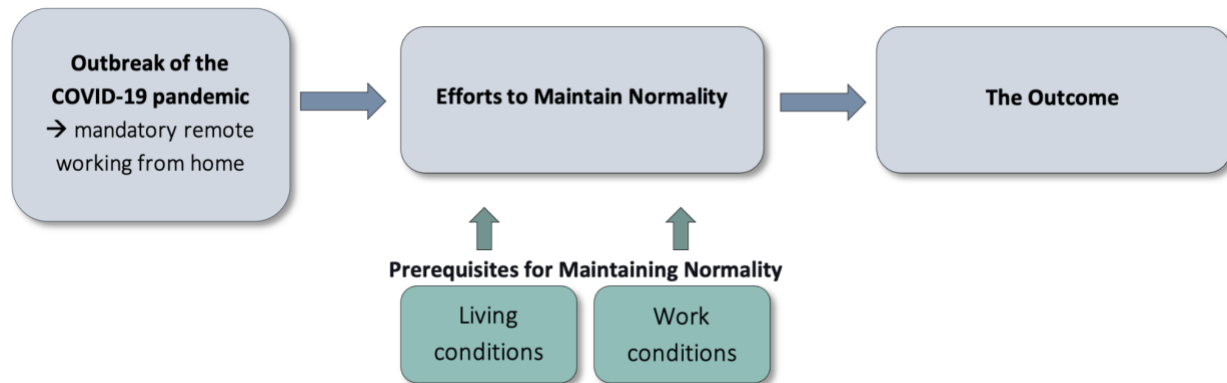
### 4.1 Lundgren's Recruiting COVID-19 Crisis Response

In March 2020, the coronavirus hit Sweden, and Lundgren's Recruiting quickly adapted to the situation, including all restrictions. All employees were required to work from home, and the abrupt changes affected the lives of many. Employees at Lundgren's Recruiting were now forced to work from home and entirely digitally. Some of the statements can be differently interpreted, but we choose, by following this logic, to interpret it as a social relationship that affects motivation. So it is the motivation aspect that is clarified during the analysis. Thus, in a different text, a different context, and with a different logic, we are aware that some of the quotations can be analyzed differently.

Our empirical analysis is divided into four sections, analyzing how employees at Lundgren's Recruiting perceive and manage the pandemic and its consequences at the workplace. The first section, called *Efforts to Maintain Normality*, emphasizes and identifies how employees strive after normality in the abnormal situation resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. This section aims to analyze how employees manage their remote work in order to reduce confusion, make sense of their new reality and stay motivated. The following section, called *Prerequisites for Maintaining Normality*, examines the different conditions and factors affecting the ability to maintain normality and motivation during mandatory remote work from home. This, in order to understand why and how employees' efforts to maintain normality are successful or not. The last and third section, called *The Outcome*, examines the effects of remote WFH on employees and, ultimately, their motivation. This logic is outlined in the illustration below, and is further elaborated in the summary



This logic is outlined in the illustration below, and is further elaborated in the summary of empirical findings and analysis.



*Figure 2. Overview of Empirical Findings and Analysis*

#### **4.1.1 Efforts to Maintain Normality**

The outbreak of COVID-19 forced many organizations to change and work from home, and Lundgren's Recruiting was no exception. The employees had to adapt to the situation and work from home since they were no longer allowed to work at the office. The prerequisites for working as before the pandemic vanished and the previously known normality ceased. It was an institutional change that people, organizations, and the whole society had to manage. Since it was a global phenomenon, the radical changes were imperative, and it mainly resulted in a reluctant acceptance rather than resistance from the employees. The situation can be seen as a crisis, where people, management, and organizations try to deal with the situation in the best way. As a start, the employees felt confused and even denied it at the start. However, it also showed that, with time, the employees tried to reduce the uncertainty in order to manage the remote work from home and the ongoing pandemic. As Anna, one of the employees, stated:

*"I've had very mixed feelings when it comes to working from home because of corona [...]. I mean, you lost physical contact with your colleagues, and the situation felt completely unpredictable [...] But after a while, I adapted to the situation and got used to it." - Anna*

It is evident that being forced to work from home can initially be perceived as problematic and confusing. However, with time, employees can adapt to and accept the new circumstances,

resulting in more positive feelings towards remote working from home. Interestingly, most of the employees expressed a similar perception of having to work from home due to Lundgren's Recruiting crisis response. For example, Eva expressed that:

*"I would say that I've been affected pretty much by the pandemic, especially in the beginning when I was new at work [...]. But after a while, I got into new routines, and it started to work better for me." - Eva*

There are evidently some mixed feelings when it comes to mandatory work from home. Prior to the pandemic, the employees had already established routines and worked at the office eight to five. However, those routines were disrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak as the old normality was no longer possible to maintain. Eva further described this by stating:

*"It was obviously hard to maintain the feeling of 'now I'm going to the office, and now I'm leaving it.' [...] So I always took a walk, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, just to retain the feeling of having the routine of going to and leaving work." - Eva*

This quote highlights the importance of maintaining old routines in order to maintain normality, which Fredrik further agrees with:

*"When working from home, I try to keep it as it was before, where I set my alarm, wake up, eat breakfast and do all those things I normally do when going to the office." - Fredrik*

As a final illustration, Adam described his strategy for working from home by stating:

*"When I work from home, I still put on my suit and have the same routines as if it was a usual workday. It's all mental. [...] According to me, It's not productive to sit on the couch in a T-shirt and work." - Adam*

The employees clearly tried to maintain normality and cope with the radical changes in the workplace by maintaining old routines and the feeling of working as usual. When losing old

routines, the employees felt confused and perceived working from home as challenging. In order to adapt to the circumstances resulting from the pandemic, the employees needed to either maintain old routines or create new ones. Those efforts involved, for example, putting on a suit, maintaining morning routines, or taking walks before and after work to retain the feeling of going to and leaving the office. Those efforts display the employees' desire to reduce a large amount of uncertainty and maintain a feeling of things being fairly normal by doing the things usually expected of them. This, since maintaining normality is about maintaining an idea about oneself as an employee in a specific organization with specific norms and specific ways of working. Hence, the attempts to keep things normal comes down to a question of motivation, where employees at Lundgren's Recruiting try to make sense of the situation and maintain the feeling of being a "Lundgrener". Overall, it seems evident that the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting strive to maintain normality and keep the mindset of still being a coworker at Lundgren's Recruiting by maintaining old routines by waking up early, getting dressed, or taking walks as usual. This, in order to remain motivated and have a somewhat normal and well-functioning workday from home. However, maintaining normality requires certain prerequisites, which brings us to the next section.

## **4.2 Prerequisites for Maintaining Normality**

With support from the insights presented above, it is clear that the employees try to maintain a certain level of normality in the abnormal reality due to COVID-19. Nevertheless, it is easier said than done. There are various prerequisites needed to maintain normality and motivation during times of radical changes. Those prerequisites determine to what extent this normality can be maintained. The empirical material showed how these prerequisites are connected to the physical space, living condition, equipment, workload, and other technicalities. Hence, the efforts put into maintaining normality to remain motivated are affected by those factors.

### **4.2.1 Living Conditions**

The current living situation seems to play a critical role for employees and their attempt to maintain normality. Factors such as whether the employees live alone or not, how big their home is, and having office space or not at home contributes. As an example, Anna explained the advantage of living in a big apartment:

*"I also have the luxury to live in a relatively big apartment so that I'm not disturbed by my partner who also works from home." - Anna*

This statement shows that having a bigger home allows the employee to feel less isolated and at the same time avoid being disturbed by a potential partner. Anna's comment illustrates that having a bigger home and the opportunity to be in different rooms is beneficial when having a partner who also works at home. Linda's statement below is in line with Anna's. She implied that she noticed a difference when WFH in her old apartment compared to her new apartment, where space is of great importance.

