Remote Work

Transitioning to Remote Work in Times of Crisis

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Abstract

During times of crisis, such as when the world is going through a pandemic. Many companies get affected and need to change their way of working. Our purpose is to study how the abrupt transition to remote work effects different aspects of work and to see whether, and in what ways, the involuntary nature of the current remote work situation changes how remote work is perceived by employees and managers. We choose to do a qualitative study, in order to get a deeper understanding from both employees' perspective and managers perspective. The managers and employees participating in our interview are from banking, insurance, and staffing agencies. These interviews will be supplemented with secondary sources from news and statistical surveys. By comparing the results from our study with earlier research and recommendations from industry experts, we concluded that organizational members are handling the transition to remote work well despite the ongoing situation. Similar pros and cons of remote work that are present in previous research are also present in our interviews. However, there are some distinct differences as well. Our thesis is intended to help other organizations learn and gain knowledge about how different organizations are managing remote work in a crisis and the challenges that it brings.

Key words: COVID-19, management, remote work, crisis

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1. Introduction

In this section we will present the key concepts of the thesis so that the reader can get introduced to the important concepts that will be discussed later. In this section we will also present a background of the issue, our problem background that we identified, the research question and the main purpose of the thesis. In the end of this section the limitations that we had to take in consideration while writing will be presented.

1.1 Key Concepts

Remote work
Remote work is the practice of working outside of the traditional office, both in a temporal (time) and a spatial (location) sense (Olson, 1983). Previous research has separated the practice into two distinct definitions: Working from home and working from anywhere.

Working from home
Working from home as defined by Choudhury, et al. (2019) as working within a certain distance from the corporate office (<50 miles away), this does not necessarily mean that the person is working out of their own home but for most workers that is the case. The important aspect to consider here is that working from home provides temporal flexibility, meaning that the worker chooses their working hours more flexibly. Additionally, it removes the need for commuting and reduces sick days.

Working from anywhere
The difference between working from home and working from anywhere is the geographical flexibility of working from anywhere. In addition to choosing their own hours, the worker also chooses where they work from, without any constraints and with very limited physical presence at the office (a few times per year). This allows workers to select an area with lower costs of living or one that suits their specific needs (Choudhury, et al., 2019).

In our thesis we will be mainly focusing on working from home.

Crisis
A crisis in general is a situation with much, confusion, disagreement, or suffering (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Our thesis will focus on crises that are highly disruptive to everyday life, mainly the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19
COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China but has since spread to more than 100 locations. Corona viruses are part of a family of viruses ranging in severity from the common cold to COVID-19 and previous epidemical diseases, such as, MERS and SARS. Research into the severity of the disease is still ongoing but the most common symptoms are fever, cough, and shortness of breath (Center for Disease Control, 2020). As of the time of writing there is no vaccine available.

Social distancing
Social distancing is a non-pharmaceutical measure that can be taken to limit the spread of an infectious disease between people. These measures include but are not limited to; Closing schools, limiting public gatherings, and closing offices (Kelso, et al., 2009).

Leadership
Definitions of a leader and their work can be many, but one of them are: "Leaders implement organizational rules by defining their meaning and by providing members with specific directives about what they should do" (Tyler, 2012, s.150). In our thesis we have defined leader as the one in the organization that coaches the workers by telling them what to do, lead them to an answer, and in some cases, tell the workers how to do it.

Abrupt change
In this thesis abrupt change is defined as a change that needs to be done quickly in order to manage an unexpected situation that has occurred because of an unpredicted event. Situations can occur because of both positive and negative events, but in this case with the COVID-19 as a base the focus will be on negative events that occur and imposes various organizations to change their way of working.

1.2 Problem Background

1.2.1 COVID-19

Late 2019 a novel coronavirus appeared in Wuhan, China. The virus likely originated from local wildlife markets or wet markets in the region. Since then the virus has received the official name of COVID-19. It is a zoonotic virus, meaning that it spreads from animals to humans. Ground zero seems to be bats. This is not entirely unexpected since COVID-19 is of the same family as, and is similar to, MERS and SARS. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease meaning that it attacks the lungs primarily. Since the outbreak in China the virus has spread to over 100 locations across the globe (as of early March) with over 126 000 confirmed cases (Center for Disease Control, 2020). The severity of the virus seems to vary from case to case with some infected people reporting no symptoms at all, and in the worst-case scenario the virus is lethal. As the virus spreads, drastic measures are becoming more common and on the 11th of March U.S. president Donald trump announced a European travel ban to the U.S. in an effort to halt the spread (Mills, 2020). On the same day, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Adding that this is the first time that the world has experienced a coronavirus pandemic (WHO, 2020).

As of April, the Swedish health department (Folkhälsomyndigheten) advised against public gatherings of more than 50 people, in order to prevent further spread (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). Some companies are already shutting down their offices and telling their employees to work from home. One prominent example is Spotify CEO Daniel Ek who has told all of his employees to work from home in order to do their part in reducing the spread of the disease (Ek, 2020). In the U.S., many tech companies have asked their employees to work from home as well, effectively shutting down their offices. These include Apple, Amazon, Cisco, Facebook, IBM, Microsoft, and Twitter. However, the most drastic among these being Google where all employees, not only in the U.S. but also in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa have been told to work from home until at least the 10th of April. While the others have only encouraged employees to work from home (Fried, 2020).

Google's CEO Sundar Pichai tweeted: "Contributing to social distancing if you are able to, helps the overall community spread and most importantly, will help offset the peak loads through critical healthcare systems and also saves it for people in need. (based on expert advice). Please contribute if you are able to" in connection with the new directives for employees (Pichai, 2020).

Spotify's CEO Daniel Ek tweeted: "I have asked Spotify employees to work from home the next two weeks due to the heightened risk for COVID-19. We all have a responsibility to delay the spread of the virus and the expected pressure on our healthcare system. I hope other companies in Sweden follow suit." (Ek, 2020).

As of April 2020, about a third of the global population is in quarantine lockdown. With countries like the UK having some of the strictest policies and other countries limiting travel and advising limited movement outside of their homes (Kaplan, et al., 2020). With more and more countries putting more and more extensive lockdowns and recommendations in place, our thesis will understandably fail to be fully up to date with the ongoing situation, however, we will strive to be as up to date as we can with the limited time that we have.

1.2.2 Remote Work

Working from home extends far back in time. In the very beginning 1.9-1-4 million years ago, the first "working man" (Homo ergaster) did not move much from home to hunt (which was the way of working and bringing food to table during that time). Many thousand years later from that, longhouses existed in England, where farmers lived and worked. Usually "working areas" in the longhouses were in the middle where one could find the kitchen, spinning, weaving, and dressmaking etc. So, the longhouses were where people lived and worked. During the middle ages, when tradespeople traded, much of the work were done from home. Even after the industrial revolution when the working environment changed still there was some professions and works that were driven from home, such as funeral parlours, teaching from home etc. Even though the concept of working from home have existed for a very long time, companies officially began to give the opportunity of flexible working not before 1980. The organization IBM introduced then "remote terminals" in some workers homes, so that they could work in a more flexible way. In 2009, 40 % of the employees at IBM were remote working from home which resulted in reduced working office/place which resulted in higher annual profit for the company (Dishman, 2019).

As the social and technological environments and trends are changing, so does the way of working. Today workers at different organizations have more freedom and flexibility than ever to work from anywhere else than the "traditional" office. What we mean with traditional office is an office where people mainly work on their computers, but still are together in the same place. It is mainly about those working on the computer on their own, such as banking workers, insurance company workers and workers with different administrative responsibilities in the organization. What people want to achieve is a cheaper, faster, and greener way of working. Remote work is one of the flexibilities and is (in this article) defined as *"performing work at a location other than one's primary office"* (Jensen Perry et al., 2018). It is important to keep in mind that remote work not always have to be implemented because of a crisis like COVID-19, it can just be a "natural" way of working in some organizations, even in "normal" times, where no external crisis forces them to do so. Further the article tells that different studies have strengthened the fact that people who have the flexibility to remote work are more satisfied which leads to fewer turnovers. When remote working, the workers often tend to work harder, and manage the long working hours better. Another important issue is the balance of work life and private life. Studies shows that people who remote work experience less conflicts related to the work-family balance, even though it can be hard to ignore and not get affected of thing things or stressful situation at home that occur when you are "at work" (Jensen Perry et al., 2018).

With this sudden increase of remote work on a global scale the questions of how to make remote work actually work, and how to effectively transition to remote work, are becoming more and more popular. Both managers and workers are in an unprecedented situation which requires overarching change to the structure of the modern office and the idea of modern office work. Although the amount of people working remotely has been growing, most people still only work a few days per week from home and the rest in the office. Census numbers from the U.S. show that less than five percent of remote workers work full-time remotely (United States Census bureau, 2018) and according to Neeley (2020), companies in general are unprepared for this sudden change.

It can be different from company to company what resources they need in order to manage the crisis and be able to remote work. According to Staples et al. (2006) there are four key drivers for an organization that needs to carry out the work in a virtual world. The first thing is

information technology (IT), which is a key part in a virtual working world. It allows workers to work remotely, the leaders to control the organization and it allows the people within the organization to communicate with each other. The second key driver is an effective communication between the manager and the employee. And finally the two last key drivers are, experience and training from remote management/work with the arrangements around it, and effective management practices, which includes the managers view of what is realistic, so that the expectations of meetings, performance etc can be in line with reality.

Remote work is directly tied to an increase in productivity (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019), with some evidence of real income increase (Choudhury et al., 2019). However, remote also has downsides, such as, feelings of loneliness and isolation (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, Grant et al., 2013, Jensen Perry et al., 2018). Remote work also serves to integrate work-life and leisure time, blurring the boundaries between the two. This has been perceived as both positive and negative, where the increased socialization at home is seen as positive by those who have families, but where the blurring of the boundaries led to increased stress and the inability to leave work when the workday ends (Grant et al., 2013). Where some remote workers missed the socialization at work, others found that socialization in their families or significant others. Remote work also removes the need for commuting, thereby reducing the stress and reduction in wellbeing which comes with a daily commute, additionally the carbon emissions that would have otherwise been produced by the commuter are also reduced (Bloom et al., 2013, Chatterjee et al., 2020, Choudhury et al., 2019). The one commonality between the majority of the research that we have studied while writing this thesis, and what will set our study apart from them is that the subjects studied in the previous literature have been working remotely by choice, while our subjects are working remotely by necessity.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has led to a sudden change in the way many organizations work. Leading to a drastic increase in remote workers that have little or no previous experience working remotely from companies and organizations that are most likely very ill prepared for this change (Neely, 2020), additionally these remote workers are largely involuntary and would not have been working remotely were it not for the ongoing crisis. This has led to many workers and managers struggling with the common issues that arise when working remotely, such as, loneliness, feeling left out, lack of motivation, and difficulty separating work-life from home-life (Grant, et al., 2013 p. 541).

1.3 Research Gap

The research on remote work is quite extensive and remote work as a concept is nothing new, but the situation that many organizations are facing at the time of writing this thesis is unprecedented in history. Previous research has mainly covered pre-planned and voluntary remote work programs (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, Grant et al., 2013, Jensen Perry et al., 2018). Our research will study how organizational members (managers and employees) are handling remote work that is largely un-planned and involuntary. This is where we believe that there is a large gap in previous research, that is not only unexplored in science, but also important to practitioners and organizations.

In order to compliment previous research, we also studied companies like Stack Overflow (Donovan, 2020), GitLab (GitLab, 2020), and Zoom (Marais, 2020) have been to one degree or another remote workplaces for their entire existence. Additionally, we also studied Microsoft, who are well known for their hardware and software. Many of the products that they

provide are intended for remote collaboration and technological solutions. The reason we chose these companies is that they are prominent players within remote work, either by working remotely or providing help and tools to others that work remotely. These companies are stepping up to provide insights and expertise to other companies that are now struggling to adjust to a remote workforce.

Although remote work is well researched most of the research is focused on productivity, socializing, and learning and the research has been conducted on companies that have done extensive pre planning before implementing remote work (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, English, 2017, Grant et al., 2013). The ongoing situation with COVID-19, however, has many companies scrambling to set up remote work on a very tight timeframe. So, we set out to find out how organizational managers and employees are coping with the transition to remote work. In order to study this, we will analyse advice from experienced companies and conduct a series of interviews with newly remote workers and managers of remote workers. The end results should provide valuable insights into the process of adjusting to remote work, the best tools for remote work, and how to avoid the pitfalls of remote work.

1.4 Purpose

Our purpose is to study how the abrupt transition to remote work effects managers and employees, and to see whether, and in what ways, the involuntary nature of the current remote work situation changes how remote work is perceived by employees and managers. We chose this subject because of its relevance and timeliness. Crises are something that we know occur at different times, such as the IT-crisis in the 2000s and the economic crisis in 2008 and now the corona crisis. Our thesis is timeless in that way that it can be useful for managers and employees to read and learn what opportunities and challenges remote work brings and how to manage a crisis by changing the way of working in a smooth way.

The COVID-19 crisis is most likely not the last crisis, and our thesis gives the opportunity to prepare and learn about remote work in order to smoothly change from traditional office work to remote work in times of crisis. By interviewing both employees and managers our results will provide insights into how people in both positions in an organization are coping with the transition to remote work as well as whether there are any discrepancies between what the managers perceive as challenges and opportunities and what the employees are struggling with. Managers will find our research useful not only for insights into their own organization but also for insights into how other managers are dealing with similar situations. Employees will find our research important for the increased transparency between them and managers and hopefully for increasing dialogue between them if there are problems that they are facing that the managers are unaware of.

Remote work has pros and cons and dealing with the cons while maintaining the pros is the key to its success. Regardless of whether this situation will be short-lived or a month's long experience, we believe that the advice provided by industry experts can alleviate some of the struggles of both managers and employees. In addition to this we hope to provide future researchers with information regarding gaps between existing research and real-world practices, especially in such an unprecedented event as the ongoing crisis and the ensuing shift in the way thousands of people work.

The crisis has changed the everyday work of many and with our thesis we hope to provide ways of easing the process and making remote work more feasible for the future by properly

integrating it now. The lack of choice for many companies and employees provide an ideal setting for our thesis, in the sense that many are struggling with the adjustment. In our thesis we will investigate whether managers and employees are really following the advice of previous research and whether industry experts agree with the best practices for remote work.

1.5 Research Question

How do organizational members handle the abrupt transition to remote work in times of crisis?

1.6 Significance of the Thesis

Theoretical

Studying a subject that is as topical as ours carries great theoretical significance since the situation is unprecedented. This huge shift to remote work for so many employees and managers provides ample opportunity to test the theories regarding remote work. although we are somewhat limited in time and scope our research should still provide significant data that can be further applied when researching remote work. This sudden and unplanned shift to remote work will truly test the trade-offs of remote work when it comes to productivity versus socialization and isolation, especially due to the involuntary nature of the situation.