*"I absolutely get less distracted when working from home. But it depends on how you live, of course. I recently moved to a bigger apartment, and now I have my own office room, in contrast to my previous apartment, where I worked in my bedroom. That made a major difference." - Linda*

The living space evidently plays a crucial role in the perception of working from home. As Linda states, the change from a smaller to a bigger home enabled her to have a separate office room. In turn, she could work more undistracted, which further enhanced the effectiveness. Hence, having a small living space is a prerequisite that negatively affects remote work from home. Andrea presented support for this:

*"I live in a one-room apartment. When I work and eat, I sit in the kitchen, and I don't switch places or move [...]." - Andrea*

Andrea highlights the inconvenience that comes with living in a smaller apartment. The employee may perceive working from home as less advantageous when not having the possibility to have a workspace in a separate room or away from the living space. Having a smaller home results in fewer options on where and how to sit while working. This makes it harder to maintain the feeling of having an office space, as prior to COVID-19. Furthermore, the statement from Andrea indicates that when working from home, it is easier to end up sitting in the same spot for an extended period of time, in contrast to when working at the office, where there is more movement during the day. Hence, when employees live small and alone, they have a hard time separating the office space

from the living space, which is far from the previously known normality. All of those factors inhibit the efforts to maintain normality and motivation when working from home. Another factor was brought up by Emma, who stated:

*"I work at the kitchen table, which isn't the best, ergonomically. Also, I don't think it would have worked for me at all if my boyfriend didn't work at the office every day, especially since we live so small." - Emma*

Here, another aspect is being taken into account. Emma states that, when living in a small apartment, having a partner is a critical prerequisite. If the partner also works from home, the physical space at home can become a limitation. However, as stated before, the social aspect might benefit from having a partner at home. Hence, having a partner or family makes the social exchange not entirely excluded, which may help the employees keep motivated and feel less isolated. In addition to this, Emma stated that it is not beneficial to live small during the pandemic since there is no space for a solid home office. Employees who live small might have trouble ergonomically since they have no place for a desk or office chair.

Overall, the employees' living conditions seem to affect their perception of working from home highly. If the employee has a partner or family as well as a solid space for their own office at home, the motivation increases, and the attitude towards working from home becomes more positive. However, this attitude tends to become more negative if the employee lives alone, has a smaller apartment, and does not have a solid place to sit. In short, the employees' living conditions are a prerequisite that highly affects the attempts to maintain normality to keep motivated during remote working from home.

#### **4.2.2 Work Conditions**

The empirical material shows that work-related factors, such as the amount of workload, the salary structure, and support from leaders, highly affect the ability to maintain normality and work from home conveniently. The ability to motivate themselves is an essential factor that the employees mentioned to appreciate having a home office. As Linda expressed it:

*"Working from home has been working well in periods. If you have a lot of things to do at work, it's the work itself that motivates you. But if you don't have that much to do, you must have the ability to motivate yourself." - Linda*

The statement above implies that, depending on the amount of workload, the ability to motivate oneself is crucial in order to appreciate working from home. As remote working from home implies sitting alone and not having any social exchange with colleagues, the ability to keep focused and motivated without interaction with others plays a crucial role in the feeling of having a somewhat normal workday. As Linda stated, the workload affects to what extent self-motivation is necessary. The individual ability to keep motivated is essential when the work tasks themselves are not the motivation factor. When the workload increases, so do the motivation. Linda continued by saying that:

*"The workload and clarity in my work tasks affect how I perceive working from home." - Linda*

Overall, the statements above indicate that the perception of working from home depends on several factors, which are highly personal. Some employees have the ability to motivate themselves somewhat, regardless of the amount of workload. However, other employees feel like it is the workload that motivates them when working from home. The following statements indicate that when working from home, support from coworkers is a critical prerequisite as well. The organization can help its employees maintain normality by supporting and enhancing the organizational culture, even remotely. Anna's statement below displays this:

*"I feel that we, at Lundgren's Recruiting, based on how we work, have been able to adapt quite easily to working from home." - Anna*

Anna expressed that "we at Lundgren's Recruiting," as a team, can adapt to the situation together, indicating that she positions herself as a part of the team. The strong norms and values within Lundgren's Recruiting can act as a valuable prerequisite for retaining the feeling of being a "Lundgrener", as it was before the pandemic. Anna also says "*how we work*", which can be based

on the work ethics at Lundgren's Recruiting, where all employees are ambitious and driven to reach their goals. This ambition is to some extent, according to Anna, based on the salary:

*"[...] Since we have a commission-based salary and highly ambitious and driven people, everyone feels motivated to take their own responsibility. " - Anna*

Here, Anna expressed the importance of monetary rewards for efforts. "How they work" at Lundgren's recruiting, together with the commission-based salary, might be the driving force for employees in their efforts to maintain motivation. As there is a desire to feel "normal" and live up to the organization's standards, norms are an important driving force. If the norm is to fight hard for commission, as Anna said, her efforts tend to increase due to that, resulting in the norm of working much and hard. As Adam described it:

*"I'm in a place in life where my career is my highest priority [...]. That's why I work hard, even if I don't like working from home." - Adam*

Here, the career is also described as an important explanation for why the norm that prescribes hard work gains a foothold. As the employees strive to maintain normality, the commission-based salary might be a prerequisite that helps them keep up the same drive and ambition to perform at work as usual, even when working from home. Moreover, Anna's statement shows the importance of good support by managers during the crisis:

*"[...] And that is mainly because we have received very good support from managers [...]. Also, they provide corona-related updates twice a week and continuously work on solutions to make the best out of the situation. For me, that has been very valuable." - Anna*

Here, leaders are described as playing a crucial role in managing to work from home, as the management at Lundgren's Recruiting provides extra support related to the COVID-19 crisis. By support, Anna meant, for example, that she and her colleagues get weekly updates regarding the COVID-19 situation. She also meant that the managers have clear communication and strategy to help all employees. This made Anna feel supported and included by management. Additionally,

as the management is responsible for fostering the organizational culture, their support and efforts are further crucial. By receiving good support from management and being part of a strong organizational culture, normality maintenance might become easier to achieve. The management at Lundgren's Recruiting does not just expect the employees to adapt and adjust to the changes but helps and supports them along the way. An approach that takes away some pressure from the employees and creates a feeling of teamwork and involvement, which in turn can help motivate the employees in their remote working. As Adam expressed it:

*"I really value that my boss gave me the opportunity to schedule my own working hours and doesn't require me to attend start-up meetings or Friday meetings. [...]" - Adam*

The statements above show that some employees perceived good support from their managers when the organization shifted into remote working, which has been of great importance for maintaining motivation. Overall, work-related conditions create a variety of prerequisites for maintaining normality and motivation at work.

To summarize, the employees' efforts to maintain normality are critical in order to keep them motivated when working from home. In turn, these efforts are affected by several conditions and prerequisites, as presented above. One group of prerequisites is connected to the employees' living conditions, which involves the size of the home, the opportunity to have a solid office space, and whom the employee lives with. The other group of prerequisites is connected to the work conditions, which involve the workload and clarity in work tasks, the norms and values in the team, the salary and career structure, and the support from management. All of those factors determine the prerequisites for the ability to maintain normality and motivation while working from home. For some, the prerequisites are in place, but for others, the prerequisites are what limits their ability to feel "normal" and create a positive work environment. In turn, the outcome varies for the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting, which brings us to the next section.



## 4.3 The Outcome

In this last section, the outcome of the mandatory remote work from home will be presented, which shows the employees' feelings resulting from Lundgren's Recruiting's COVID-19 response. According to the empirical material, employees' motivation and effectiveness are affected by working from home. Some employees become more effective at work when having a home office, and others cannot focus or do not want to mix work and private life when working remotely. Some work more when working at the office, and some work less. Depending on how the employees cope with this, it affects their productivity, and some employees feel fragmented. When working from home, the employees' work-life balance is affected as well, where the boundaries between work and life become blurred out. Lastly, this new way of working has created new insights, affecting the employees' view on the future workweek, which will be presented below.