Practical

The practical implications are clear in that interviewing both managers and employees should yield actionable advice along with the advice that we have compiled from secondary sources. We hope that our thesis will lead to more opportunities for those that want to work remotely to do so and to make remote work more bearable for those who do not.

Policy and Societal

The COVID-19 pandemic may lead to extensive changes to the way we work, and the societal impacts of remote work have been explored in previous research. If we can ease the transition and help to alleviate stress for the people who will be working remotely, showing that not only is it possible to work remotely but that there are clear advantages, we might incentivise more organizations to try it for the long-term, potentially leading to reducing the stress of the population and reducing the pollution from commuting.

1.7 Delimitation

Due to time constraints and accessibility we have limited our study to Swedish companies. This will in turn limit the results of our thesis, mainly due to the different degrees to which countries have been locked down, with Sweden on the more relaxed side of lock down and related recommendations. In order to make the research more applicable to the general public we also chose to study news articles regarding remote work during the COVID-19 crisis. The answers we receive will likely be less severe in nature than those we would have received if we had interviewed, for example, Americans or Italians. We consciously limited ourselves this way and are aware of the impact it will have on our results. Further we have chosen to only interview those who are capable of working remotely, excluding those that are incapable, such as, manual labourers, doctors, etc.

2. Theory

In this section we will present earlier research about the key concepts that this thesis is based on. These are Crisis management, Social distancing, Remote work, Remote leadership, and Self-efficacy theory. Additionally, in this section we will explore what some of the leaders of the industry recommend when it comes to remote work.

2.1 Theoretical Points of Departure

2.1.1 Crisis Management

During time of a crisis the employees trust against the organization and the leader is an important issue, because when a crisis hits the organization employees needs to believe in the organization's ability to handle the crisis. In their article they talk about seven important things that leaders should do in crisis times like this, their recommendations are specially based on the existing COVID-19 crisis. Generally, in any kind of crisis, leaders should make sure that the communication with their employees goes well, and not only employees but all their stakeholders. Open, honest, clear, and timely communication are important to ensure so that the stakeholders and mainly employees can keep the trust against the organization. Further the authors give seven steps of how to behave as a leader when communicating about COVID-19 (Parfet and Solomon, 2020). As a leader you should:

1. Make sure to keep the personal emotions and thought separated from what actually are known. Communicate information that are based on fact and statistics, so that the information you give can be referred to experts in the area.
2. COVID-19 is a new kind of virus and we do not know much about it. So, the future is uncertain for many organizations. That uncertainty can be seen as an opportunity to highlight the preparedness. Take time to look at the business plan to see how prepared the organization is, and what changes needs to be done in the business plan so that different situations can be managed.
3. When something as unknown as COVID-19 occurs, some people feel fear. What a leader can do to prevent the feeling of fairness is to build a strong community, which can be a bit tricky when employees are working remotely. Working from home does not mean that the leader cannot build a community. You as a leader should just think outside the box and make it possible despite to the remote working. For example, a leader can have virtual meeting (in group or individual) where he/she take time to talk with the employees, and listen to them, reminds to support each other. It is about giving the employees the right resources so that their stress can be addressed. For example, the opportunity to call a line and talk with a psychologist.
4. Ask for feedback and listen to what the employees have to say. If the working should go well from home there are different things that must work, the technology, the safety, the health, the life balance etc. As a leader you cannot fulfil all the "wishes" that the employees have when working from home, but you should be aware of them and support the workers as good as you can. A crisis such as COVID-19 can be emotionally stressful for all the involved, which is important to take in consideration when trying to make the work go well from home.

5. Based on the communication with the employees and the feedback they give it can be a good idea to change some policies and rules within the organization. All this to accommodate the stressful situation and the people's feelings and needs.
6. Show the work that you do by for example documentation, and communication to all stakeholders. It shows that even in a crisis, and a stressful situation you as a leader are capable to keep the control and show your competence.
7. During a time of crisis, it is easy to focus on the details, and think about the numbers, projects, and other issues in the organization. What is important is to see the human in the organizations. The employees are people with families, friends, feelings, and a life outside the work. So, it is very important to lead not with only our technical skills but also our humanity and empathy.

2.1.2 Social Distancing

Social distancing has been the main reason for the current shift to remote work, with employers urging their employees to work from home to the largest extent possible. Therefore, we believe that it is important for our thesis, that we briefly explain the science and reasoning behind it. Social distancing means to stay away from large crowds, and also to not get in close contact with others. Social distancing can be seen as a test for the humans, it tests how well people cooperate and take responsibility for each other, even people they do not know or do not even care about. Social distancing can be implemented for different reasons, but in this case where we have a pandemic virus that is spreading all over the world in a very high speed, social distancing is important in order to stop the virus from spreading in the same pace (Miller, 2020). Since the recommendation about social distancing is rather new, it is hard to tell what the long-term consequences will be. But what is known for sure is that social distancing can lead to different kind of health problems, such as depression. On the other hand, social distancing can lead to a lower level of stress. Thanks to the technology and digitalization people can still talk with each other through different applications such as Skype and FaceTime.

2.1.3 Remote Work

Remote work is the practice of working outside of the traditional office. This can be working from home or working from anywhere. The practical difference between these two being the distance from the corporate office. With working from home being defined as within a range of 50 miles from the office and working from anywhere being defined as working outside of that 50-mile range (Choudhury, et al., 2019). Although these definitions may not be widely accepted, we believe that they are useful when making some distinctions with regards to remote work. Additionally, remote work has been separated into remote work (working full time remotely) and telecommuting (working one to three days per week remotely) (Eddleston and Mulki, 2017). Due to the nature of COVID-19 and the intent of social distancing (more on this above) being the driving force behind the shift to remote work in this case we will be speaking mainly of working from home and remote work, as that is the situation for most at the moment.

The idea of remote work is not new, according to Westfall (1998, p. 256) there are theoretical mentions of remote work as early as 1920 and some real ideas seem to have emerged during the mid-1900s and the first "modern" research dates back to 1976. Much of the earlier research has been centred around the productivity increase, cost, and cost reductions of remote work, as well as the logistical effects on for example, congestion in major cities (Nilles et al., 1976). This is understandable since the main arguments for remote work usually boil down to these four aspects. In later studies the emotional and social costs of remote work have been studied

which added another consideration to the decision-making process behind remote work. The rise of remote work can be heavily attributed to the development of technology that enables long distance communications (Westfall, 1998, p. 256).

Previous studies of the practices of working from home and working from anywhere have highlighted the productivity increase as well as the increased wellbeing that comes with the flexibility of these practices. One study by Bloom et al. (2013) found an increase in productivity by 14%, and another study by Choudhury, et al. (2019) found that, in addition to the productivity increase provided by working from home, the opportunity to work from anywhere further increased productivity by 4.4%. It also increased real wages in people who chose to live in areas with lower costs of living, without increasing nominal wages. However, these studies found that loneliness and the lack of socialization were the main downsides of these practices. In the study by Bloom et al. (2013) of a Chinese travel agency he found that at the end of the trial period that was studied some of the participants decided to return to the office even though they would lose productivity and flexibility, this was mainly due to perceived loneliness when working from home.

A study by Grant et al., (2013) explored the effects of remote work on work-life balance, job effectiveness and well-being. The study found several pros and cons of remote work, and again the aspect of loneliness came up as a con for some of the research subjects. The interviewees also raised the issue that you can miss out on the "office grapevine" and important information (Grant, et al., 2013 p. 541). Further, although some interviewees found that integrating work and non-working life and improved social life at home to be a pro, some found that the blurring of the boundaries between work and non-work to be stressful and they also found it hard to truly leave work when the day ends. This was exasperated by late emails and a working culture that values overtime and round the clock availability (Grant, et al., 2013 p. 541). The maintenance of social relationships at work where also found to be more difficult and while some interviewees missed coming into the office, at least on occasion, others found their social company in their spouses or families (Grant, et al., 2013 p. 540).

Additionally, remote work cuts down or completely removes the need for commuting. The daily commute has significant effects on the subjective wellbeing of workers directly tied to the duration, mode of transport, and other stress factors connected to commuting (e.g. traffic congestion, public transport delays, etc.). These factors all contribute to decreasing the overall subjective well-being of workers and lead to lowered performance and mood throughout the workday and even at home after the day has ended (Chatterjee et al. 2020). Both Bloom et al. (2013) and Choudhury et al. (2019) find that working from home and working from anywhere severely reduce the commuting times of workers and can not only assist in the subjective wellbeing of workers but also in reducing the carbon emissions of the commute that they would have otherwise undertaken. Grant et al. (2013, p. 541) also found that working from home enhanced their subjects lives by reducing the time spent travelling.

A study by Jansen Perry et al. (2018) investigated the levels of stress that remote work contributed to and compared these results to the emotional stability of the subjects. Their primary findings were that those with high emotional stability found remote work and the autonomy it affords less stressful than those with low emotional stability. The authors chose to measure stress as the strain or "diminished state of well-being" a person is subjected to (Jansen Perry, et al., 2018 p. 578). They found that the most straining situation was one where the subject experiences high demands with low personal control. Further they raised the question of whether the positive effects (better job attitude, increased performance, and motivation) are

enough to offset the strain that a remote worker could face when working remotely (Jansen Perry, et al., 2018 p. 578). The results from this study, that people with high emotional stability are better suited for remote work and experience less strain because of it, and that people with lower emotional stability are more susceptible to strain because of remote work, carry important implications for our study which entails a situation where remote work is not an optional perk of employment but rather a requirement due to a crisis. We have found little research on the subject of involuntary remote work.

Recent research by Larson and Makarius (2017) has outlined two important aspects when working virtually or remotely. These two main aspects: establishing rules of engagement and Building and maintaining trust was then split into smaller actions that can be used by remote workers to make the most out of working virtually (Larson and Makarius, 2017, pp. 168). In the case of rules of engagement, the authors explain that in a "face to face" situation these rules evolve naturally but in a virtual situation they should be properly outline from the start in order to avoid confusion and unnecessary conflict.

The important issues to tackle when establishing the rules of engagement are; how to communicate, when to communicate, and how to best collaborate. Examples of how to communicate are, for example, email when it's non-urgent and calling via phone or skype for urgent issues. For when to communicate it is important to know whether you are expected to answer emails or phone calls at any time of day or within a certain time frame, this is especially important when working in teams that span several time zones. When collaborating in, for example, a shared document it is important to not delete, overwrite, or otherwise inhibit the other collaborators work. Which is why the authors recommend that remote workers utilize for example Dropbox in order to avoid any conflicts when writing or editing (Larson and Makarius, 2017, p. 168).

Building and maintaining trust is complicated in any situation and it is only exacerbated by lack of in-person contact. Larson and Makarius (2017) suggest that there are two types of trust, relational- and competence-based trust. Building relational trust in a virtual relationship can be easier if the remote workers try to incorporate friendly small talk in their email correspondence, showing enthusiasm, and letting their own "voice" show in the emails making them more personal while maintain a professional level and not oversharing (Larson and Makarius, 2017, pp. 167). Building competence-based trust is, according to the authors, more straight forward. The importance here lies with properly communicating the remote workers expertise and how they can contribute to the team or project, and responding to emails and other communication in a timely manner (preferably established during the rules of engagement part of the relationship construction) (Larson and Makarius, 2017, pp. 167)

Further Larson and Makarius (2017, pp. 167-169) introduce the concept of virtual intelligence and the development of such intelligence. The authors choose to define intelligence by as "the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, think rationally, and deal effectively with his environment" (Wechsler, 1944, cited in Larson and Makarius, 2017, p. 168). The authors then go on to describe virtual intelligence as a set of abilities that a person possesses to a greater or lesser degree. Which all contribute to their intellectual capabilities and their ability to adapt to virtual work. These abilities are "recognizing", "directing", and "maintaining" (Larson and Makarius, 2017, p. 170).

The ability to recognize contributes to a remote workers ability to realize that the situation that they are in is different and also to recognizing that these differences require adaptation.

Included in this section the authors also mention the ability to shift attention from one task to another and setting appropriate priorities on the remote workers own initiative (Larson and Makarius, 2017, pp. 168, 169).

The ability to direct is explained as being able to plan and utilize cognitive resources in a way that is appropriate for remote work. Directing cognitive resources is also useful when building trust and establishing modes of communication. According to the authors, the reason for this is that workers who recognize the different environment that remote work consist of, are better equipped to direct cognitive resources to adapting to the new environment. This also includes planning for the novel norms that arise from remote work and the ability to adapt to the norms as they are agreed upon or arise organically (Larson and Makarius, 2017, p. 169).

The ability to maintain essentially means the ability to manage, monitor, and continuously update knowledge and information in an ever-changing virtual environment (Larson and Makarius, 2017, p. 169). According to us, this is a major part in a remote workers adaptability and their ability to retain and utilize previous knowledge and information in a constructive way, while being adaptable enough to seize opportunities for improvement.

Development of these skills are done on a metacognitive level, meaning that each individual pays greater attention to their cognitive processes and works to improve and develop these three crucial abilities. As previously defined, intelligence differs on an individual level and different individuals may have to work harder to hone these abilities than others, not accounting for outside influences and situational factors which could further contribute to the development of virtual intelligence (Larson and Makarius, 2017, p. 169, 170). In conclusion, adapting to virtual, or remote work is not only based on the physical attributes of the work but also on cognitive development. With the substantial differences in individual capacity, we believe that it will be important to provide differing levels of support for different individuals when transitioning to remote work. Where some may need little help and adapt quickly, others may struggle to fully utilize their virtual intelligence.

Harvard Business review published an article answering 15 questions regarding remote work. According to professor Neeley companies are unlikely to be adequately prepared for this shift in the way we work (Neeley, 2020). Her tips and suggestion for remote work in general and smoothing this transition will be summarised below:
1. Set up the infrastructure and make sure employees can access the tools they need.
2. Develop rituals. For example: set start and end times for your workday, shower, and get dressed in the morning. Managers should check up on their employees in order to make sure that the transition is going well.
3. Have a team launch. Open a dialogue on how you should communicate and structure things like meetings, and how often. Once the basics are in place, check-up regularly and try to encourage informal conversation between co-workers by for example starting every meeting with a quick round of questions regarding how everyone is doing etc.
4. Encourage exercise.
5. Keep everyone in the loop and make sure no one is feeling left out.
6. Trust your employees. Trust that they will perform as usual even under these new conditions. Evaluate results.
7. Be flexible around the hours that employees work. With remote work issues like childcare and other disruptions during the day are inevitable. Enable your employees to work around them and set the best times for work.

8. If an employee seems to be struggling with the transition, talk to them, and encourage others to do so as well.
9. Leaders need to be visible and available to instil hope.

(Neeley, 2020).