### 4.3.1 Social Deficit

Due to COVID-19 and the mandatory social distancing, the physical interactions with coworkers have decreased to an extent never seen before. WFH and socially distancing results in a social deficit, which affects the level of motivation and effectiveness at work. According to Andrea, the level of effectiveness increased when working from home:

*"The positive thing is that you get highly effective at home since you don't have anyone that distracts you. [...] I can work more focused now when it's not possible to chit-chat with colleagues for 20 minutes every now and then. Today, I really keep up with work which makes it possible to end the day when you are supposed to since you get more things done during the day." - Andrea*

Here, Andrea highlighted a benefit of working remotely, which is a better focus by not getting disturbed by her colleagues. As a result, more work tasks can be done during the day, making the effectiveness increase when working from home. In accordance with this, Olof stated:

*"I think I work pretty effectively when I work from home since I'm completely isolated and don't get disturbed by colleagues or so. At the same time, I like to talk to and have coffee with my colleagues, and that is something that I really miss." - Olof*

In line with this, Fredrik expressed:

*"One advantage is that you are not getting disturbed by colleagues at home. [...] However, I get more energy by having movement and colleagues around me." - Fredrik*

The statements above imply that social distancing correlates with higher effectiveness at work as it reduces the risk of being disturbed by colleagues. However, Olof and Fredrik also point to the social deficit as something that they miss. Hence, the advantage of being undisturbed and remaining focused at home contradicts the need for social interactions with colleagues and the energy that it entails. What was interesting was that all employees stated that the social aspect was the most challenging one. Social interactions with colleagues are described as what gives them energy and motivation at work. The importance of belongingness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness becomes evident here. Without social interactions, the company culture might become suffering, as it is harder to maintain the feeling of community. This is something that Andrea agreed with:

*"The only downside is that I never meet my colleagues anymore, and I think that's something that everyone really misses. Some days more than others." - Andrea*

In accordance with this, Adam stated:

*"For me, the transition phase was tough. I went from a situation where I meet and talk to people every day to not see anyone at all. I became a bit sad and felt lonely, so I started to take walks with a friend or a neighbor in the evenings and had video calls with some other friends." - Adam*

All employees described how they were negatively affected by the lack of social interactions due to COVID-19. Hence, the outcome is a social deficit that can make the employees feel lonely and unmotivated. Adam described the transition phase as challenging, where he took walks with others to avoid excluding all social aspects. Seeing someone in person and not just on a screen was his strategy for maintaining normality since he used to see his colleagues daily prior to the pandemic.

He strived to still include social interactions in order to maintain a, to some extent, normal workday. Andrea continued by describing the effect on the organizational culture and community:

*"The downside is that you can not build on any community with your colleagues or get that same social exchange as before. [...] But also that the energy that your colleagues give you is hard to obtain when you sit alone at home all day." - Andrea*

Overall, the statements above indicate that the employees miss their colleagues who contribute with energy and belongingness. At the same time, some employees experience a higher focus when not getting disturbed by colleagues. Hence, the social aspect results in both positive and negative aspects, which can cause some fragmented feelings regarding working from home. The employees implied that they receive their motivation in work by meeting and physically seeing their colleagues, giving them energy and confirmation, which is impossible in a digital world. In short, motivation is an interactive phenomenon, making some employees feel less motivated due to the mandatory remote work. Additionally, the effectiveness is affected by the social deficit, both negatively and positively, depending on how you look at it.

#### **4.3.2 Blurred Boundaries Between Work and Private Life**

It is clear that remote work, due to the pandemic, has resulted in mixed feelings and blurred boundaries between private and work life among employees at Lundgren's Recruiting. The employees were forced to work in the same place as they live, creating confusion and fragmentation for many. As having a home office has become the new normal, the employees needed to adjust mentally to the new way of working. This adaptation includes maintaining normality in the new reality. When working from home due to COVID-19, many employees at Lundgren's Recruiting expressed that the boundaries between work and private life have been blurred out, where it is hard to separate private life and work since they now take place in the same place. Nevertheless, when working from home, it also becomes easier to do things unrelated to work. The following quotes indicate that having a home office can affect the employees' private life since they can do the laundry and dishes during the day. Some employees perceive it as more beneficial and others as challenging. As Emma expressed it:

*"At home, you can do the dishes, clean, have a longer lunch, which sometimes makes it harder to go back and find a focus after lunch since you are in your home atmosphere." - Emma*

The statement indicates that the boundaries between work and private life can be perceived as somewhat erased due to COVID-19, and it is harder to leave things at home undone. Consequently, the work-life balance becomes disordered, and without the proper focus, the work efficiency is harder to maintain at the same level as when at the office. In turn, this can affect employee motivation. However, Jakob described working at home as something that enhances efficiency:

*"The advantage with working from home is that you are able to do everyday chores simultaneously, which would otherwise be suffering if working at the office. I talk a lot on the phone, and then I can do the dishes or clean at the same time, which is beneficial. [...] Then you maximize efficiency both at work and in private life." - Jakob*

In line with Jacob's statement, Eva stated:

*"I think it's very smooth to have a home office since you do more things during the same hours as you work. [...] I mean, you can do laundry during the day or clean and make food, and then you don't have to do that when you come home after a workout in the evening or so." - Eva*

This perspective on WFH shows a valuable insight, where the employee can combine the work with everyday chores at home. This might result in higher efficiency in both work and private life when combining work and everyday chores. However, the question is how to maintain a balance so that neither the work nor the employee's private life becomes suffering. Another aspect worth questioning is how effective work is when the employee is in a meeting simultaneously as doing the dishes. Olof implied that it might work for a while, but that it can become increasingly challenging in the long run:

*"In the beginning, I felt so much more effective when working from home. [...] But then, at the end of January, I noticed that my motivation really decreased, and I really wanted to come back to the office again. [...]" - Olof*

This statement illustrates how mandatory remote working can affect motivation, even if it benefits the effectiveness. As Olof stated, his motivation decreased after some time, and he expressed a desire to go back to working at the office. In turn, this statement indicates that going back to normal would make his motivation increase again.

Another aspect was brought up by Anna:

*"When I worked at the office, it became more clear that, 'oh, I work overtime now,' when the colleagues went home, and the lights around me turned off, and they shouted 'don't sit too long now.' Unlike when I sit alone in my little corner in my apartment and suddenly the clock is half-past six, and I realize that I should maybe end the day [...] there are no clear boundaries." - Anna*

This statement implies that Anna possesses a high ambition and is used to work overtime, before and during the pandemic. However, it is even more difficult for her to put the work aside when working from home. Consequently, Anna easily forgets about the time as she no longer notices when colleagues are going home. As the employees have their office space at home, the boundaries between life and work can become blurred out, and the risk of working overtime increases. This can depend on various factors, such as doing more chores at home during work, lacking focus, or becoming stuck in a bubble where leaving work for the day becomes challenging. Alternatively, all of those factors combined. In this case, the employees must set their boundaries more clearly than before the pandemic to keep the work-life balance in place. The following two statements by Jakob highlights the situation where the separation between home and work becomes confusing:

*"Before, home was just home. Now home is also work." - Jakob*

Jacob then continued:

*"The disadvantage is that you do not really let go of work. It is a mental barrier. If you have the work computer at home, you can easily take it and send an email after working hours. [...] I'm not*

*that good at shutting down at five. Even if I take a walk after work, I'm still coming back to my so-called office again. It's always there, at home." - Jakob*