2.1.4 Remote Leadership

A study rooted in transformational leadership by Neufeld et al. (2010, p.229) researched the effectiveness of different types of leadership style on remote workers. The two leadership styles researched in this study were transactional leadership and transformational leadership. With transactional leadership being authority based with clear rewards and punishments and transformational leadership being the idea that leaders can transform their followers by utilizing three techniques, increasing awareness of task importance, focusing on team or organizational goals, and by activating their higher order needs (Neufeld et al., 2010, p. 229). Their study was based on previous research and findings that proximity to the leader may influence the importance of certain behaviour and that rhetorical skills have a higher importance when leading from a distance (Neufeld, et al., 2010, p. 230). Their study resulted in a confirmation of previous research, that transformational leadership was preferable when leading from a distance, and with the addition that according to their interviewees distance seemed to play no part in leader performance or effective communication. However, the authors recognize that their interviewees had extensive experience from working at the same company and through a robust communication system. They suggest that learning over time may negate the impact of distance. In conclusion they state that leaders should not assume that distance will negatively impact communication or leadership. Additionally, they find positive association between perceived leader behaviour and communication effectiveness, meaning that the leaders who are perceived to engage in more effective communication also perform better in practice (Neufeld et al., 2010, p. 240, 241). Their findings further emphasize the importance of communication when leading from a distance, confirming many of our previous findings from our secondary sources, such as the industry experts that we studied.

A study by Patrick English (2017) about remote leadership or virtual leadership found similar issues as the main concerns of both employees and leaders when working in a remote team. These are trust, collaboration, and social isolation (English, 2017, p.43). English's study found that the leader has to trust the team to perform as they should and that the team has to trust that the leader is available and capable enough to provide support and resolve issues. The teams must also trust that they are rewarded for their work and recognized by the leader.

Additionally, the study found a risk of remote teams operating in silos rather than as full teams, diminishing collaboration. English also mentions the issue that virtual communication lacks the nonverbal cues that are a large part of face to face communication.

Finally, the study further confirms the issues of social isolation. Teams working in different time-zones and communicating mainly asynchronously leads to feelings of loneliness that a local team does not have to address since the "water cooler" socialization is so prevalent in an office (English, 2017, p. 43).

In our opinion many of the issues raised in English's (2017) study relate directly to the lack of face to face interactions when working and leading remotely. He states, for example, that a face to face meeting in the starting phase of a project had a positive impact on the working relationships within the team. Further the lack of nonverbal cues led to unnecessary conflict

and a delay in the resolution of these conflicts. Even Though technology is generally perceived positively by the respondents in his research, most claim that there is no substitute for face to face interactions (English, 2017, p. 45, 46). In a crisis situation where face to face interaction is essentially impossible these issues will have to be addressed through other means.

2.1.5 Self-efficacy Theory

The definition of self-efficacy is *"a judgement of one's ability to execute a particular behaviour pattern".* People can have a strong or a weak self-efficacy belief. The difference is that people with a strong self-efficacy belief put more effort in the work so that they can manage the challenge, but people with a weak self-efficacy beliefs do not put as much effort into the work as people with strong self-efficacy, and they are more likely to give up and quit (Staples et al., 2006). According to the article there are four different (major) sources of information that affect every person in the process of reaching a certain level of self-efficacy (see figure 1 below).

1. Performance accomplishments - are about the personal experience of earlier experiences and accomplishments in life. If one has made it earlier in life, the experience of success, will make the expectations higher. And also, if a person has experienced failures earlier in life the expectations will be lower next time.
2. Vicarious experience - is about seeing/observing and then learning. Seeing others doing right and reaching a successful result can lead to higher expectations and willingness to success.
3. Social Persuasion - refers to different activities where a leader leads a team or an individual by giving different suggestions and make them believe that they can take on a task and execute it successfully. To coach people through something and give them feedback is a good example of social persuasion.
4. Physiological and emotional States - are the personal feelings and physiological states that affect the self-efficacy judgement. For example, if you get a task that feels very boring to you and at the same time a bit complicated, it will lead to a lower self-efficacy judgement, and a worse performance in the end.

These four sources lead to a certain judgement of the self-efficacy which in its turn lead to the way of performing.
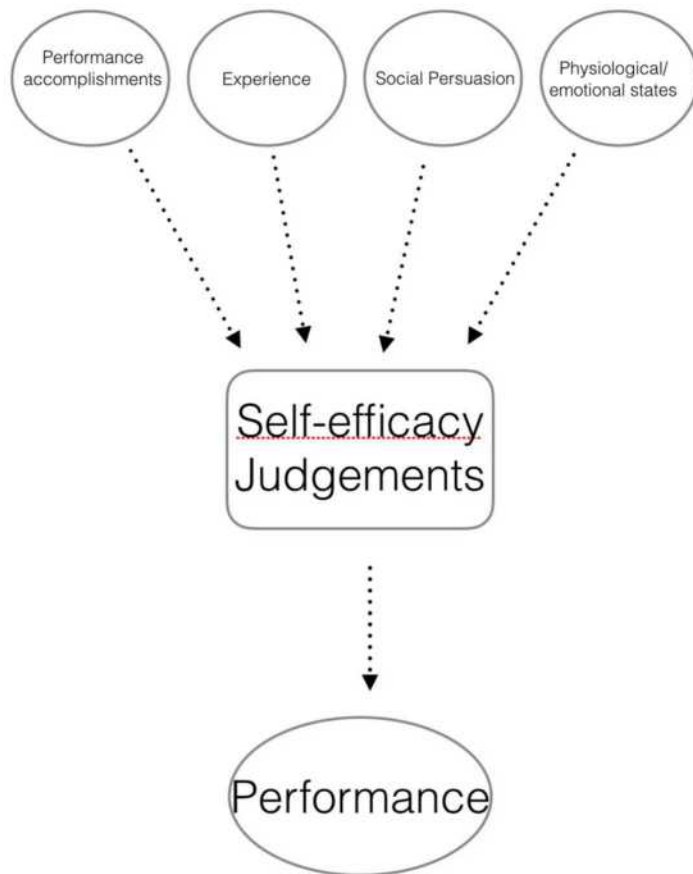
Figure 1, self-efficacy model.

The self-efficacy is theory relevant to mention in the context of remote work because in this thesis remote work is about working from anywhere else (often from home) than the traditional office. Self-efficacy theory is about the ability to execute a particular behavioural pattern or in other words the performance. We can see from the figure above that the performance is dependent on the self-efficacy judgements that in turn are depending on 4 main different issues. These four phenomena can change depending on from where people work and, in the end, it leads to a different performance.

2.2 Advice from Experienced Companies

In order to gain insights into the practical experience and advice regarding remote work, we have decided to compile the most prominent tips and suggestions from industry experts and companies with extensive experience of remote work and managing a remote workplace. The following companies have all been selected for their renown within their fields and because they are to some extent remote workplaces. We found these sources to be reputable and reliable and we recognize that as they are secondary sources, they are perhaps less reliable than peer-reviewed studies and journals. However, we also found that these sources could provide information that peer-reviewed sources could not and have decided to use them in our thesis. In the following section each company will be briefly explained along with our reasoning for choosing that company. While many organizations are facing a restructuring due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis these companies are well prepared to tackle the challenges presented by remote work. Ultimately, we believe that in comparing the suggestions and tips from these industry leaders to the existing research and our interviews we will gain insights about the reality of the current remote work situation, and to a useful collection of scientifically based tools and tips for adjusting to remote work in a crisis.

2.2.1 Stack Overflow

Stack Overflow provides tools and community for programmers and other IT professionals and has at least a third of its workforce working remotely (fully remote as of the 9th of March 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Chandrasekar, 2020)). We chose them because of their extensive experience with remote work. According to them the crucial parts of a successful remote workforce are:
1. Location. Create a separate workspace, even if it is in your apartment or house, it should feel separate.
2. Routines. Keep up with your normal routines. Get dressed in the morning, have lunch at a set time, and most importantly have a clear start and finish to the workday.
3. Self-care. Make sure you get exercise and go outside daily.
4. Communication. Establish clear lines of, and standards for, communication. Make sure everyone is one the same page when it comes to the tools used for communication and collaboration.

(Donovan, 2020).

2.2.2 Zoom

Zoom provides an extensive video chat service. They are a self-proclaimed remote workplace and their video chat service is a common choice for both business and private user. With almost 13 million active users as of February 2020 (Novet, 2020). We acknowledge that they are biased in some of their suggestions for remote work (due to a vested interest in promoting their service) but all the same we believe that they provide valuable insights. Camilla Marais at Zoom, suggests that:
1. Create a dedicated workspace (and share them with the rest of the team for inspiration).
2. Make sure all workers have the required tools (laptop, internet, communication tools, etc.).
3. Encourage communication and make meetings fun (schedule for lunch or breakfast).
4. Add fun, have meeting themes and special activities. Make sure your workers are getting exercise and going outdoors regularly.
5. Encourage your team to maintain routines, get dressed in the morning etc.

(Marais, 2020).

2.2.3 GitLab

GitLab is a fully remote company, working out of at least 65 different countries. They create collaboration tools for DevOps (Developer Operations). Of the companies that we have collected information from, they provide the most extensive information regarding remote work. Their information contains not only tips and suggestions but also some of the pros and cons of remote work. Below we will list first their suggestions and tips, followed by some of the key pros and cons according to GitLab.

Tips and suggestions:

1. Facilitate informal communication. Intentionally create social interactions between workers in order to build trust and relationships. This means fostering an environment where co-workers can interact remotely in a natural and informal way, such as, one-on-one "coffee chats" (informal two person chats), virtually touring co-workers houses, and larger, casual group meetings. Many of these meeting are done through the previously mentioned Zoom software (Informal Communication in an all-remote environment, 2020).
2. Create a handbook. GitLab has created a publicly viewable handbook that has all relevant information available to anyone. This reduced the need for repetition and eases onboarding of new members.
3. Use Google docs instead of a Whiteboard. During meeting the traditional whiteboard is replaced by a collaborative document such as a Google doc, in order to visualize ideas and collect notes throughout the meeting.
4. Be flexible. Use the opportunity of remote work to allow people to make their own schedules and pick their own locations. Focus on delivered results rather than when or where it gets done.
5. Leisure time. Make sure that working from anywhere does not mean working all the time. Ensure that workers take time off and make clear separations between home-life and work-life. Encourage employees to go outdoors and to exercise. Do not celebrate working long hours or working on weekends.
6. Find routines. Maintain regular routines such as getting dressed in the morning, taking regular breaks, and having social lunches. However, encourage remote workers to set their own hours, and help them schedule around the time when they are the most efficient.
7. Pick a location. Create a suitable workspace, that is ergonomic and works for the individual employee.

(GitLab, 2020).

Along with these suggestions and tips, the pros, and cons along with their potential solutions, of remote work have also been extensively written about by GitLab. See table 1 below for a brief overview of the cons and their solutions. Many of the tips and suggestions above function as solutions to the cons that GitLab have found.

Cons	Solution
Difficult onboarding	Handbook, clear communication
Loneliness during transition/first few months	Create socialization opportunities for all employees
Difficulty working from same place as they	Construct separate, suitable workspace.

sleep/live	Maintain clear separation of work-life and home-life
Different time zones	Focus on asynchronous communications and be transparent about when to schedule meetings.
Managing time and motivation on your own	Hire autonomous people who work well on their own.

Table 1, cons of remote work and possible solutions (GitLab, 2020).

The pros of remote work, according to GitLab, are far more numerous and their blogpost covers pros for both employees and employers. See table 2 below for a brief overview of the pros.

Employees	Employers
Increased flexibility	Hire great people regardless of where they are situated
Less stress and wasted time commuting	More productive employees
Safer (no risk from traffic etc.)	Save money on office costs
Increased productivity	Remote work attracts self-motivated people
Ability to travel without needing vacation time	Easier to grow your company (no office space means easily scalable)
Freedom to relocate	Employees are increasingly expecting remote work opportunities
Less exposure to germs from sick co-workers and during commute	Lower employee turnover and higher morale
Easier to communicate with colleagues, less interpersonal drama, and office politics	Fewer meetings, meaning more result-oriented time.
Set up own workspace to suit each individual	No relocation costs for new hires
Choose working hours when you are most productive	Asynchronous work means less downtime during the full 24 hours of the day
Meet and work with people from all over the world	Less risk from localized disasters or crises, work goes on even if parts of the company are unable to work
Onboarding new members can be less socially stressful	More diversity in your company
Eating at home is healthier and cheaper	
Lower taxes in certain countries	

Work clothes are not required	

Table 2, pros of remote work for employees and employers (GitLab, 2020).

Along with the pros for employees and employers, GitLab also found benefits for the world and society as a whole. According to them remote work can help with the overcrowding of urban areas and bringing better paying jobs to low-cost regions can have a positive economic effect of that area (GitLab, 2020). In the theory chapter of this thesis we will compare their findings to those of researchers and peer-reviewed articles.

2.2.4 Microsoft

As one of the largest tech companies in the world, Microsoft provides a wide range of services, hardware, and software to a global market. With the prominence of Microsoft office and the Windows operating system, Microsoft has its software installed on almost all corporate computers and devices. Microsoft also has an almost unrivalled amount of experience in the tech field, using their experience and gathered knowledge they put together a PowerPoint presentation to help employees and employers adjust to remote work. Following are some of their key suggestions and tips:

1. Set up a workspace that is safe, comfortable, and away from distractions.
2. Set up a virtual workspace with good internet connection and the apps needed to be productive.
3. Communicate often. Set up your webcam and video chat service. Make sure to add fun into the communication and try to enable informal communication as well.
4. Collaborate and lead inclusive meetings, where everyone gets the chance to voice ideas or concerns.
5. Manage your well-being, set boundaries, and clearly plan and communicate availability. Get exercise and fresh air. Check in with yourself and others, be mindful of how you are feeling. Seek support from and give support to others who struggle with the adjustment to remote work and the loneliness or stress that can arise because of it.

(Microsoft, 2020).

2.2.5 Trello

Trello provides software designed to help with planning and organizing for groups and individuals (Trello, 2020). As of 2014 they had 4.75 million users and claim to fully "embrace remote" (Ryder and Moon, 2020). Below is a summary of tips included in their guide "How to embrace remote work".

1. Have chat tools for quick conversations.
2. Managers should have weekly check-ins via video call.
3. Never work from bed.
4. Plan and clearly communicate availability.
5. Use video chat to ensure that non-verbal cues come a across.
6. Set up team-building activities over video chat.
7. Set ground rules for communication.
8. Over communicate.
9. Make sure that every employee has the software and hardware necessary.
10. Encourage non-work activities and conversations.
11. Be empathic and transparent
12. Embrace asynchronous communication.

13. Create remote team events where people for example, go wherever they want to go and at the next team meeting you share experiences and photos.

(Ryder and Moon, 2020)

2.2.6 Summary

To summarize, there is plenty of real-life experience available to those who search for it. All of the companies above provide solid advice and tips based on their own and their client's experiences. There is a bias risk for Zoom, Trello, and Microsoft due to their vested interests in the software and hardware market. However, we consider these vested interests of little importance outside of suggestions for specific software and hardware, and most of the companies that we have researched have overlapping suggestions that are repeated several times between them. With more time and resources, we would have liked to research more industry professionals in order to get an even better view of the best practices for remote work. We do believe that the above mentioned companies comprise a good representation of the industry at large and as such we feel confident in using the suggestions and tips that they provide in order to make comparisons with actual practices of interview subjects and with established research. In order to make these comparisons more concisely, we created a table with the most common advice.

Advice from experienced companies
1. Create a suitable workspace
2. Make sure that employees have the tools that they need (software and hardware)
3. Establish rules of engagement (communication)
4. Do not celebrate overtime
5. Communicate clearly and often
6. Encourage non-work or casual interaction
7. Clearly separate work from leisure
8. Create daily routines

Table 3, Advice from experience companies.

3. Method

In this section we will present the method that we have used in order to gain information about the management of remote work during a crisis, and how the transformation is done today. Different scientific approaches are presented in this section as well. Finally, we will also present the ethical aspect of this thesis.

3.1 Subject Choice and Preconceptions of Authors

We chose this subject due to the timeliness of the topic. COVID-19 has forced many into remote work and the existing research has focused mainly on voluntary and planned remote work. We saw an opportunity to provide new insights into this field. Neither one of us has worked remotely prior to starting the study. However, recent lockdowns have forced us both to work from home. In order to maintain objectivity, we have not discussed the issues that we face with each other or with our interview subjects, and our perspectives are omitted from the thesis. Remote work could become the new norm in society, and we believe that our research can contribute to making the transition easier for organizations, that is why we chose this subject.

3.2 Research Process

Our research in this thesis will be separated into three sources of data with the first being information gathered from industry leaders in the field of remote work, and the second being our own interviews with managers and employees who are working remotely. Finally, we will use secondary sources, news articles regarding remote work during COVID-19.

First, we will study earlier research in order to understand how managers manage remote work and change in a crisis situation, when the change is sudden. Additionally, we will investigate the pros and cons of remote work, and the issues that both managers and employees face when working remotely. The literature that we have chosen is the most accurate and up to date information on remote work that we could find, from as reputable sources as possible. The secondary sources discussed further below, were chosen to fill in the gaps with regards to existing literature and the lack of practical and actionable advice, and to gain a more holistic and useful result. Secondary sources will be presented before the analysis in order to add to the information we gained in our results.

Secondly, due to the topical nature of the subject, we will gather information from industry experts who have extensive experience in the field of remote work. The companies and journals selected were chosen due to either their long standing as remote workplaces (as in the cases of GitLab and Stack Overflow) or their experience with remote work and supporting remote workers, through software or education (as in the cases of Microsoft, Zoom, and Harvard Business Review).

The third step will be to do our own research by making a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with managers and remote workers who have recently began working remotely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Naturally, our interview subjects all work in industries where remote work is possible. We selected these interview subjects in order to get an as holistic view as possible, considering our limitations, of how organizational members

are coping with the change to remote work. We have interviewed members of the banking sector, programmers, members of the insurance sector, and a manager at an employment agency. In this step we will also study a selection of news articles pertaining to remote work during COVID-19. These articles have been found through searching prominent news sources such as, Time magazine, the New York Times, Forbes etc.

Our interview guide (se appendix 1) was constructed by analysing the advice of industry experts and the existing literature. This led to an interview guide intended to cover the more pressing issues that the transition to remote work carries. We have also adapted the interview guide to suite managers and employees by altering the questions to reflect and gather information about the issues faced by each of the different interview subject types more appropriately. When designing the interview guide, we kept it as open as possible in order to promote conversation and more in-depth answers. However, some questions are inevitably more of the yes or no nature, but these are quite few and deemed necessary in order to gain useful insights. As previously stated, the interviews are semi-structured, and the guide is not a script. This means that the interviews will differ slightly in their structure and the order of the questions in order to match the interview's rhythm and promote more complete answers.

3.3 Methodological Choice

According to us a qualitative study is most suitable, because we want to get a deeper understanding of the issues and a better understanding of how organizational members are handling the transition to remote work. There are many advantages of collecting data based on a qualitative paradigm. By giving explanations in words, talking about events, and explaining the things that lead to a certain outcome is better explained and understood in words than in numbers and graphs/diagrams (Mathew, et al. 1994 s 1.) This would make it easier for the readers to understand instead of us presenting numbers/diagrams without any deeper understanding and explanation. That is the reasons why we think a qualitative data collecting is better than quantitative. The interviews will be done individually, so that we can minimize the risk of people giving answers that are affected of the other participants.

When it comes to the sample, the qualitative research can often be based on a small sample of objects (in this case people) and still provide with deep understanding of the issue when studying the context and the subject from a deeper perspective, meanwhile a quantitative research asks for a larger sample and tries to find a statistical significance between different variables (Miles, et al., 1994 s. 27) meant to generalize the results to a larger population and to draw conclusions based on relations between variables. Due to the nature of the subject and time restrictions we will supplement our interviews with secondary sources. These sources have been selected through searching prominent news sources for articles on the subject of remote work, additionally we will only be looking at articles from after January 2020 since that was when the COVID-19 situation really started in the west.

So to summarize, we choose the qualitative method because it gives a deeper understanding in words, and are accessible to any reader, without a need for previous understanding in statistics, graphs and diagrams in order to understand what we explain in the thesis. Another reason why we choose qualitative method is because we can base the result on a small sample and still get a deep understanding and a credible result. In the situation that we are in with the limited time, we believe that qualitative data is the most feasible.

When writing scientific thesis another important thing to decide is the starting point of view. Will it be a deductive or inductive approach? In our thesis we will take an inductive approach, which means that we will make observations in the real life and then generalize the answers we get within a theoretical frame. Basically, we are going from observations in the interviews and from secondary sources to making a model/theory (Le Ducs, 2011).

When selecting our interview subjects, we used a combination of purposive sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is when subjects are chosen due to the specific person, setting, or event that they are part of (Taherdoost, 2016 p. 23). In our study we have purposely selected subject who are working remotely due to the COVID-19 crisis. Quota sampling means that subjects are chosen to represent a certain characteristic in order to facilitate some generalization to others with similar characteristics (Taherdoost, 2016 p. 22). We have deliberately chosen subjects who are managers and employees in order to get the viewpoints and opinions of both of these types or organizational members. Snowball sampling is when interview subjects introduce the researcher to others who are similar to themselves (Taherdoost, 2016 p. 22). We used this in order to get a better outreach for our sampling as well as to get more people who are in similar situations to each other. The weaknesses of our sampling method are that there is some risk of selection bias, and there are difficulties in generalization (Taherdoost, 2016 p. 23). However, we believe that these methods combined will give us the best overview of how organizations are handling the transition to remote work.

3.4 Ontology and Epistemology

Epistemology is questioning the nature of knowledge and what actually should be seen as knowledge. There are two different views, the first one is positivism and the second one is interpretivism (Bryman, 2018, pp. 51-52). Positivism refers to natural science methods when analysing the reality and in short positivism intend five different things:

1. Only things that can be confirmed with our senses is knowledge, this viewpoint is also called phenomenalism.
2. Positivism aims to contribute hypotheses that can be tested, and this is called deductivism.
3. Knowledge is reached by collecting facts, and these facts forms the basis for legal regularities. This principle is called inductivism.
4. Science should be objective.
5. There is a clear difference between normative statements and scientific statements. The normative statements/knowledge cannot be verified with our senses.

(Bryman, 2018, p. 51).

Interpretivism on the other hand has a view where different social phenomena are seen from a subjective perspective. Interpretivism takes into account the differences between humans and natural science. This viewpoint shows more understanding for human behaviour (Bryman, 2018, p. 52). We will take the interpretivism-approach within the epistemology because the purpose of our thesis is to study how managers and employees handle the abrupt transition to remote work and to see whether, and in what ways, the involuntary nature of the current remote work situation changes how remote work is perceived. The employees' and managers' perceptions of the same situation, which we will interpret in our thesis, can be different and

that will show on a subjective approach and thereby interpretivism is most suitable approach for our thesis.

Ontology is about the view/nature of the reality and can be divided into two different views. The first one is objectivism (also called positivism) and the second one is constructionism (also called interpretivism) Objectivism refers to reality being independent from external actors. In other words, the reality is something that external actors cannot affect by their actions and perceptions (Bryman, 2018, p. 57). Constructionism refers to a viewpoint where one believes that reality is constructed based on the perceptions and actions of external actors. Constructionists believe that social phenomena are not only built up due to social interactions, but that they are in a constantly changing process due to external actors, their perceptions, and their actions (Bryman, 2018, p. 58). Considering the purpose of our study, we find constructionism as the most suitable because the organizations we study are getting affected of external actors and circumstances that reconstructs the way of working and acting during a time of crisis.

3.5 Ethical Aspect

When it comes to ethics there are many different aspects that we as researchers take in consideration. According to Bell and Bryman (2006), there are an increasing pressure on all kind of researchers to make sure that the participants in the interview, observations etc are anonymous in the paper, so that any negative effects can be reduced. We will interview different companies, and in order to keep the anonymity, we will not write the name of the company or person in the company that we have interviewed. Instead we will refer to managers as M1, M2, etc., and employees as E1, E2, etc. Confidentiality is another aspect that goes hand in hand with anonymity and they can sometimes be perceived to overlap each other. The important difference between this two concepts are that confidentiality is about protecting the information you get from the organization/person that are willing to participate in the interview, from other parties while anonymity is about protecting the identity of the participant (Bell and Bryman, 2006). Anonymity is a mandatory phenomenon in order to reach confidentiality, because the thesis is going to be published and in order to make sure that no information about the companies we will interview are protected, we will keep the companies anonymous.

In the article Bell and Bryman (2006) list eleven categories within ethics that they identified in their study. Below follows a short definition of the different aspects that we will adhere to in our study.

1. *Harm to participants*: the probability to somehow cause harm during some part in the research process and the need to make sure that no one that is involved in the research gets physical or psychological hurt.
2. *Dignity*: the insistence/claim to respect the dignity of all the involved people such as research participants, researchers etc. It is also about avoiding discomfort or anxiety for all the involved people.
3. *Informed consent*: the need to make sure that the participants who consent are fully informed about the research. We ensure this by being transparent in the information given to the interview subjects and asking for clear consent before starting the interview.

4. *"Privacy*: the need to protect privacy of research subjects or avoid invasions of privacy" (Bell and Bryman, 2006). In order to ensure privacy, our subjects have been anonymised.
5. *"Confidentiality*: the requirement to ensure confidentiality of research data whether relating to individuals, groups or organizations" (Bell and Bryman, 2006). We clearly stated that any confidential information could be omitted from the interviews and the records. None of our subjects requested this.
6. *Anonymity*: as mentioned above, it is one of the important ethical issues and are about to protect the anonymity of individuals or organizations. We ensure this in the same way as privacy.
7. *Deception*: the likelihood that someone will be deceived in some part of the research process, either through lies or behaviour that is misleading and not in line with the reality.
8. *Affiliation*: the need to explain eventual professional or personal connections that may have influenced the research in any way, including conflicts of interest and sponsorship. Affiliation also include information about where funding for the research has come from, if there is any. We have not received any funding or have any affiliation with our interview subjects.
9. *Honesty and transparency*: the need to be open and honest in the communication to everyone who is involved in the research somehow, it also includes trust. Our recordings and transcriptions are readily available in order to ensure transparency.
10. *Reciprocity*: is about making a benefit for the participants in the research, the authors and the those who will read it. The benefit of potentially learning from our research and the promise that the work will be made available to those who want it was given to the interview participants.
11. *Misrepresentation*: can occur if the research findings are reported in a misleading, misunderstanding, or misrepresenting way, so it is about not spreading false information.

3.6 Literature Search

The literature used in this thesis is based in the fields of management with some important concept regarding the COVID-19 crisis and the measures taken to slow the spread. In order to establish a solid foundation for our research it is important to consider what has been researched previously (Bell et al., 2019, p. 91). This also done to ensure that our research does not repeat previous research. There are two main ways of conducting a literature search, systematic or narrative. A systematic approach means that the researchers decide on a research question and search for literature is conducted based on that question. On the other hand, a narrative approach takes a wide look at the literature within a certain topic and crafts a research question based on existing literature (Bell et al., 2019, pp. 93-97). We chose a systematic approach, first recognizing the problem of transitioning to remote work, creating a research question, and finding relevant literature based on that.

When searching for literature, we focused on peer-reviewed studies as much as possible, mainly using google scholar and the Umeå University library (both online and in person). Although we found a decent number of peer-reviewed articles on the topic of remote work, some of the articles we used are working papers (Choudhury et al., 2019). However, the source is reputable, the authors are well known in their fields, and the study is credible. We judged

that the information in the article was too valuable to our study to omit while awaiting peer-review. Additionally, we used a number of secondary sources to extend our sample size and to be able to conduct a deeper analysis and draw more credible conclusions. These secondary sources were found through searching google, using the key word: "remote work" and filtering for articles written after February 2020. This narrowed our search down to articles that looked into remote work due to the COVID-19 crisis.

3.7 Limitations

Time is the main limitation that we have in the process of writing this thesis. With lack of time comes other limitations, such as the geographic limitation. Our interviews in this thesis focus on remote workers and managers in Sweden, not because it is something that is exclusive to Sweden or because we do not find it interesting to interview employees and managers in other countries but because we do not have the time to make interviews in other countries. Another limitation that we have is the inherent limitation of the research question. Due to the topical nature of our research, we have been limited to previous studies on remote work, which may not be directly applicable to the situation we are studying.

Having access to different databases is seen as an availability such as the database of Umeå University and also the different thesis on Diva-portal. But it is important to remember all the databases we do not have access to, and they can be a limitation. Also, some theses are not available with full text which can be seen as a limitation, we do not have the time to contact all the authors and ask about the full text.

As the crisis is ongoing some of our information is expected to be outdated by the time of submission but this should have no effect on the overall results and conclusions of our study.

With the choice of studying companies and industry experts comes a natural risk for biased information along with vested interests to, for example, sell products. We are limited by the information that they choose to post online, and the validity of statements are questionable without scientific proof, leading to many anecdotal statements from these sources. However, we believe that in comparing and collating the information gathered from these sources we will be able to garner insights that will be valuable when combined with the scientific studies and our own interviews. We hope to, in addition to our own research, discover unexplored subjects by our comparison between the industry experts and the previous research. This may lead to new fields of research in the future.

4. Results

In this section of the thesis our result, based on our interviews is presented. The interviews were done with both managers and employees in order to get a perspective from both sides. To make it logical and clear this section will be presented in two different parts. First part is the result from based on the manager's answers and the second part is based on the answers we received from employees.

Our results are based on interviews from managers and employees. Due to confidentiality issues with some of our subjects we decided that they will all remain anonymous in this thesis. However, we can disclose the industry and role of the interviewees, they are managers from banks, insurance companies, staffing agencies. The workers that we interviewed are administrators, customer service representatives, and a programmer.

Code	Interviewee type	Industry	Role
E1	Employee	Consultancy	Programmer
E2	Employee	Banking	Customer service rep.
E3	Employee	University	Faculty coordinator
E4	Employee	Banking	Customer service rep.
M1	Manager	Banking	Head of collections
M2	Manager	Banking and insurance company	Head of business service
M3	Manager	Staffing agency	Office manager

Table 4, Interviewee categorization.