Jakob's statements show that when the home and workspace end up being in the same place, the work might intrude on private life and the other way around. This can become further problematic since it inhibits the maintenance of normality and results in confusion and decreased motivation. The statements further imply that having a home office makes it harder not to check the phone or computer even after work, which was easier before the pandemic when leaving it at the office. Not having the work phone or computer near allows the employee to separate the home from work and maintain normality. For example, Jakob highlights that even if he leaves his apartment, he always returns to his "office" afterward. Prior to the pandemic, this was not the case, and the normal was to leave work when leaving the office. Fredrik further described this by saying:

*"I haven't been trying that hard to make it work. I mean, I haven't brought an extra computer screen, chair, or desk home from the office. I just use my laptop and sit at the table [...]. I haven't really created the right conditions for myself to make it work well [...]. So I think a lot lies in myself to create better opportunities. At the same time, I haven't had that energy or motivation to do it either." - Fredrik*

Fredrik highlighted the risk of not putting enough effort into maintaining normality and creating a solid office space. The statement indicates that the lack of motivation and energy is what limits the ability to set boundaries between work and private life. At the same time, it is those blurred boundaries that affect the motivation. This suggests a vicious spiral that needs to be broken in order to enhance motivation. Moreover, the pandemic has created new circumstances for the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting. The motivation is being affected by the employees' home offices since they can now do everyday chores during their workday. There are three evident outcomes here. Firstly, some might have longer working days now since the boundaries have been blurred out, and doing things unrelated to work during the day makes working overtime become easier. Secondly, some might work less since they do more everyday chores at home or feel less motivated to actually work during the day. Thirdly, some might work more than before, since it is harder to let go of work when the office space is in the living space. However, no employee

indicated that they have shorter working days now, but that the amount of work done during the day is what has changed. It becomes a mental barrier to separate work from home, and a lot lies within the employee's motivation and energy to create the best opportunities for that.

### **4.3.3 The Flexible Workweek**

Due to the employees' statements above, a deeper understanding of how they perceive the mandatory remote working was feasible. The following statements open up another perspective on remote working from home. Even if there are several negative aspects of working remotely from home, the new ways of working have created a demand for more flexibility even in the future. The efforts to maintain normality seem like a common strategy for managing remote working. However, the old normality might not be desired to the same extent as it was at the beginning of the pandemic. In the statement below, Linda presents her view on this:

*"It's even hard to remember how it was before the pandemic [...]." - Linda*

Linda implies that the mental adjustment and development of new routines have resulted in a new normality, where the old normality is no longer easy to remember fully. In turn, the old normality might no longer be crucial for managing remote work from home. Thus, motivation might now come from the opportunity to choose where to work from and when. The outcome is a more positive view on the new ways of working, and when the employees were questioned how they would like to work when the pandemic was over, the answers resembled each other. It showed that the employees are now more open to a flexible way of working, even though it has disordered their work-life balance and old normality. Anna stated:

*"I can imagine continuing to have a combined way of working after the pandemic. [...] I even wish to be able to keep both options available." - Anna*

The flexibility that remote working from home contributes with is now more desired than before. Since working from home offers a choice on where to work from, the motivation might be easier to maintain as the employees can choose for themselves where it fits them best to work from on a specific day. If they get more effective when working from home, they can choose that, and if they

feel more motivated when working at the office, they can choose that. Further, Adam presented another perspective on remote working:

*"I don't want to work from home at all, ever. I want to work at the office, or maybe other spots [...]. For 95%, I would say that I will work at the office but maintain the flexibility to work from another place, but definitely not from home." - Adam*

Adam implied that he does not want to work from home, yet he wants to maintain the flexibility to work from other locations than the office when needed. In other words, he does not want to exclude remote work entirely but clearly expressed that working from home is not for him. In contrast, Anna appreciates working from home and wants to be able to do so, even after the pandemic. However, both statements display that there is a desire to keep the flexibility to work more remotely in the future. The flexibility that remote working brings them is highly valued among all the employees. In turn, the flexibility might enhance motivation as the employees now have mentally adjusted to the new ways of working. As remote working was not widely spread among workers before the pandemic, the COVID-19 outbreak has enabled more people to realize its benefits. As Jakob explained it:

*"I think that we have been moving against a more digital society already, but that the pandemic has hurried up the process. And I would say that it is great that we got there earlier." - Jakob*

In this statement, Jakob implies that organizations were on the way to become more digitized already and that remote work is no longer rare since COVID-19 expedited the process. Eva continued with expressing her view on the future:

*"I think if Lundgren's Recruiting says that we are going back to the office at 100 percent after the pandemic, I would feel a bit obsolete. [...] Lundgren's Recruiting must realize that it has been working out quite well." - Eva*

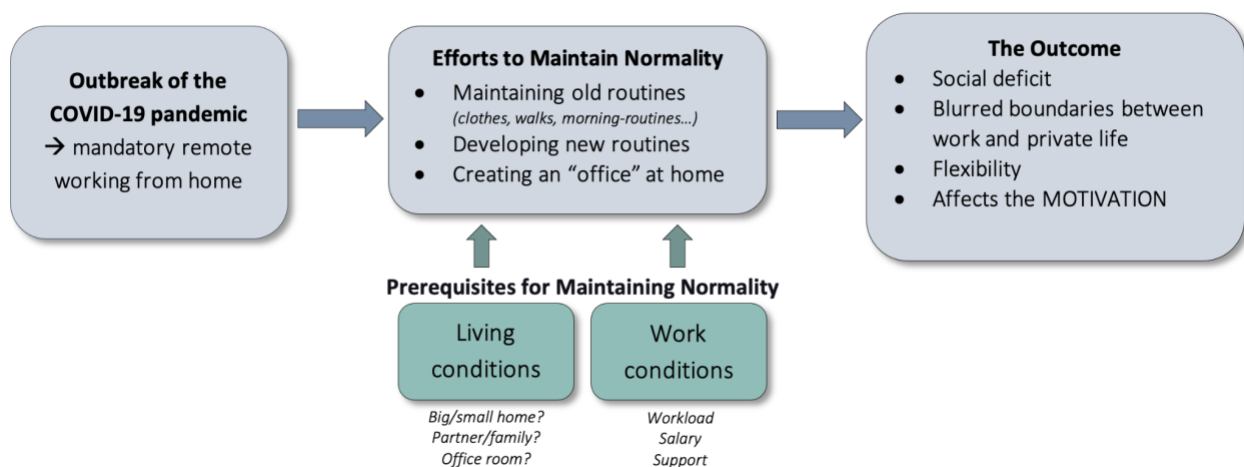
Eva highlights the pressure on Lundgren's Recruiting as an organization to adapt to and learn from the new ways of working. She expressed that she would be disappointed if the company decides



to go back to the office full-time as the flexibility appears highly valuable for the employees. To conclude, it seems evident that the employees want to maintain the flexibility to work from home and not go back working full-time to the office. Even Adam, who was the most skeptical employee against working from home, does not want to exclude the opportunity to work remotely in the future. The employees at Lundgren’s Recruiting have made sense of the new reality and are therefore struggling with making sense of the old normality. In short, the outcome of mandatory remote working due to COVID-19 is a changed view on the home office. Even though WFH can be confusing or challenging at times, the empirical evidence shows that it has created a desire to work more flexibly in the future than before.

#### 4.4 Summary of Empirical Findings and Analysis

In conclusion, it is evident that mixed feelings arose among the employees at Lundgren’s Recruiting when the organization had to radically change and start working fully remotely due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The illustration below provides an overview of how the employees at Lundgren’s Recruiting interpret and perceive the mandatory remote work from home.



**Figure 3. Overview of the Result of Empirical Findings and Analysis**

The employees clearly showed a desire to maintain normality in the abnormal situation. They expressed how they developed new routines and put significant effort into maintaining a somewhat typical workday to remain motivated at work. Furthermore, those efforts were affected by different work and living conditions, which acted like prerequisites for maintaining normality. Depending

on what prerequisites the employee had, the perception of working from home varied. If they lived in a small apartment with no solid place to sit when working, the employee tended to be more skeptical and experienced a lower degree of motivation. Also, the workload, clarity in work tasks, and support from managers affected the employees' ability to maintain normality and motivation when working from home.