4.1 Managerial perspective

When speaking to managers, our goal was to study how their employees are handling the transition to remote work and what they are doing to ease the transition. We wanted to gain insights into the main concerns that arose from our research. These were: productivity, socialization, communication, mental and physical health, separating work from leisure, the opportunities and challenges of remote work, and future prospects.

4.1.1 Background

M1 is the head of collections at a bank and manages a team of 12 people. Two or three of his employees are present at the office daily, with the rest working remotely. He has some experience managing remotely but only for telecommuters (working remotely a few days a week), never a more or less fully remote workforce. Through his union membership he has received some guidance on the subject of remote work, and he has previously attended a few courses on managing remote work. However, he claims to not have done any extensive research on the subject prior to the crisis.

The bank where he works is a subsidiary of a French bank and got directives to shift to remote work earlier than most Swedish companies, first by splitting the workforce into two groups where one group would work remotely and one would be working in the office and these groups were not to intermingle. However, after a mere three days the directives changed to a more or less fully remote workforce with only the most essential employees remaining at the office to handle physical documents etc. The decision to transition to remote work was communicated at an information meeting, where the focus was on ensuring that the employees understood that the transition was for their own safety and the safety of society as a whole. According to M1 there was little to no resistance to the transition and any worries were more centred around the technical and logistical aspects of remote work.

M2 is the head of business service at a banking and insurance company. There are 200 employees in his organization, and he is responsible for 20 of those employees. Currently, due to the crisis, approximately 60% of them are working remotely, in other words M2 is leading 12 employees remotely. M2 has never been leading remotely before, it is due to the crisis that parts of the business have had to be restructured. When asking M2 what kind of resources he used in order to equip himself for the remote work he answered:

"I have asked the questions that I needed to ask a subordinate who is the IT manager to ensure that we have the technical resources available. Otherwise it has been trial and error."

The decision to work remotely was taken by the management group, because according to M2 this is not the kind of decision that the employees can be involved in. M2 continues with telling us that they are communicating with the union representatives so that the employees can receive all the information they need and also be able to provide feedback, but the decision itself was taken by the management group and communicated to the employees. The decision was well received, with understanding that the change was necessary due to the prevailing circumstances.

M3 is office manager for a staffing agency. She has a team that consists of eight employees and every one of them is working remotely due to the COVID-19 crisis. M3 has led remotely before but not in the same extent as now, at that point she was leading one employee remotely

in order to make the employees life puzzle go together. When preparing for this kind of remote leadership, due to the crisis M3 utilized the internal resources in form of information from different parts in the organization and also earlier experiences of leading remotely. The decision of working 50/50 (which means that half of the employees can be in the office at the same time) or a maximum of four employees, came from the management. M3´s team consist of eight employees, so a rule of 50/50 means in this case a maximum of 4 employees. The decision was later communicated to the employees at a meeting and they totally accepted it.

4.1.2 Productivity

M1 was expecting some technical difficulties which would impede the work of his employees; however, it appears that his employees have so far exceeded his expectations and productivity has remained more or less unchanged or slightly improved. He pointed to one of the positive effects of remote work being the ability to truly focus on the work, saying:

"The positive effects has, I guess, been that when you are working from home you can really focus on the work, as long as you don't have kids or anything else at home that disturbs you. Many have said 'God I get so much done'. Because there kind of aren't any questions, there is more time for deepwork that way."

According to M2, the time that has passed since the crisis begun is not long enough to say something about the productivity for sure because no qualitative controls have been done yet. What M2 can say for sure is that the results for the employees are beyond expectations. There is no major loss in productivity and the customers of the organization are still getting service as usual. The expectations in M2:s company was to make the job work from home so they ensured the technical support for both hardware and software, because it is the main resources that should work so that the employees can work from home. M2 continues by telling us that they have been prepared to meet the demand of other supports as well, such as questions and support about the working environment. Because of the unusual situation there are discussions between the nearest manager and employees, and there is an IT function that is included as a support function if the employees need help with different things such as skype. M2 continues:

"we are responsive, we listen to what the trade unions have to say. What the work environment representative says. This is an ongoing discussion, as it is a strange situation we are in"

Comparing to the help that the employees needed in the office and now when they are working at home, there is not a big difference. The "problems" that the employees need help with are often IT related, otherwise the employees are very independent and know their task and what they should do. This is something that M2's team has in common with M3's team, the main thing that they need help with is also IT-related.

M3 cannot tell that the results have changed remarkably, the employees are continuing to work as well as they did in the office. The expectation from the beginning was to make it work from home and that expectation has been met. M3 says that the performance is tied to the individual, for some people it is easier to work remotely while it is more difficult for some. In general, she is satisfied with the work that the employees are doing from home. In order to make sure that the employees have the right resources to work effectively from home M3 states:

"I have ordered several screens that people can take home, to create an 'office' at home instead of sitting on the sofa with a laptop. Then they have the internal systems that we have given extended permission to access more things than just the e-mail"

4.1.3 Communication

M1 says that the main difficulties with communication when leading a remote workforce is the lack of body language. When asked about the biggest difference between virtual and in person meetings he said:

"It is that you can't pick up the subtle signals regarding body language, sometimes you can tell if someone isn't keeping up at a meeting, you can see it in their facial expression or body language, you can't catch that in the same way remotely."

M1 also says that virtual meetings tend to have people talking over each other since it can be difficult to know when someone will start talking or when they are done. At the same time they are restricted, by bandwidth, to using only voice calls and very sparsely using video calls.

With regards to the subject of inclusion and employees feeling seen and heard, M1 said that it is very important to him, especially now that they are working remotely.

"I usually start every meeting with a check-in so that everyone actually gets to say something during the meeting. Otherwise it can be that some talk a lot and others not at all, and that's harder to pick up on remotely. So that's why I have a check-in where everyone gets a chance to say what's on their mind or if there is something special that they want to convey, something fun, something that has gone less well. It's really so that everyone gets a chance to speak during the meeting, so you start with that, so that no one is forgotten, and I think that's important."

For M2, the communication channel during meetings is the most obvious change to meetings and communication between employees and leaders. Physical meetings have now been replaced by skype and phone meetings. M2 is positive to the change and states that the digital meetings are much shorter than the physical meetings, he finds the skype and phone meetings even more effective with less talk about other issues than the main theme that the meeting is about. When it comes to feedback the leaders in the organization act differently but M2 gives as much feedback as possible, both positive and negative feedback.

M2 and M1 had a common point about remote communication because both of them talked about body language and the difficulty with interpreting expressions when having meetings remotely. M2 mentioned that when sharing some decisions, it is easy to understand what the employees actually think about it if one can see their faces and understand their reflections. But when sharing information through skype without video, it is hard to tell if they get everything, if they are unsure and seem to be worried. All kind of feelings are harder to understand when the voice is the only source of communication.

In M3's team the communication channels have also changed, going from physical morning meetings every day to skype meetings every morning. Every morning she asks how they are feeling and how the work is going. The goal with the meetings every morning is not to gain any control because M3 claims that the trust has not changed between her and the employees, she trusts that every employee knows what to do and does a good job. M3 agrees with M2, that

the "non work related" issues that people talk about during the meetings are less comparing with physical meeting.

When asked about communicating feedback M3 answered:

"In the past you could just say "congratulations to the contract, or good job" when passing by with a cup of coffee, but now you have to take the time to send a text message, or call. It is more deliberate. But negative feedback I prefer to take in the office".

4.1.4 Socialization

M1 says that the socialization between employees, although encouraged, has not been a large concern and he perceives it as working well, saying that:

"You can create group chats in Jabber, and I know that there are large amounts of ongoing conversations. The focus is on work but of course there are private questions in these chats and there are calls between different people."

However, M1 also believes that the subject is important and will ask how the socialization is working in his next team meeting.

In order to encourage socialization between the employees when people are working remotely M2 have invited to interactive "fika" together.

Socialization between employees in M3´s team occur when they sometimes need to be in the office (maximum 4 people at the same time). Then they can drink coffee and talk together. M3 does not encourage anything that has to do with meetings and socialization between the employees, because of the risks due to COVID-19. However, there does not seem to be any problem with socialization because the employees make sure to meet and socialize, for example they had planned an afterwork in the time of the interview.

4.1.5 Mental and physical health

M1 acknowledges that judging the mental and physical health of his employees is more difficult remotely, saying:

"What might be harder to notice is if someone is feeling bad or needs to talk about something, it's harder to pick up on the softer values unlike the hard results and the results that is delivered, these we can follow up as well as when we were all at the office."

Further M1 tries to keep up with his employees through weekly meetings with his team as well as one to ones. The timeframe of these one on one check-ins depends on the needs and wants of the employee.

"It's a little different, either it's every other week or it's once a month. It depends on the individual's needs"

With regards to ergonomics and workspace, M1 says that it is an issue that they have discussed internally, and he admits that some of his employees may be working in less than ideal situations. The company has provided its employees with a laptop and a headset and has also

offered that employees can stop by the office and bring things like screens, keyboards, or mice etc. home. M1 says that the focus so far has been on the technical aspects and as far as ergonomics are concerned, he said that:

"Some may live quite cramped and may not have a proper workspace, instead sitting in the sofa or maybe at the kitchen table on some bad chair. Here we have said that we do not have the possibility to do much since we believe that we will be returning to the office in mid-May, at least partially. But say it drags out, say we would work from home for half a year, then I think we would provide some form of opportunity to have a desk delivered home for example. But this is just speculations on my part, so it's not a decision. I know that we have discussed that if this becomes long-term, we might do more than we have so far."

Finally, M1 noted that sick days and absence have remained similar to what they were at the office, not counting the probable COVID-19 cases among his employees which inflated the numbers slightly.

M2 finds physical and mental health important and in order to make sure that the employees feel well he to remind them to go out for walks and take pauses in their work. When it comes to ergonomics, M2 does not control it in any way and states that it is about trusting every employee and believe that they will take the necessary steps that are suitable when it comes to ergonomics. When asking about different control measures in connection with remote work M2 said:

"We trust our employees; we trust that they want and actually do a good job. No further control action has been taken."

Further according to M2 the number of reported sickness are has not increased, rather the numbers has decreased a bit now when the employees are working from home. M3 also agrees that the reported sickness has not changed because of the change in working environment from office to home.

Something that M3 does at every morning meeting is to begin with asking the employees, individually, how they are feeling. Because according to M3 it is very important to her that the employees feel that they are heard and seen by their manager. Another thing that she does to encourage the physical and mental health is to remind the employees to use their "friskvårdstimme" (wellness hour) and she continues by telling us that everyone in her team is interested in sports so they are good at using their "friskvårdstimme" without a need of getting reminded. For those who need more support in mental health there are internal resources to utilize. Ergonomics are hard to control when people are working remotely. M3 says:

" I do what I can from my side, by ordering office materials that people can take home and create "an office at home", but if people do that and how and where they work in their homes is something that I cannot control"

4.1.6 Separating work from leisure

When asked whether he believes that his employees are struggling with the separation of work-life and leisure time, M1 responded that:

"Not really, however, I have experienced that with working from home it happens that people don't take proper lunches and such, so that is something that I have encouraged. Take a coffee break, take a proper lunch, go outside, and move. If only to get the natural break during the day. But I haven't perceived that they have been working strange hours or that it would have escalated in that way, we have still left for the weekend when we should and we'll see each other on Monday and when the clock strikes 17 we quit for the day, so I think it's been working well."

Overtime was something that M1 considered a necessity when there is a lot of work to be done. However, he states that there cannot be too much overtime every day since that would indicate a larger issue with the work situation.

"I think that overtime should occur under special circumstances and it is not something that I expect my employees to work on an ongoing basis."

When it comes to working overtime M2 has not placed order to work overtime or not, it is up to the immediate supervisor to make the decision with the employee if it is needed. But as it seems now the normal working hours are enough for the employees to fulfil their tasks. The employees in M2's company do not seem to have difficulties with separating between work and leisure, but M2 still reminds them of taking pauses and go for walks in order to help them separate between work and leisure.

With regards to working overtime M3 told us that she knows, based on her own experiences, that it is easier to work more when you are working from home than if you go to the office. However, she does not feel that there is any general problem among the employees, they have a shared schedule and M3 would see if anyone worked overtime. There is only one employee that has contacted M3 because of working too much, the solution that M3 came up with was going through the schedule for that individual employee in order to find a good way of working so that the overtimes could be minimized. When it comes to helping the employees to separate the work from leisure M3 said:

"I do nothing special to help employees distinguish between work and leisure if I do not get the request from them"

4.2.7 Opportunities and Challenges

M1 considers the one on one meetings to be the biggest challenge when leading remotely, he also perceives that as time passes the personal connections become more and more difficult to maintain. Additionally, M1 has found it difficult to maintain the sense of community within the team, saying:

"To me it's very important with an involved and personal leadership and I think that that can be difficult when we're sitting spread out in different apartments in and around Stockholm. So it's hard to gather the group to something common, it's not quite the same over the phone as it is in reality."

When asked about the opportunities of remote work M1 again states the focus that you can achieve when working from home.

M2 thinks that this crisis has come with both obstacles and opportunities. The difficult part of being a leader remotely is that you need to give the same instructions and talk about same things at different times to make sure that the information has reached all the employees that it should reach. He also finds it difficult to interpret reactions when you do not see the faces of the people you are talking with, so you have to start think in a different way. M2 says that it leads to the point that the leader should be very aware of the details in order to not miss something important that an employee says or does during a remote meeting.

Communication seems to be an issue according to M3 as well. When having the meetings through skype and phone the communications gets straighter. She says:

"You are stricter. For example, at meetings it becomes that "now I talk"."

M3 continues by telling us that the biggest challenge of leading remotely is to keep the "team feeling" within the group.

When talking about opportunities that the coronas crisis has brought, she says:

"More effective meetings. And those who were not willing of working remotely and get digitized, must do it now. so that's good"

4.1.8 Future

M1 believes that when the crisis passes, they will allow more remote work, where they have previously thought it impossible to do certain parts of the job remotely, they have now found that it is working remarkably well. Telecommuting seems to be the way to work going forward:

"Previously we have said that unless you have special reasons to stay at home, you would work in the office. But here we have seen that it would actually be okay to work one or two days from home, if you are comfortable with that and the work gets done in a good way. I believe that we will be more open to allowing working from home."

M2 had a positive view of the changes that this crisis will bring in the future. When asking him about the future and what he thinks that the crisis will change M2 answers:

"I think we will be more effective in meetings and question the old structure. We will question travellers more. That one hour meeting you travel to Stockholm for maybe you can take from distance"

When asking M3 the same question about future she gave a short and clear answer:

"We will work more remotely, because we see that it works"

4.2 Employee perspective

When interviewing employees, we intended to study how they are handling the transition to remote work and whether/how their managers are easing the transition. Again, we found certain similarities to previous research such as, productivity increasing, socialization decreasing, communications being difficult, and mental and physical health suffering slightly from working remotely. However, our interviewees, again, responded with some variation in their perception of the change to remote work. Next, we will categorize the responses from our employee interviews.

4.2.1 Background

E1 is a consultant programmer and works as a software developer/software architect. He has no experience working remotely in this sense, however, since he works as a consultant, he normally works remotely at the client's office. E1 believes that his manager has no experience with this kind of remote leadership. In preparation for working remotely the company has sent him some guidelines for how to achieve a proper workspace at home but he has not studied any other tips for remote work. He lives and works in his small one-bedroom apartment but has a dedicated workspace at his desk. The desk has a pull-out shelf for keyboards and E1 uses this for his laptop when he is working. When asked about whether his manager has provided any help or resources to create an optimal workspace, E1 says:

"Since we are consultants, we are slaves to the client's rules. In general, in the company, my manager hasn't come out with "do this", it's more about what the client thinks. So, nothing specific from my manager, but the client that I work for have given us guidelines"

When asked about his daily routines and how they differ from his routines when he worked in an office, E1 says:

"Well, I wake up and brew a pot of coffee and start working instead of commuting 40 minutes, and then instead of commuting 40 minutes home, I just close the laptop."

E2 is a customer service representative at a bank. Her role is to take calls from customers, handle loan payments, and help the collections department if they are understaffed or overwhelmed. She has not worked remotely previously, outside of a two-day company trip to Berlin where they would work during the day. To her knowledge E2's manager does not have experience leading remotely, at least not in a situation like the one that they are currently facing. She has been given tips for remote work but has not read them as of the time of interviewing.

E2 works out of a quiet room in a house, where she is separated from the other residents. She says that she has not adapted her workspace with ergonomics in mind, even though her manager has offered that their employees can bring screens, mouse, keyboards, chair, etc. from the office. E2's routines, according to her, have not changed much from her time at the office. Except for the handling of physical documents and not having to commute, her routines are quite similar.

E3 works as a faculty coordinator and has never worked remotely to this extent. She does not know if her manager has any experience of leading from distance. When it comes to her own experience, she told us that, she has been working from home but not in the same way as now,

she has worked from home single days when needed. E3 has a permanent place at her home where she works, when we asked her to describe in more details she said:

"...It is in a corner of the bedroom, where I have a desk, a chair and the computer."

When it comes to the ergonomics, she has no ability to stand up and work, so she is mostly sitting down during working hours. Her manager has told the employees that if they want they can bring home the desk and a chair. But E3 has neither taken the chair nor the desk.

"...I think it is the chair that many people have taken home for it is easier, but the desks that are you can raise and lower seem basically impossible to dismantle and bring home. Anyone who has brought anything home has brought the chair, except the computer."

The routines are the same as when working from the office because her husband is also working for the same employer and they try to keep the same "fika-hours" and lunch hours.

"We try to keep the same routines as at work to the extent possible. What happens at times is that I now turn on the computer and turn off the computer about when I would go to work and when I would come home from work. The day is extended that way. The time previously commuted to and from work is now spent as working hours."

E4 is also a customer service representative at a bank. She is a team specialist, a sort of team leader, at their operations department and handles loan application and savings accounts. She works remotely two to five days a week and at the office one to three. She and her colleagues are split into two teams with slightly different work hours, where she takes on a leader role in one of these teams. E4 has no experience working remotely except for the odd day or two previously, additionally she also believes that her manager has no experience leading remotely other than the occasional day or so. In her company they have had meetings in preparation for remote work, discussing things like, how to maintain focus, the importance of breaks and proper lunches, and how to stay productive but also find the time for walks and such. However no official guidelines or tips have been sent out.

E4 works out of her kitchen/living room in an apartment in Stockholm. Initially she simply had her laptop, mouse, and headset and sat at the kitchen table. However, recently she has been using a second screen and a proper keyboard. These were provided by her boyfriend who is also working remotely. The company has offered that she can go to the office and take anything she needs from her workspace there, but according to E4 it is too much of a hassle to transport it to her apartment.

E4's routines for the day are similar to those she had at the office, the main difference being that she sleeps longer in the morning and goes to bed later in the evening. She also says that she feels like she is less in "jobmode" when working remotely since she does not meet her colleagues or dress up in the same way.

4.2.2 Productivity

E1 judges his productivity as much higher than at the office saying that since there are fewer interruptions, he can work with a completely different focus when working remotely. When asked what he misses most from working at the office he said:

"Whiteboards is pretty much the only thing. I am actually very content working from home. I get a completely different focus when I work, because no one ever comes and taps on your shoulder and interrupts you with daily tasks. When you're programming and you're really into a problem, it's very disruptive if someone comes and "hey, can you look at this?", you lose focus and, I think there's statistics about this where it takes like 15 minutes or half an hour to get back to where you were before you got interrupted."

E1 also attributes some of his increased focus to the fact that he can listen to his own music on speakers instead of headphones when he is working remotely, giving him the choice to listen to calmer music when he needs it and "metal" when he needs it.

E2 believes that her productivity has increased while working from home. She feels more productive and efficient. When asked to compare working remotely to working at the office she said that:

"Since I don't go to a coffee machine and talk to someone for 10 minutes, you kind of just keep working, you have nothing else to do."

Prior to the transition to remote work E2 was concerned that it would not work due to the technical aspects, however, she has not experienced any difficulties making it work.

E2 has found that she relies less on feedback when working from home and that her managers trusts her and that she can get the job done, saying that:

"Now you trust yourself more and you have better self-esteem. You are forced to be more confident that what you do is correct since you can't go and double check with someone that it is correct, you just do it."

Although E2 has had some problems focusing while working remotely, she still believes that her focus is increased compared to when she was working at the office. E2 attributes this to the fact that she cannot really do anything but work.

E3 thinks that it is a bit tricky to change from office to home, because you have a kind of routine and way of working at the office, but when it comes to productivity she thinks that she gets even more efficient in certain ways, when working from home. Some things are very slow to do remotely because you have a kind of routine for that in the office but not the home such as:

"...asking to come into the office to handle the internal mail, but I think you will be more effective in much else".

To handle the internal mail is one of the tasks that goes slower while working from home, but it is also something that is impossible to do from home. Another task that is impossible to fulfil at home is to handle the original documents that have been signed with a decision. So far that works because they are allowed to be at the office, one or a few people at a time.

In order to stay focused and productive while working remotely, E4 writes to-do lists and since her role of team specialist means that she has to make sure that everyone is doing their jobs, she also feels that with that responsibility comes a pressure to perform at her best. E4 thinks that her productivity has been very good considering the circumstances. Initially, not having

two screens was a hindrance to her but she has since received an additional screen. Aside from that E4 said that:

"...I don't feel like I'm sitting at home rolling my thumbs, instead I feel more stressed if I do go to the bathroom or something because no one sees what I'm doing, and since I should always be available, or I feel like I should at least, I easily feel like if I don't answer a chat message but was in the bathroom, I wasn't available and no one knows where I am. While if you are at the office everyone knows that you are there and if you're not at your desk, they might see you helping someone else. So, I feel almost more productive in a sense because I feel like I'm constantly working."

With regards to overtime E4 says that she is doing more or less as much overtime as she did previously. When asked if she had discussed overtime with her manager or internally at the company, E4 said that she and her manager talked about it and made certain adjustments and now it is working better than it did when they first started. However, E4 also said that she thinks that she works more, or more intensely now than she did before the crisis.

"... There's a higher pressure now, kind of like, 'now I'll do this', 'now I'll do this', 'now I'll do this', while at the office it was more like 'now I've done this, what should I do now?'. A different pace, partly because of the difficult situation that we are in and the demands we have, or rather budgets to reach... Since we can't work like we used to we have to work harder in different ways..."

4.2.3 Communication

E1 communicates through Skype for business, email, Outlook, but also over the phone should they need to contact each other outside of working hours or "online hours". The biggest differences between online communication and in-person communication according to E1, is the lack of body language.

"You completely lose the physical parts of the communications. That means that you can't really 'wink, wink', you don't notice that, you can't wink digitally unless you send a smiley. So that part is lost completely, body language or whatever you call it. But you can communicate, for sure."

E1 says that they have scaled back on meetings in general now that they are working remotely and in his opinion that is an almost exclusively good thing. Additionally, E1 perceives no changes in the way feedback is provided or needed. Due to the nature of the consultancy work he is used to requesting and receiving feedback remotely from co-workers and managers. Although, E1 enjoys the increased focus that he gets when working remotely he also says that:

"... The downside is that if someone needs help, they won't get the help they would get from tapping me on the shoulder directly, instead they have to email or call someone... It's a downside for the others that might need help with things, but in terms of productivity it's better for me to sit at home."

E2 has also found that they have reduced the amount of communication compared to when they were at the office. The main mode of communication is a chat using Cisco Jabber, with weekly meetings or "fika" meetings less frequently, once, or twice a week. When asked what the biggest difference in communications between now and at the office E2 said:

"You don't communicate as often, now it's only when we really don't know something that we communicate. While at the office you might ask something mostly because you want to talk to the person about something else so to say."

E3 communicates with her leader and colleagues through Microsoft Teams. There are weekly meetings with the whole office and then there are also function meetings that she thinks works well. When asking about the biggest difference between physical meetings and meetings through Teams E3 answered:

"... it feels like it gets more concentrated and becomes less nonsense maybe also the dialogue gets a little worse, someone talks and everyone else sits and listens, then it's good. It is both good and bad, but maybe even better than I thought it would be".

E4 mainly uses chats for day to day communication. They have separate chats for each team and a larger chat for the entire department. Additionally, E4's department also has weekly meetings and monthly meetings over the phone. While the majority of these meetings are voice only, they have had one corporate wide monthly meeting where everyone had the option to use video as well. When asked E4 further said that:

"... You could choose to be in the meeting with video or not, you can turn of your camera, but you could see most of the people and that was more fun."

When asked about the biggest differences between communicating digitally versus in person E4 explained that conveying emotion properly has been difficult.

"I think it's very hard to communicate an emotion and some might misinterpret you to sound harsher or something. I haven't gotten that feedback, but I sometimes feel like I sound harsh, but I don't mean to, and I have misinterpreted people and gotten messages that sound a certain way..."

Another issue that E4 has had, is that her colleagues do not always respond to messages or confirm that they have read them, especially in the larger chats. E4 says that:

"... When you send out a general message you want people to acknowledge the message and at least have some reaction to it, so you know that it's been received. But it's been a little hard to make that happen. People read it and think 'now I've seen it' and you can't know if everyone has read it and understood it."

Regardless of the lack of confirmation from her colleagues, E4 feels that she is heard and seen by her peers and her manager. She says that she knows that if a message goes unacknowledged, it is not on purpose or because of a lack of respect. Additionally, she feels that she has a close connection to her manager and speaks to her daily.

4.2.4 Socialization

E1's company has started hosting virtual "fika" at 9 in the morning where they have banned work conversations, instead they drink coffee together and talk like they would in an office break room. This is done with voice only. As for general socialization E1 quickly mentions that:

"Some social aspects might suffer and that's sad but from a work perspective I think it [remote work] is better."

Further E1 says that he has not made any real attempts to regain the socialization, but rather talks to people after work on for example, TeamSpeak, a voice chat software.

E2's company have had the discussions around socialization and encouraged them to call co-workers with video and have lunch together for example. However, they have not had any more in-depth conversations about it. Additionally, during their "fika" meetings they discuss what has not been working or just talk more casually. When asked what she misses most from working at the office, E2 said:

"I mean, it's the people, it's the social part that I miss the most."

Further, E2 says that she has made conscious efforts to regain the lost socialization and to recreate it digitally, saying that:

"... You call co-workers occasionally to hear how they are doing or write in the chat just to check-in, the things you would normally walk over to their office and ask, how's your family and kids, and how are things in general. Instead you write to check-in."

When asked about what E4 misses most about working at the office she said that the energy, sense of community, and the relationships are the things that she perceives as having been negatively affected by remote work.

"Still, it feels like it [remote work] has worked above expectations, but it's just not the same thing in a chat as in the breakroom when you're talking. Just being able to say something while getting coffee. So, it's sad, but I just miss hanging out and seeing each other there."

4.2.5 Mental and Physical Health

E1 is still in the starting blocks when it comes to physical health and when asked about how he is handling the mental and physical health aspects he responded:

"I have been thinking about getting an exercise bike, and that's how far I've gotten with that… I haven't taken any special actions around it, but it feels like exercise is a good thing in general"

While the social aspects have suffered for E1 during the period of isolation so far, E1 is not overly concerned with his mental health. His manager does not really check-in on him, rather they have an agreement that is individually customized to fit the specific person. E1 says that:

"I think it's perfectly fine that if something is wrong, I will say something, if not I'm quite and everything is good."

When asked how she manages her physical and mental health E2 said:

"I don't, I try to move more, since I know that's something that there is less of when you work from home. I think the physical goes hand in hand with the mental, if you exercise you feel better."

E2's manager has check-ins during the weekly meetings, where her manager makes sure that they are all doing well. There is also an email sent out where they can confirm that they are doing well. According to E2 the check-ins concern both the physical and the mental.

"... They want status on how everyone is doing mentally in case someone is feeling bad or worse because they miss the social. Also, if you are sick, they want to know, so that you aren't working. Because it's easier to work from home if you are sick, even though you shouldn't, since you are already at home and you don't have to go to work"

When asking E3 about the way she is handling her mental and physical health she laughs and answers:

"We will see when this is over, I think. What I find difficult is that you feel that you have to sit at the computer all the time, in a way that you do not know when you are at work, because then you go to the printer, you go to a workmate and ask a question, you move like in a more natural way, nothing you have a bad conscience for but now it feels like you just have to sit at the computer."

E3 tries to go out for a walk every day to ensure the physical and mental health because she finds it a very important issue. Her manager also seems to consider it an important issue, because at every functional meeting that they have, her manager asks everyone how the work is going and how they are feeling. But according to E3 some things are harder to tell through a video-meeting with 6-7 participants than others, She thinks it will be a bit hard to go back to the regular way of working after the long period of remote work. In her own words she says:

"I'm pretty bad with people as a person and I think this will affect me, I need the social training that you get each in a workplace. Now I sit here at home with my immediate family and it will be a long time so I think it will affect me, that it will be difficult to go back".

E4 used to go to the gym until they closed down due to COVID-19. Since then she also fell ill, however, since the gyms have opened up again, she goes there to exercise during evenings when there are less people. E4 said that simply going outside and getting fresh air gives her energy and she tends to spend a lot of time outside. When asked whether her manager checks-in with her and keeps track of her wellbeing, E4 answered:

"Not on a daily basis. We recently had individual meetings where she checked how we are and how we are coping with the situation and stuff. But if I had been feeling bad, she would of course have been there, and I know that I could have written to her or called her and said that this feels bad or something. I know that she is there for me and is a great support and such, but she doesn't check-in all the time for no reason."