However, regardless of if the prerequisites for maintaining normality were in place or not, all employees mentioned that they miss their colleagues when working from home and that it affects the community within Lundgren's Recruiting. This consequence points to the strong culture within the organization and the need for physical interactions. On the one hand, employees missed their colleagues when working remotely. On the other hand, the colleagues were perceived as a distraction when working on-site, which provides two aspects of the social deficit resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. Another consequence of the pandemic was the blurred boundaries between work and private life. In turn, this resulted in some working more and some working less. Additionally, the work-life balance was hard to maintain, and the motivation decreased for many. As a result, all the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting appreciate the flexibility and the opportunity to work remotely, where no one wants to go back to working full time at the office after the pandemic.

## 5 Discussion

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*In order to gain a deeper understanding and a more distinct picture of our study, the following chapter provides a discussion of the empirical findings and analysis by implementing our theoretical framework. This discussion is divided into three parts in line with what was brought up in the literature review, organizational change into remote work from home and its impact on work-life balance and motivation. Additionally, with the social aspect in focus, interactive motivation will be the most prominent theory influencing the second part of the discussion.*

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### 5.1 Remote WFH and Its Implications on Employees

We begin by analyzing how remote work from home, in general, can affect employees by examining the empirical findings to determine what the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting find as unique and central when interpreting remote WFH due to COVID-19.

#### 5.1.1 A Mental Barrier When Managing Remote WFH - Organizational Change at Lundgren's Recruiting

Before delving into the discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic's direct effects on employees' motivation, we found it necessary to begin by specifying what mandatory remote work has meant for the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting in general. Our empirical data suggests that when the employees talked about being forced to work from home, they spoke about the challenges and mental barriers. This is supported by the statement where one employee indicated that it is a mental barrier to maintain work motivation when working from home since he was happy with how it was before. This is further supported by Palmer, Dunford, and Buchanan (2017), who argue that when people are happy with how things are, they are more likely to be reluctant to change. Thus, since the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting were happy with how things were before the pandemic, the radical changes created a reluctance and mental barrier to change. Additionally, organizational change that is forced and rapid may result in people not having enough time to feel included and open to change (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017). However, since the COVID-19 outbreak affected the whole world with a global and imperative change, the employees might feel less

resistant as there was no choice. Furthermore, this made the employees more determined to manage the change rather than being resistant to it.

Based on our empirical findings, it seems evident that all the employees acknowledged that the change due to COVID-19 was necessary. However, the change was rapid and highly comprehensive, which limits individual change readiness. As Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis (2013) suggest, an individual's readiness for change is based on five beliefs. The first two are the beliefs that change is "needed" and "appropriate". Which, according to our empirical findings, are highly believed among the employees. As a third belief, Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis (2013) state that readiness for change is based on the "individual's perceived capability to implement the change". This is a belief that, according to our findings, is not entirely in place since many of the employees' stated that they perceived it as confusing and challenging to implement the change successfully. Additionally, they had never worked full-time from home before. Thus, there might have been uncertainty regarding the individual perception of what capability the employees had to implement the change. Furthermore, this perception might have contributed to the mental barrier as it lowered the readiness for change. Furthermore, the fourth belief is the "belief that the organization (management, peers) will provide resources and information" (Rafferty, Jimmieson & Armenakis, 2013). According to the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting, they did receive good support and information from the organization. Hence, this support is highly valuable for the employees when trying to overcome that mental barrier. Lastly, Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis (2013) mention the belief that there are more benefits than costs with the change. According to our empirical findings, this is not convincing for all employees. WFH comes with various benefits as well as many drawbacks. Thus, the belief that the change would result in more benefits than disadvantages was not evident.

### **5.1.2 The Feeling of not Having an Office - A Conflict Between Work and Private Life**

Coping with a global pandemic can be stressful and challenging in itself. However, according to the empirical data, the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting find it extraordinarily confusing due to the blurred boundaries between work and private life when being forced to work from home.

Although they have developed new routines and adapted to the situation, it is still physically and emotionally difficult for them. For example, the respondents felt that they physically lack a solid place to sit when working from home, which affects them both ergonomically and mentally. For example, some employees stated that they had noticed a decreased well-being when not working at the office since they do not move as much as usual when working from home. Others stated that they experience more pain in their bodies if they do not take responsibility to work out or take a walk after working hours. Additionally, some employees were not satisfied when working at the kitchen table, as it is not the best ergonomically. Therefore, it can also cause pain in their bodies, resulting in decreased well-being among employees who do not have the right equipment to work remotely. The feeling of not having a solid office space suggests a conflict between the workspace and the living space. Such an incompatibility between work and private life might result in difficulty maintaining a work-life balance when the employees experience friction between work and personal purposes (Quick et al., 2004).

The employees are likely to do things unrelated to work when working from home, disturbing the work-life balance, which, according to Parkes and Langford (2008), can indirectly provide disadvantages to organizations through decreased well-being, increased job stress, and heightened risk of burnout. Therefore, the employees are likely to feel stressed and fragmented when working from home. Although they need to work as normal when sitting at home (to uphold a standard), the employees also find it hard to leave things at home undone, such as the dishes or laundry. Hence, an employee who cannot fully focus on work at home would likely prefer to have a solid office space, separated from the living space, in order to maintain the work-life balance. The employees who lack the opportunity to have a separate office space at home cannot entirely follow the standard of working as before due to the erased boundaries between work and private life. Thus, there is an evident conflict between work and personal ambitions. This conflict is in line with Hill et al. (2001), who argue that work-life balance is the extent to which an individual can balance the emotional, behavioral, and time requirements of paid work, family, and personal duties. When a conflict between those duties arises, it is common for individuals to experience a decreased motivation (Wolor et al., 2020) as well as lower loyalty and positive attitudes to work (Moore, 2007). In this case, it seems like the employees who have a separate and solid office space at home are more positive and motivated at work compared to the employees who lack this

opportunity. Thus, the ability to maintain a work-life balance seems to have a great impact on the employees' motivation.

Interestingly, the empirical findings show that the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting seem to have found ways to reduce this "work-life"- "private-life" conflict. Firstly, the empirical findings revealed that the employees put efforts into maintaining normality when working from home to separate work from private life. The employees showed serious attempts to maintain routines, norms, and standards, which enhanced the possibility of maintaining a somewhat normal feeling of going to work. By taking walks before and after work and maintaining old morning routines, the employees tried to minimize the risk of disturbing the work-life balance. Moreover, the interviews revealed that the employees tend to adjust to the situation mentally by dressing up in office wear. For instance, when one employee got ready for work, he put on a suit as usual even if he just sat at home. Hence, as the old normality differs from the new reality, the employees do not only work from home to get paid, but they also put significant effort into maintaining normality. These ways of maintaining a feeling of still going to the office correlate with Thompson (2017), who argues that most people care more about their work-life balance than their pay. Although the efforts might reduce the blurred boundaries between work and private life, they are not entirely enough to maintain a positive work-life balance, which Noon et al. (2013) explain as a result of the increased digitalization, which has made work and non-work aspects of life increasingly intertwined and overlapped since employees are available virtually at all times. Therefore, the employees' efforts are a helpful tool but do not fully solve the problem, which might cause stress and decreased well-being and motivation in the long run.