4.2.6 Separating Work from Leisure

The separation of work from leisure is important to E1 and he has been actively trying to step away from work when he quits, only being reachable in emergencies. He works flexible hours,

with a set number of hours to work in a week and mandatory availability from 9 to 15. E1 strives to work 8 hours a day and says:

"...It's important with routines so I do practically the same hours as I did when I wasn't working remotely, so I start around 7 or 8 and then quit 15 or 16. I try to maintain the routines so there are no late nights."

Further, at his company they have not had any overtime since they started working remotely. E1 believes that he works more when working remotely but is not sure. When asked about over time he responded that:

"I used to be very stressed earlier when we have had a lot of overtime. I think it's important to limit yourself regarding work hours. Of course I work 40 hours per week but I try to fit in one or two extra hours during the week so I can go home early on Friday, or go home in the sense that I close the laptop."

E2 struggles to separate work from leisure and often ends up working overtime. E2 has fixed hours that she works every day, and says that it is much easier to work overtime when working from home, she says that:

"...because I like to finish things and I don't mind staying after I've quit for the day in order to finish it."

"... It's easier to work overtime when you are home, because you can work while you cook or while you wait for laundry to finish, or anything like that. So, it's easier to work overtime from home."

Because E3 has almost the same routines as when working from office, and she also tries to keep the same hours (because they have to be available during the same office hours as at the office) she does not feel any bigger problem with separating work from leisure. When asking about overtime she said:

"I turn on the computer like when I left home and turn off when I got home. I have an extra hour each day if I say it takes half an hour to get there and half an hour to get home, and in that way the working day gets almost one hour longer"

E3 continues to tell us that it was a bit harder in the beginning to find the balance between the work and leisure, but it got easier. She thinks that it would be harder if she felt that she has a lot of things to do that she does not have time for, while the computer lies in the bedroom, right now she thinks that it works well.

E4 feels that it's more difficult to separate work from leisure and says that she cannot leave work at work like she could at the office, saying that:

"It's nice when you've been at the office and you come home because it's really like 'oh how nice to be home' while if you're working from home the computer might stay on the table, so it is a little harder I think. But what I do is I shut down the computer and try to do something else, like watch tv, or go for a walk..."

4.2.7 Opportunities and Challenges

The most positive part of remote work for E1 has been the fact that he does not have to commute to work, as well as the increased focus and uninterrupted work.

The biggest challenge has been the lack of physical communication and even though E1 works as a programmer and says that it is not as big of a problem for him as it might be for others, E1 still said that:

"Sometimes you need to sit as a group and talk about things. It's a lot easier if you can see each other, so I think that part is toughest"

When asked about the biggest challenge E2 touched upon an issue that E1 also raised, that help, or assistance is slower when working remotely. E2 says that:

"Well, I believe that the biggest challenge has been, for example, if you end up in a situation where you don't know what to do, it takes a long time before you get a response in the chat to get help. Instead of being able to go directly to someone at the office to get help because you know that person can solve it, I think it just takes time to get help."

Additionally, E2 also says that the most difficult thing about working remotely has been that she misses the sense community and her co-workers.

When asked about the opportunities that she sees with regards to working remotely E2 simply said that the positive part of remote work so far has been that it actually works, and they could keep working normally.

E3 thinks that the challenges with working from home is that one has to think about all the tasks that were done on "auto-pilot" before. E3 has a lot of papers to handle in her daily work and she says:

"It feels like I will have hundred thousand documents that are in the wrong place, they have not come to the right people that need to sign them because we cooperate with someone who also works at home who is sitting somewhere else, you do not meet physically to hand over actual original documents."

She gets affected by the fact that everyone else is also working from home. E3 means that it would be a different thing if only she was working from home and the other colleagues were still working from the office. E3 also mentioned positive things with working from home, such as the fact that it is more quiet when working from home than in the office, which leads to less disturbance and more focus on the work that she is actually doing. On the other hand, she mentioned that is it maybe the silence that also makes it boring.

When we asked E3 if she had difficulties to keep the focus and what she does to be focused she answered:

"...sometimes, some days have been that way, but I don't think that I experience any major difference, you have better and worse days in the office too. I don't think it's been more difficult at home."

On my final question about what she finds the most difficult part with working remotely E3 answered:

"Well, maybe it's the thing about thinking in new ways, because you have so many tasks that you do without thinking at all, now you have to think about it, so it takes time".

E3 continues to tell us that it is often not the hardest and most difficult tasks that takes more time because they take time otherwise also. The tasks that takes time to think about are those who were done in an automatic way before. E3 said:

"*Those task that you think of in the ordinary case, you have to keep thinking a lot about, but it is the ones you have not thought of that you have to think about".*

E4 found it challenging to maintain her normal level of ambition and motivation. She said that they have been very busy and that it has been tough to power through periods of intense work when she is sitting on her own.

"It's easier when you're in a team and you can feel that everyone is in it together. Instead of knowing that everyone is in it together but not hearing the sounds of everyone working and struggling together. So sometimes I've been closer to being tired than before."

Additionally, E4 found it difficult to focus on the goals, budgets, and standards that they have due to everything going on at the moment.

4.2.8 Future

E1 hopes that in the future they will be allowed to work from home more. He believes that companies have been reluctant to allowing people to work from home but hopes that now that they have seen that it works well, they will be allowed to work remotely or telecommute.

E2 believes that when they return to the office her way of working will return to what it was before the crisis.

When asking E3 how this crisis will change her way of working in the future when the corona crisis is over, she answered:

"...I don't really know. The only thing I know now is that it will be difficult to go back and have a lot of people around... I do not know it is difficult to say if it is just the first week when you are back or if it will be so for a year to come, I do not know".

Another thing that she thinks will change is the way of working. She describes that when working from home she has to think in a different way, therefore "new" ways of working will maybe occur later when everyone is back at the office.

"...you do as you always have done, now when you have to think and do in different ways you can find other ways that are better than the ones you have had before. I definitely think so, although I have not been able to find them. But that can come with time too".

E4 believes that her company will come out of the crisis better prepared for any future crisis. She now knows how her company reacts to a crisis like COVID-19 and that remote work

actually works for them. However, she also believes that the way she works will not be affected much when they return to the office. When asked whether she has any hopes for the future in terms of change, E4 said that:

"...Previously you have felt a little dumb when you would ask if you could work from home, if you for example, are going away that day and it would be good to quit a little earlier and be at home. So now you might not feel as dumb if you ask occasionally, since it works quite well working from home and everyone knows it."

Lastly E4 added that she believes that her company will come out of this stronger and as better teams.

"...I also believe that this will affect our teamwork when we return to the office. We have gone through this together and managed to create new routines, new ways to communicate, and to move forward. When we're back, I think we will have grown, even if you don't feel it now, it might turn into such a feeling in the future."

4.3 Secondary Sources

Since the COVID-19 is such a current issue, there are many opinions and predictions about how the situation should be handled and how the crisis will change the way of working in the future. According to Parungao (2020) the first common prediction is that remote work will become a permanent condition in many companies and the second prediction is that technology will continue to play a significant role.

4.3.1 Salesforce Survey

In a survey from early May of about 3500 people from six different countries by Salesforce, they found that 62% are currently working remotely (Consumer and Workforce Research Series, 2020), compared to around 43% who worked remotely in any capacity (down to a few hours per month) in 2016 (Hickman and Robison, 2020) . The respondents rated aspects of their remote work from excellent to poor and overwhelmingly the respondents found that communication, productivity, technology, and collaboration either good (roughly 45%) or excellent (roughly 33%).

- 62% believe that they are as productive at work now as they were prior to the crisis.
- 61% say that they will miss going to the office.
- 71% could communicate across platforms.
- 63% say that they can collaborate with colleagues digitally.
- 68% feel closer to their families due to working remotely
- 67% are interested in working remotely post crisis.
- 58% consider employer trust in employees as very important during the crisis.
- 55% consider regular communications very important.
- 33% consider reduced workloads as very important.

(Consumer and Workforce Research Series, 2020).

4.3.2 New York Times

According to the New York times, Americans are happier and more productive as a consequence of the shift to remote work and many want to hold on to the benefits when the crisis is over. The authors write about a pervasive fear of having to return to the office, having interviewed a number of people from different industries (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020). One interviewee says that:

"I'm better rested. I can devote more time to my work, just saving the time and money of commuting, I really like this personally"
(Cramer and Zaveri, 2020).

However, the authors also raise the downsides of remote work, with distractions from children or spouses and the difficulties of video chatting. For example, some women have said that video chatting makes it harder to get a worn in during meetings. Although the downsides are quite impactful for many, especially those that are extroverted and get energy from others, the article also lists many benefits:

- Less commuting
- Increased productivity
- Potential environmental benefits

- Lower costs
- Higher job satisfaction
- Reduced sickness
- More time for personal wellbeing and exercise.

For the future, the authors spoke to Kate Lister, the president of Global Workplace Analytics. She predicts that workers will be looking to balance remote work and office work. She hopes that after the crisis is over managers will have seen that remote work is possible for many that have previously been perceived as impossible (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020).

Cramer and Zaveri (2020) also provided a series of quotes from newly remote workers, providing insights into the positive aspects of remote work. The value of this is a further exploration into people who are in a similar situation as those that we interviewed for our study. Following is a summary of some of the quotes and their reasoning.

"There is this softened, unfiltered, more honest version of ourselves that I'm enjoying getting to know. There is room to be forgiving and understanding with each other and ourselves. And it's because we've all had to juggle."

One interviewee said she used to love going to the office, but that she does not miss it all anymore and does not want to go back after the crisis. When the crisis is over, she hopes to be able to work two to four weeks per year from her parents' rural home, saying that:

"It's beautiful. It's resting and restorative, and I'll miss that"

Another interviewee had moved home to her parents and found a new focus and increased productivity, free from the interruptions of chatty colleagues. An employee at Greenpeace hopes that the emails that the company has been sending out, encouraging socialization and maintenance of physical and mental health, will continue when the crisis passes. A chemistry professor thinks that workplaces need to adapt to individually optimal ways of working through asking them how the company can best help them thrive (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020).

4.3.4 Time Magazine

Time magazine interviewed companies that are working to solve some of the issues that remote workers are facing. for example, the authors spoke to a company called Spatial, a software company focused on enabling meetings via holograms. They are trying to solve the connectivity and socialization issues that come with video and audio calls compared to real-life interactions.

In an interview with Thalia Wheatley, a professor of psychological and brain science at Dartmouth, they discussed the impact that in-person communication has and why organizations are struggling to recreate that experience digitally (Semuels, 2020).

"In face-to-face communication you are sharing a moment in time and space with someone, that's incredibly compelling for our ancient brains."

In her research Wheatley has found that the more eye contact that you have during a conversation the more connected you become. With the way that video calls work, you can either look into the camera and appear as if you are looking into the eyes of the other person or

you can look into their eyes in their camera but appear to be looking away to them. Wheatley believes that social interactions are crucial for mental and physical health.

Further the authors discuss how easy it is to multitask when you are on a video call. It is much more difficult to notice whether someone is paying full attention to you when you speak or if they are answering an email.
When interviewing two different remote workers, one in the UK and one in USA, the authors gained good insights into the longer-term impacts of the lack of socialization. The man from the UK decided to work remotely in order to be with his young son but found that he was becoming more and more isolated. The man from USA lived alone and said that:

"There are times when I lose track of the days because I haven't talked to anyone and haven't been outside"

The Time's article also recalls what happened after previous crises, such as 9/11 and the spike in gas prices in 2008. Both led to an increase in remote work but not at the same magnitude as COVID-19 has (Semuels, 2020).

4.3.5 IVL Svenska Institutet

According to a report from 2017 by IVL Svenska Institutet it is fair that 10 % of the workers in Gothenburg can work from home, which is equal to 50% of all the employees that works as administrators. In the example the employees would on average work from home 20 days for one month. IVL has counted on that case and concluded that it would lead to a decrease of emissions of carbon dioxide with 60 tons each year (Strid, 2020). The environment aspect is something that two of the managers in our interview mentioned. M3 thought that we will work more remotely because we see that it works, and mentioned that the traveling will be more questioned, M3 says:

"*We will question travellers more. That one hour meeting you travel to Stockholm for maybe you do remotely*"

The study reinforces the statement that M3 made. According to the article, working from home really does affect the environment when we start to make meetings on for example, skype instead of physical meetings that we need to travel to by car or flight.

4.3.6 Forbes

According to Forbes, employees are reporting greater productivity and increased job satisfaction since the remote work programs started, as well as increased profitability for employers as their overhead costs are reduced due to lower real estate, equipment, and supply costs. However, the author raises the question of whether working from home is necessarily the core reason for the positive effects of remote work, or if it is the flexibility afforded by remote and whether the effects would not be the same if people could work wherever they want. The concluding question raised is ultimately whether the issue, post COVID-19, should be where people work or how people work.

Further the author raises three main differences between working in an office versus working remotely. According to her, these are Virtual workplace accessibility, asynchronous communication, and results-based tracking. Virtual workplace accessibility essentially means

that wherever an employee is their access to information, people, etc. should be equal to the access of an on-site employee. Asynchronous communication means that work should not be dependent on location or time. This includes flexibility to adapt to conflicting schedules, household interruptions, and even different time zones. The author highlights the importance of transparent information sharing, through asynchronous channels, such as, email, google docs, etc. Results-based tracking simply means that an employee's productivity can no longer be judged by visual confirmation as is the case in a traditional office, you can see people working and what they are doing. Instead productivity should be measured by the results delivered by employees.

In her closing remarks, the authors states that when we return to "normal" we should be focused on the actual work rather than the office (Farrer, 2020).

5. Analysis and Conclusion

In this section our analysis and conclusions will be presented. The analysis will be divided into two sections, first we will analyse from the managers perspective and later we will continue to analyse based on the employee's perspective. Finally, we will finish with our conclusions.

Research Question

How do organizational members handle the abrupt transition to remote work in times of crisis?

Research Purpose

Our purpose is to study how the abrupt transition to remote work effects different aspects of work and to see whether, and in what ways, the involuntary nature of the current remote work situation changes how remote work is perceived by employees and managers. By interviewing both employees and managers our results will provide insights into how people in both positions in an organization are coping with the transition to remote work as well as whether there are any discrepancies between what the managers perceive as challenges and opportunities and what the employees are struggling with.

5.1 Manager

5.1.1 Productivity

What we have found regarding productivity, based on our interviews and secondary sources, is that the productivity does not decrease when organizations shift from the office to remote work. All three managers that we interviewed are satisfied with the results that their employees deliver. The expectations are met, and even though remote work seems to work better for some people and worse for some, there is in general higher focus on the work and less "nonsense". What all the managers said can be reinforced by an article in New York times where a study showed that the most Americans are happier and more productive when they work from home. In addition to our own research and the secondary sources there are previous researchers that have done different studies that show the increase in productivity when working remotely. Bloom et al. (2013) showed in a study based on a Chinese travel agency that the productivity increases by 14% when the employees work from home instead of in a traditional office. Based on all the information from different sources we can, with considerable confidence, say that working from home really has positive effects on the productivity. We think that it is important, as a manager, to keep in mind that not every single employee increases their productivity, we suppose that there are exceptions and people who are not willing to work remotely because people are different and for some people it does not work to "move the office" to home and keep working in an equally productive way. The fact that our interviewees had different thoughts and feeling regarding remote work could be explained by their emotional stability (Jansen Perry, et al., 2018 p. 578). We believe that this means that managers need to know their employees more than they did at the office, in order to optimise their working situation and gain the positive effects of remote work while offsetting the negatives. In addition to this recognizing an employee's so-called virtual intelligence is important. Each employee will be differently capable of recognizing, directing, and maintaining (Larson and Makarius, 2017, p.