### **5.1.3 The Emergence of Other Motivation Factors due to COVID-19**

In addition to the mentally challenging feeling of not having an office space, the empirical material also uncovered other factors that determine the employees' ability to maintain motivation when working from home. The employees reported both living- and work-related conditions that affect their ability to maintain normality and motivation at work. For instance, the respondents highlighted the size of the home and having a partner or family as factors affecting their maintenance of motivation. The interviews revealed that employees who have a bigger home and therefore space for a solid office room feel more motivated at work. Additionally, having a partner

can become challenging for the employees if they live in a small apartment where it is hard to avoid being disturbed. Those prerequisites inhibit the ability to maintain motivation. However, having a partner can also be viewed as an opportunity to decrease the social deficit, which was brought up as a key challenge when working from home due to COVID-19. The social deficit resulting from working from home is also brought up by Ford and Butts (1991), who argue that the lack of informal communication with colleagues increases the risk of employees feeling alienated from the organization and colleagues. Hence, having a partner can both be positive and negative for the employee, depending on how big their home is. Nevertheless, the employees' living conditions are evidently factors that determine to which extent the employees can maintain normality and motivation when working from home. Prior to the pandemic, it did not matter whether the employees had a small or big apartment or had a partner or not since work did not occur at home. However, due to the mandatory work from home, the living conditions now play a major role in the employees' ability to manage their work and maintain motivation. Hence, the new ways of working have created new factors determining whether employees can work effectively and stay motivated.

Moreover, work-related conditions were also brought up as factors highly affecting the employees' motivation. The interviews revealed the importance of workload and clarity in work tasks in order to work hard and stay motivated when working from home. The respondents highlighted how they, for example, got motivated by having much to do at work as well as clarity in what to do. By having a large workload and knowing what to do, the employees felt that it was the work itself that motivated them rather than their ability to motivate themselves. Moreover, clarity in work tasks depends on the management's ability to successfully support and inform the employees. According to the empirical data, the employees perceived the support from managers as crucial for managing the remote work from home. Thus, the employees felt more motivated to focus on work when working remotely by having support and much workload. In addition to this, the support from managers also includes the choice of ICTs to facilitate remote WFH among knowledge workers, which correlates with Newell et al. (2009), who argues that ICT can facilitate organizational change and remote knowledge work. With the right technology, such as Teams as a communication tool and remote access to corporate information, remote work is feasible and easier

to manage for the employees. Thus, it becomes easier to maintain motivation to work when the technology facilitates remote knowledge work.

Additionally, the employees have a commission-based salary, which according to Alvesson and Kärreman's (2018), is a reward that motivates people. Thus, if the employee perceives the commission as highly valuable and achievable, motivation is likely to increase. Furthermore, the commission-based salary can be viewed as an incentive that makes employees more motivated to make an extra effort at work when sitting at home. Suppose the employees had a fixed salary and little workload, the motivation to make an extra effort and stay productive during the days would most likely decrease. One employee presented support for this by stating that the commission-based salary and the highly ambitious and driven colleagues motivate the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting. This statement further suggests that the atmosphere in the organization, with driven and ambitious members, makes it easier to stay motivated. Additionally, prior to COVID-19, when employees worked in the office, the commission-based salary was viewed more as a competition between employees or as part of the motivation. However, today, when employees work from home and motivation might be lacking, the commission-based salary can be seen as a necessity and the only reason for putting extra effort into work. Thus, the interviews revealed that the commission-based salary is now more influential and significant for employees' motivation than it was before the pandemic. Nevertheless, all of the above suggests that various work-related factors are affecting the ability to maintain motivation at home.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that all employees appreciate the flexible scheduling resulting from remote working from home. This correlates with Lupu (2017), who claims that flexible scheduling provides employees with autonomy in planning their everyday lives, including activities facilitating their needs, such as going to the doctor or managing a family. The empirical findings exposed two views on this flexible scheduling. Firstly, the employees who have a more positive attitude towards WFH want to continue with that practice, to some extent, even after the pandemic. Secondly, the employees who dislike WFH still want to keep the opportunity to work remotely from other places when the pandemic is over. Thus, it is evident that all employees appreciate the flexible way of working, which COVID-19 contributes with. However, it does not simply mean working from home full time but rather have the opportunity to decide for oneself,



depending on what fits the employee best. The empirical material indicated that the employees were aware of the drawbacks of WFH full time but did not want to leave that opportunity unavailable. However, as Grant, Wallace and Spurgeon (2013) argue, remote WFH can be viewed as negatively affecting motivation and job effectiveness. Thus, the employees might feel a desire to work from home a few days a week, but to maintain motivation, going back to working at the office some days a week is necessary. Although working at the office full time has been the standard at Lundgren's Recruiting prior to the pandemic, the desire to work from home has increased due to the flexible scheduling resulting from the mandatory remote work from home due to COVID-19.

## **5.2 The Feeling of a Lost Community - Interactive Motivation During COVID-19**

The empirical data reveals that Lundgren's Recruiting has a strong organizational culture where the employees, during the pandemic, miss the energy and motivation they receive from their colleagues. Since the organization is a KIF and recruits its employees by a cultural and personal fit, there seems to be a strong 'Lundgren identity' of highly driven, ambitious, and talented employees. According to Kärreman and Alvesson (2009), identity contains an understanding of what is appropriate and natural, which directs the individual's thoughts, feelings, and values in a certain direction. Thus, the employees see it as fundamental to meet perceived expectations and norms in the workplace due to conformity and identifications (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009). However, due to COVID-19, all employees at Lundgren's Recruiting were forced to work from home, and the opportunity to maintain the organizational culture and the so-called 'Lundgren-identity' as a knowledge worker risks being negatively affected. Although the employees can talk virtually, they are no longer able to see each other in person and have social interactions at the office. Thus, the strong culture and community within the organization are harder to maintain. When employees are unable to maintain the feeling of having a community, it might likewise affect employee motivation. The empirical material revealed that the employees perceive motivation as a result of the social interactions at work, which correlates with Alvesson and Kärreman (2018), who highlights the importance of the interactive dimension for motivation. The authors also highlight the importance of the individual in relation to social groups and standards where

motivation results from norms, reciprocity, and identity. When it comes to norms within Lundgren's Recruiting, employees work hard and are ambitious to gain commission where the effort tends to increase, resulting in the norm of working much and hard. In line with this, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) argue that following norms is an important driving force for people, as there is a desire to feel "normal" and live up to the standards to which the person attributes oneself. Thus, it is evident that the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting strive to live up to the standards and norms of being a hard-working knowledge worker. Additionally, within Lundgren's Recruiting, they have a 'scoreboard' which displays those employees within the recruiting and account manager profession who have the highest score in signing most deals. Since many employees within Lundgren's Recruiting also have a background in sports and are used to competing, many employees' goal is to be on the scoreboard and receive the title as the recruiter or account manager of the month. Thus, the norms and values within the organization highly enhance motivation, which might be a driving force even when working from home.

In addition to the norm as a motivation factor, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) bring up reciprocity, which is about being socially accommodating and giving a positive response, in any way, to other people who have done or given a person something. The empirical material revealed that employees who feel supported by managers and colleagues are highly motivated to do something in return, such as working hard or offering their help. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) suggest, the positive outcome of reciprocity is loyalty and willingness to help, based on a moral dimension of what one should do. Thus, having a high level of reciprocity within the organization contributes to motivation to work and willingness to help, regardless of whether it is at the office or at home. Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) also suggest that a higher salary could result in the willingness to perform at work. All employees at Lundgren's Recruiting have a commission-based salary, so the more deals the employees can get, the higher the salary. Thus, the salary structure can result in employees going that extra mile for the organization and strengthening the relationship between Lundgren's Recruiting and their employees.

Furthermore, the third motivation factor presented by Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) is identity, which defines what is appropriate and natural for the individual. In turn, this directs the individual's thoughts, feelings, and values in a certain direction. Thus, the employees find it important to meet

perceived expectations and norms in the workplace due to conformity and identifications (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009). According to the empirical material, the employees' identity at work is connected to their specific company, where the organization as a KIF and its culture become the identity source (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018). During the interviews, several employees stated, for instance, "we at Lundgren's Recruiting", referring to "we" as a team in this specific organization with this specific culture. Thus, those expressions indicate a high level of strong norms, reciprocity, and identity within Lundgren's Recruiting, acting like factors that intensify the motivation. Moreover, those factors indicate that Lundgren's Recruiting possesses a strong culture permeated by reciprocity, where employees identify themselves with the organization and put much effort into meeting perceived expectations and norms. Thus, on the one hand, being a "Lundgrener" seems to enhance the motivation to work hard and support each other. On the other hand, due to COVID-19 and the social distancing, the culture within Lundgren's Recruiting might be negatively affected as it builds upon those social interactions. In this case, the culture and community can act as a motivation factor in the short run. However, without social interactions with colleagues, the strength of the culture and community might decrease in the long run, resulting in decreased motivation. This is supported by the empirical material, where one employee stated that Lundgren's Recruiting is no longer able to build on the community and that the feeling of being part of a strong culture has decreased due to COVID-19. Hence, the feeling of a lost community negatively affects the motivation among employees.

Nevertheless, there is a significant social deficit when working from home, affecting both norms, identity, and reciprocity within the organization. The employees do not interact with each other on the same level as before COVID-19, and they now only meet virtually without any physical interactions. The everyday chit-chat about non-related work subjects no longer exists. The physical meetings with colleagues are gone. The feeling of going to work and meeting people in the team is lost. Thus, the motivation that comes from social interactions is remarkably hard to obtain when working from home. When the social aspect is missing, it might lead to the organizational culture suffering, and if the culture is suffering, the motivation is suffering accordingly. Moreover, participation decreases, and this may affect the employee's view of themselves. In the long run, it might end up in a vicious spiral, where employees no longer identify with the organization to the same extent as before the pandemic. Hence, the motivation to work hard and meet perceived

expectations decreases, making WFH even more challenging. However, as the empirical material revealed, the employees are looking forward to going back to working at the office after the pandemic, although it might only be a few days a week. The empirical findings indicate that the mix of working at the office and still having the opportunity to work remotely a few days a week would motivate them the most.

### **5.3 Summary of Discussion**

The empirical findings in this research have enabled us to discover some of the motivation factors that are apparent among knowledge workers during COVID-19 and mandatory work from home. This particular study has examined these motivation factors related to three research areas, organizational change, remote work, and interactive motivation. Four key themes emerged from the data, correlated with these areas, and present, as to our knowledge, a more profound set of findings than in previous studies. The identified themes provide a unique insight into how employees interpret remote WFH and motivation during the pandemic. The first theme highlights the mental barrier resulting from a lack of individual readiness for change and the challenges of being forced to work from home. The second theme uncovers the conflict between work and private life when not having a solid office. This conflict concerns the pandemic's effect on the employees' work-life balance and how they cope with the challenges of WFH and maintain motivation. The third theme emphasizes the emergence of other motivation factors during COVID-19 and how motivation has changed due to the pandemic. Different prerequisites in the employees' lives determine their ability to stay motivated, and other factors are now crucial for motivation than before the COVID-19 outbreak. The fourth and last theme reveals the feeling of a lost community when WFH and its implications on employee motivation. It appears evident that social interactions play a crucial role in maintaining motivation and that the community in the organization suffers from the mandatory remote work from home.

## 6 Conclusion

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*Our aim with this research is to answer our research questions regarding how the employees' motivation at Lundgren's Recruiting might have been affected due to COVID-19 and mandatory remote work. This section summarizes our empirical findings by our contributions to the literature. After that, we present the practical implications, limitations of our study and conclude this research with suggestions for future research.*

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### 6.1 Empirical Findings

The purpose of this research is to examine how employees in KIFs interpret and understand motivation during mandatory remote WFH as a result of COVID-19 and its implications on the work environment. Hence, we aim to answer the presented research questions in the following section.

- 1. How do employees in knowledge intensive firms interpret motivation when working from home due to COVID-19?*
- 2. What is the significance of social interactions for motivation among knowledge workers?*

As a result of our research, it seems evident that there are mixed feelings regarding remote WFH due to COVID-19. The majority of the employees felt confused and fragmented due to the radical changes in the workplace resulting from the pandemic. Our first finding shows that employees in KIFs try to maintain normality when working from home in order to have a somewhat normal workday and feel motivated to work, as before the pandemic. Those efforts include dressing up in office wear, taking walks before and after work, and overall maintaining old routines or developing new ones for maintaining motivation. This is done in order to overcome the mental barrier that results from the reluctant acceptance of radical changes. Thus, the employees interpret motivation as a phenomenon that requires much effort and determination to overcome the mental barrier and maintain a somewhat normal workday when working from home.

Our second finding reveals that various factors and prerequisites contribute to employees' motivation when working from home due to COVID-19. Some employees seem to manage to work from home somewhat successfully, and others do not. For instance, employees who have a bigger home, space for a solid workspace, and a partner have a more positive perception of having a home office than employees who live smaller and alone. Furthermore, personal attributes, such as having the ability to stay focused on work when working from home, is vital for feeling motivated. When the work-life balance becomes harder to maintain, so is the motivation. Moreover, work-related factors, such as the amount of work and clarity in work tasks, are essential for feeling motivated since the workload can motivate the employee when they cannot maintain self-motivation. Furthermore, we found that the commission-based salary could act as a motivating factor when the motivation to work was low. Above all, we found that the employees interpret motivation mainly as a challenge when working from home due to COVID-19, particularly in the long run.

Our third finding shows that management plays a crucial role in employees' perception of working from home. Support from leaders and their ability to get employees to feel involved by using the right techniques and ICTs enables the organization and its people to adapt to the situation faster and perceive WFH as less challenging. The support from leaders during remote WFH can result in a work environment where employees feel appreciated, included, and less absent from the office and organization. In turn, employees feel motivated and loyal to the company, where the feeling of belongingness makes them willing to work hard and effectively, even from home. Hence, the right ICTs and support from management might enable employees to interpret motivation as less difficult to maintain.

Our fourth finding is that when employees work remotely from home, it is the social deficit that mainly affects their motivation. Since it becomes more challenging to maintain organizational culture and community when working from home and distancing socially, motivation is affected accordingly. Several employees stated that it is their colleagues that bring them energy and motivation at work. Thus, it seems evident that working fully remote might harm the organizational culture and the employee's motivation likewise. Since motivation depends much on social interactions, remote WFH will likely result in decreased employee motivation in the long run. All employees complained about the lack of social interactions and the effect it had on their

motivation. Hence, social interactions evidently play a crucial role in maintaining motivation at work in KIFs.

Lastly, due to the employees' adaption to having a home office, the employees want to have the opportunity to sometimes work more from home even after the pandemic. On the one hand, employees find it challenging to maintain motivation when social interactions are lacking. On the other hand, the new way of working has created a desire to decide when, how, and where to work in the future. Thus, employees want to work from home when they desire it but still want to work at the office a few days a week to maintain motivation. Since many companies aim to get employees back onsite when the pandemic is over, it may contradict employees' desire to choose themselves. Consequently, this contradiction may cause resistance where some employees want to continue working from home in some sense, which might not go in line with the organization's desire. Hence, management needs to be prepared for and able to manage remote WFH even after the pandemic as the COVID-19 outbreak has speeded up the process of the society becoming a digitalized and remote work environment.

## **6.2 Theoretical Contribution**

As indicated in our background and problem statement, COVID-19 has resulted in radical changes and a global experiment of remote working on a larger scale than ever before (Kniffin et al., 2020). Thus, the pandemic has received very much attention worldwide. However, we argued that although remote work and motivation have been researched for several decades (e.g., see Ford and Butts, 1991; Maslow, 1943), little is yet researched about the relationship between those two during mandatory work from home. Our study has enabled a deeper understanding of how employees in KIFs interpret and maintain motivation during remote work from home. Hence, our study adds to the research field by providing similar findings as Kniffin et al. (2020), Wolor et al. (2020), Anwer (2020), and Holmberg & Petrelius (2020), who all found mandatory remote WFH as challenging for employees. Although our research contributes with similar findings, we add to the research field by examining the motivation related to knowledge workers in the recruiting profession, which to our knowledge is not yet adequately addressed.

In addition to strengthening contemporary research, we also contribute to the research field of interactive motivation, addressed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2018). Our reconceptualization of this theory provides another dimension to the existing interactive dimension of motivation, namely that interactive motivation is highly affected by the restrictions and social distancing resulting from COVID-19. Since interactive motivation is based on social interactions as a motivation factor, the pandemic has created a situation that somewhat erases this factor. Hence, our reconceptualization adds an additional dimension to the theory, namely that social interactions must be extended or even replaced with other motivation factors in order to maintain motivation in an entirely virtual and digitalized society. On the one hand, social interactions are still available virtually when working from home, which makes it not entirely erased. On the other hand, virtual interactions are not to be compared to meeting physically, which is a problem that still needs to be addressed and researched from a motivation perspective. Hence, by adding insights into employees' perception of motivation when working from home, we propose that there need to be other incentives for employees to maintain motivation at work in the future digitalized society.

### **6.3 Limitations**

This section considers further practical implications of our research study. Our research revealed the complex nature of how employees perceive mandatory remote work from home due to COVID-19. We find it necessary to address the impact the pandemic can have on motivation. Since the high ambitions and commission-driven nature plays a crucial role in the knowledge workers' motivation, it can be questioned whether our findings are generalizable across other organizations that do not have a commission-based salary or a strong organizational culture. Furthermore, it also suggests that our findings might be limited to Swedish KIFs. However, despite these limitations, we consider our results of how COVID-19 and social distancing affect motivation at work and can be generalized across other industries similar to our case company.

In addition, the sample size of the study can be regarded as a limitation as it is composed of the employees' subjective thoughts and opinions. Thus, their opinions might not be supported by other employees in the organization, such as managers or assistants. However, we noticed that the employees responded in a genuine way since many of them communicated openly about their perception of both the challenging and more critical sides of their organization's decision to force



employees into remote WFH and how it has affected their motivation. Thus, we consider the smaller sample size as not affecting the credibility of our empirical findings.

Ultimately, our study is not based on empirical material from one specific office but four different offices around Sweden within the same organization. Hence, our results might therefore differ since all respondents do not have the same manager and close-working colleagues. However, we found our empirical data consistent regardless of which office the employees belonged to.

## **6.4 Future Research**

Our research has contributed with many insights into how employees within a KIF interpret motivation when working from home. Based on our findings, future research is essential to improve understanding from a long-term perspective. This research has been processed during COVID-19, where we have gained knowledge regarding the situation before and during the pandemic but less of the possible situation after. One day, COVID-19 will hopefully be over, but the new ways of working will likely remain. Therefore, researchers and practitioners need more basis on how employees want to work onwards and how leaders can deal with upcoming dilemmas or challenges regarding remote WFH. However, the post-COVID-19 situation needs to be researched to a greater extent to deal with eventual future attitudes and behaviors among employees since this has changed when working from home. Since employees have been working remotely for over a year now, some have begun to prefer this way of working since they have been able to manage it in a suitable way. Thus, the new behaviors and attitudes among employees will most likely still exist after the pandemic, and some might not be willing to work full-time from the office. Hence, future research regarding the work environment post-COVID-19 is necessary for gaining insights into how organizations should manage their employees in a more digitized and changed society.

## **6.5 Practical Implications**

We find our study having practical implications, particularly managerial implications, since support from managers is likely to enhance employee motivation and commitment during remote work from home. Hence, employees are likely to better cope with the radical changes of COVID-

19 when they feel supported and included by managers. Since the lack of social interactions and motivation is a challenge during remote work from home, any way of providing support and incentives to work hard is of great interest for managers, now and in the post-pandemic society. Thus, we suggest that practitioners should aim for enhancing employee motivation in new ways than prior to the pandemic when motivation was easier achieved by working at the office and having social interactions with organizational members. In other words, managers in KIFs should focus on learning from the implications of COVID-19 on knowledge workers and adapting their strategies to the new work situation to assure that motivation is maintained. Even though this might be challenging for managers since the demands vary among the employees, if the situation is solvable, we suggest that managers should strive to find ways to enhance motivation, regardless of where the employee wants to work. A potential solution can be a higher focus on support, commissions, and activities to manage remote work from home successfully.

Furthermore, what should not be overlooked is that communication and meetings through Teams or other digital communication platforms might decrease the conversation's quality since it becomes harder to read body language or maintain a natural flow in the conversation in the same way as when meeting in person. On the one hand, digital communication enables people from different locations to discuss, even on short notice and does not require any traveling or booking of a conference room. On the other hand, such meetings are likely to be less effective, depending on the objective of the meeting. Moreover, suppose five people are attending a meeting, in which two of them join the meeting online, it becomes more challenging for those employees to join the conversation naturally. Thus, one practical solution for organizations might be to decide specific days when it is mandatory to be at the office and other days when it is optional to maintain efficiency in meetings and, in turn, even enhance organizational culture.

To conclude, managers in KIFs should focus on the employees' demands where some employees struggle with maintaining motivation when working from home and others have adapted to the situation and now perceive WFH as more attractive than before. However, this might also cause a conflict for managers to meet all employees' demands. Some employees might want to continue working from home, and others do not suggest working remotely at all. Here, a potential solution could be to offer the employees at Lundgren's Recruiting to work from home some days per week.

If the employees prefer to work from home, demanding all employees to work full-time at the office when COVID-19, including all restrictions, is over would be devastating. This since several employees perceive that their home offices have been working out well. Therefore, those employees should get the opportunity to work from home some days per week to avoid potential resistance and decreased motivation within the organization. In short, considering the limited amount of contextual research within the field of motivation during a pandemic and mandatory remote work from home, we suggest future researchers to consider the radical changes in today's work environment when studying motivation in the post-COVID-19 society.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A - List of Interviewees

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Years in the company</b>
Olof	Key account manager	0-1 years
Jakob	Key account manager	3-4 years
Adam	Key account manager	5-7 years
Emma	Recruiting	1-2 year
Andrea	Recruiting	1-2 years
Anna	Recruiting	3-4 years
Fredrik	Recruiting	3-4 years
Rasmus	Recruiting	5-7 years
Linda	Other	3-4 years
Eva	Other	5-7 years



## **Appendix B - Interview Guide**

*[Note: The interview guide has been translated from Swedish to English where some words might not have the exact same meaning.]*

### **Preface:**

*[Note: The preface is an overview and was not said word by word to have small talk, making the respondents more relaxed.]*

- We are writing our thesis at Lund University with the degree of Master of Science in business and economics. We want to ask you some questions regarding your experience of working from home. There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to gain an insight into your experience and thoughts.
- You as the organization will be completely anonymous where all respondents and organization will get another name in our essay.
- Lastly, before we start the conversation, we want to ask you if it is okay to record in order for us to transcribe for our research.

### **Interview Questions:**

*[Note: Some supplementary questions have, in some cases, arose depending on the respondent's answers]*

- Can you tell us about yourself, what role you have, and how long you have worked for Lundgren's Recruiting?
- For how long have you been working from home?
- How does a workday look like today?
- How would you say that you have been affected by not being able to work from the office?

- What are the pros versus cons of having a home office?
- Do you experience that you more easily get distracted by working from home? If yes, in what way?
- Would you like to continue working from home or the office when COVID-19 is over?
- How would you say it has been working out to have a home office?
- How would you describe your work-life balance compared to before you started to work remotely?
- Do you notice any difference due to your overtime since you started to work from home?
- Would you say you have been more available since you started to work remotely?
- Have you experienced any difference when it comes to workload since you started to work from home?
- How did you experience the change process when Lundgren's Recruiting was forced to adapt and work remotely?
- Is there anything you want to add that you feel we have not talked about?