170). Knowing who is handling the situation well enables a manager to focus their efforts on helping those that are struggling. Encouraging employees to be more attentive to the ways that they work and interact can be helpful for them to develop their virtual intelligence. Although Larson and Makarius (2017, p. 169, 170) place a lot of the responsibility on the employee, we believe that in times of crisis, management will need to play a larger role in ensuring that employees get the help that they might need. Perhaps the more successful employees can be encouraged to share their tips and experiences with others during meetings or one-on-one.

5.1.2. Communication

Meetings and communication overall is still very important for the managers, so they still have meeting to a similar extent as before, but the most obvious change is that the meetings are now on distance like over "skype" or "teams". As with many other things there are both pros and cons, M1 mentioned that it is easy to talk over each other, and in an online meeting there is a lack of body language and facial expressions, you only hear the voice without seeing how they react on something that you say and if they are about to talk or not. These results further support previous research that has found the lack of body language to an issue of remote work (English, 2017). There seems to be no real difference between planned remote work and remote work due to a crisis when it comes to the loss of body language. We believe that this means that this is an issue that is much more complicated and harder to solve. One solution is to include video in the meetings, but as M1 says, this can be limited by bandwidth or other practicalities, and as previously noted eye-contact remains an issue in video chats.

M2 highlights positive aspects of online meetings. According to M2 the meetings are much shorter and more efficient because there is less talk about other issues than the meeting actually is about. However, according to the industry experts an important aspect of remote work is to maintain casual or non-work-related conversations (GitLab, 2020, Marais, 2020, Microsoft, 2020, Ryder and Moon, 2020). This means that the no nonsense meetings may be detrimental to the overall connections and socialization of employees. Additionally some of the secondary sources quoted employees saying that they enjoyed getting to know each other on a more personal level, meaning that by excluding "nonsense" you further risk losing some of the positive aspects of remote work (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020).

When it comes to the negative aspects of online meetings, M2 and M1 shares their experiences that it is hard to understand and see feelings when you only hear the employee's voices. It is easier to share information physically and see how the employees react. Another reflection is that you only need to tell something, such as news, decisions or instructions once when everyone are gathered on one place, but on distance the same thing sometimes needs to be told a few times, in order to reach everyone. M3 mentioned in our interview that one of the hardest things is to keep the "team-feeling", which can be partly explained by what Thalia Wheatley said in an interview, that the more eye-to-eye contact people in an organization have the more connected they get (Semuels, 2020). This is tied to ancient parts of the human brain, and since face-to-face interactions have been the norm for thousands of years, humans have evolved to get a lot of information from body language. Another downside of online meetings is that people multitask during the meetings and not always pay full attention (Semuels, 2020). We believe that these things together can lead to decreased team-feeling, if you cannot share an eye-to-eye moment with your colleagues, and start to not pay attention to conversations that relate to the organization, then you risk losing the team-feeling within the organization. Finding solutions to these issues are key to making remote communication work. Although the eye contact is currently difficult to solve, managers can make conscious efforts to increase focus

during meetings. For example, managers can ban cell phones during meetings, and make it clear that during meetings you do not work on other tasks.

We think that communication as a very important issue because people are different, they think and act different, so to be able to collaborate in an organization people need to communicate, talk, listen, and understand each other. When we looked into the advice of experienced companies we found that most of them recommend that you establish clear standards and rules for communications, as well as to embrace asynchronous communication and encourage communication (Donovan, 2020, Microsoft, 2020, Ryder and Moon, 2020). This is further supported by Larson and Makarius (2017, p. 168) who claim that establishing rules of engagement is one of the two most important issues for remote work.

A general tip is to have a team launch. Open a dialogue on how you should communicate and structure things like meetings, and how often. Once the basics are in place, check-up regularly and try to encourage informal conversation between co-workers by for example starting every meeting with a quick round of questions regarding how everyone is doing etc (Neeley, 2020)

5.1.3 Socialization

Socialization is another important issue when talking about remote work. Even though the managers in our interviews know the importance of socialization they do not take any specific actions because the employees seem to organize it themselves. However, some managers have started organizing "fika" at set times, where the employees have a chance to socialize. Further we believe that the implied short-term nature of this situation has managers reluctant to make extensive efforts to solve an issue believed to be temporary. It is important to note that the uncertainty of the situation is making people hesitant and only time will tell whether they made the right choice. the industry experts that we studied had different ways of recommending increased socialization. Zoom and Microsoft try to make meetings fun (Marais, 2020, Microsoft, 2020) and GitLab says that managers should intentionally create social interactions between workers, for example, one-on-one "coffee chats" (informal two person chats), virtually touring co-workers houses, and larger, casual group meetings (Informal Communication in an all-remote environment, 2020). Trello encourages non-work activities and conversations between employees (Ryder and Moon, 2020).

There are two sides of the coin. Social distancing can lead to a lower level of stress, but it can also lead to depression (Miller, 2020). We can understand that the actions from the managers could be different if the crisis and remote work was due to some other cause than the coronavirus. Of course, we understand that managers do not want to risk the employees' health by recommending them to meet and socialize together. We can imagine that if the crisis was due to something else, such as only economic issues, it would be easier for managers to recommend the employees to meet, knowing that it would not hurt them or their health in any way.

5.1.4. Mental and Physical Health

The COVID-19 crisis has direct effects on people's health, at least the ones who gets infected. But even those who do not get the infection are still affected in some way. Those who work and lead remotely are also affected. All three managers that we interviewed could state that the health issue is a very important aspect for them, and they do "control" it in different ways. For example, M3 asks every single employee how they feel in the beginning of every daily

interview, and she also reminds everyone to go out for walks. All managers in our interviews could also state that the number of sickness has not changed compared with the sick numbers when people were working from home. Since remote work is believed to be a short-term solution no big efforts have been done from the managers to ensure the right ergonomics, even though some people (according to M1) do not have the optimal place to work from. Since the communication on distance makes it harder to see feelings and facial expressions, M1 finds it hard to notice the employee's feelings and to see how they feel. When it comes to different actions from the managers side, M1 states that they will take different actions if it shows that the remote work will become a long term solution, if people are supposed to work six month, then the managers will maybe order desks to every employees house etc. As mentioned above in previous section about socialization, remote work can lead to different state of health such as lower stress level, loneliness, isolation, and even depression (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, Grant et al., 2013, Miller 2020).

5.1.5 Separating Work from Leisure

Neither M1 or M2 have experienced any problems when it comes to separate the work from leisure and their employee's ability to separate the work from leisure. No strange working hours have been mentioned and M1 and M2 remains and encourages their employees to take coffee breaks, go for walks and so on. The conclusion we can draw of that is that it can be different from leader to leader how they handle the issue, and of course it depends on if they have any problems in the organization or not.

M3 has experienced one case where the employee felt that he or she is working to much, so she tried to solve the problem by restructure the schedule. In her own case it happens that she wants to do "just one more thing" and then she is done. But as a leader for others she does not do anything special if the employees do not come with any request. It is an important issue to keep in mind as a leader and to be aware of the workers and their routines because earlier study has shown that working from home can lead to more working hours, difficulties with separating between work and leisure, and to stress (Grant et al., 2013, p. 541). And working more hours is really something that M3 could testify about based on the own experiences.

GitLab (2020) emphasises the importance of not celebrating overtime or working longer hours than usual. We believe that this will be an important issue if employees are finding it easier to work overtime. Communicating to employees that overtime is the exception to the rule and should be used only when necessary (as in the case of M1) should be standard practice for managers in order to help separate work from leisure.

5.1.6. Opportunities and Challenges

There are both opportunities and challenges with remote work and the situation that the world is facing right now. The opportunities are related to more efficiency and more focus, all of the managers in our interviews can attest to that. However, M1 found it difficult with one-on-one meetings, and feel that the personal connection between the employee and leader deteriorates. This can be a problem when the leader follows an involved leadership style. For M2 and M3 giving same instructions many times and keeping the team feeling is a challenge. Secondary sources that we have found ensures the things the managers in the interviews are chasing, such as increased focus and high productivity levels, and also that we see that remote work is something that really works (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, English, 2017, Grant

et al., 2013). As M3 said in her interview, she thinks that the remote work will increase because we see that it works and is effective.

5.1.7. Future

We believe that remote work will increase in the future because study shows that the productivity do increase and we also believe that organizations gain other advantages by working remotely, such as connecting with other organizations, finding business opportunities, socialization, sharing knowledge, learning from others etc. Of course, there are some obstacles with leading remotely, but we believe that those are possible to overcome, with the technological development that we can see in the world. 67% are willing to continue working from home when the crisis is over, this is the numbers that a survey from May shows (Consumer and Workforce Research Series, 2020). This is an issue that is highly relevant right now due to the crisis, and we learn new things about remote work every day, if not through different research or articles, then we get own experiences that we can learn from and use in the future. The first prediction according to Parungao (2020) is that remote work will become a more permanent way of working, which strengthens the results that we got from our interviews. For example when we asked the managers about the future, and how the crisis will change the way of working every one of them thought that the remote work will become more common, because they have seen first-hand that it works, and even that meetings take less time and become more effective.

5.2 Employee

5.2.1 Productivity

Our results seem consistent with previous research in that productivity increases or at least stays the same when working remotely (Bloom, 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019). All of our respondents reported an increase in productivity and focus when working remotely. However, some had struggled with distractions as well, this is consistent with the secondary sources which also reported distractions for some people, be it kids, spouses, or something else (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020).

Although we knew that previous research had found solid evidence of an increase in productivity (Bloom, 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019) we had some concerns that the abrupt shift to remote work would be disruptive to the employees and cause a reduction in productivity, at least initially. This was further confirmed by some of our respondents and what their expectations had been before the remote work had started. Some had been hesitant or worried that the technology would not work or that certain routines would be difficult to do remotely. However, outside of the handling of physical documents, our respondents reported that remote work has exceeded their expectations and is working quite well. This is further confirmed by the Salesforce poll where 62% said that they are as productive now as they were before the crisis (Consumer and Workforce Research Series, 2020).

A main contributor to the increase in productivity seems to be the absence of colleagues, with our respondents saying that there are fewer interruptions when working remotely. No one is coming over to ask questions or to request help, instead this is done via asynchronous communication channels, such as text chats or email, which gives the employee the opportunity to deal with it at an appropriate time without interrupting their current work. This is partly consistent with previous research where the solitary nature of remote work has been attributed

with an increase in productivity, however, unlike the responses we received from our interviews, the previous research provided additional reasons, such as, fewer sick days and less absence, as well as reduced time commuting (Bloom 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019). Further research into the correlation between increase in productivity and reduction in social interactions is needed in order to investigate whether this is coincidental or not.

5.2.2 Communication

Although communication is working for all of our respondents, they all reported some version of missing the physical interactions and body language that face-to-face communication has but digital communications lacks. This is further supported by our secondary sources, who report difficulties with, for example, eye contact (Semuels, 2020) and by previous research by English (2017), who discusses the lack of nonverbal cues. Some of our interviewed employees found it hard to convey emotions properly when communicating digitally which is another difficulty that arises from digital communications.

Our interview subjects reported that they used text-based chat services for their everyday communications. This had led to some problems with the response times when questions or issues were raised. It seems like it is hard for remote workers to have the same interactions with their co-workers, this is highlighted as a positive aspects in the productivity section where our interviewees viewed it as something that increases their productivity. However, the flip side of that is that it can delay the productivity of others. E1 for example, said that he imagines that it is difficult for those that need help more often, but he does not. The issue here might be that his productivity is increasing, while those that would benefit from his help sees their productivity decrease. Further studies could be made in order to investigate this trade-off and to find out whether organizations need to choose between faster help or fewer interruptions.

Farrer (2020) places asynchronous communications as one of the most important things to master in order to make remote work work. Which means that the issues that our interviewees raised regarding slower responses etc. might be something that they need to get used to and learn to work around if they are to work remotely in the long run. This could be an area where it is worth investing some time and resources to optimize routines, even though most of our interviewees view remote work as something temporary and short-term. However, E4 does claim that they have found new ways of communication and made it work to some extent, which could be a good sign of flexibility from her and her organization. The issues that English (2017) raised with regards to social isolation due to asynchronous communications do not seem present in our interviews or in the secondary sources. However, these are, according to him, due to time-zone differences which we have not had the opportunity to investigate.

Previous research such as the study by Grant et al. (2013) found that remote workers would miss out on communications and information and end up feeling excluded. However, our interviewees felt both heard and included. We believe that a driving force behind this is the fact that all employees are in a similar situation, and thus the information is communicated in an appropriate way. This means that, as Farrer (2020) also highlights, information should be equally available to all employees regardless of where they are working.

5.2.3 Socialization

The social aspect of the traditional office was one of the things that our interviewees missed the most. Daily interactions are limited when working remotely and the loss of the breakroom or "watercooler" conversations have yet to be replaced. Isolation and loneliness is also a common theme in previous research (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, English, 2017, Grant et al., 2013) and the industry experts also give plenty of tips on how to encourage socialization (GitLab, 2020, Marais, 2020, Microsoft, 2020, Ryder and Moon, 2020).

In our interviews there seem to have been some efforts made to increase socialization, for example, through "fika", encouragement of casual conversation between co-workers, as well as some conscious efforts on the employees' side. However, all of our interviewed employees agree that there is no substitute for face-to-face interactions, and they believe that digital communications will never be the same.

On the other hand, when we studied secondary sources, there was some evidence that working remotely allowed them to get to know a more personal version of each other and gain insights into each other's lives (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020). In our interviews, E4 seemed to also believe that there was team building potential in this experience and even though it might be hard to see now, they could come out of it as a closer group, knowing each other and the organization better. The long-term effects of this type of remote work has yet to be studied and what parts will carry into the future remain to be seen. However, we believe that there is opportunity to introduce co-workers to a different version of themselves and that should be encouraged. Employees ought to embrace the situation in that sense, and allow their co-workers into their homes and lives, which will hopefully lead to stronger bonds between them. This is further encouraged by Ryder and Moon (2020), who hold individual getaways for employees and then gather to talk about them, together.

5.2.4 Mental and Physical Health

In general, the information that we gained with regards to mental and physical health was sparse in our interviews and it does not seem like a priority from secondary sources either. Our interviewees seemed aware of the importance of exercise and its effects on mental health, but where not necessarily doing anything out of the ordinary. Two of our respondents had adapted their workspace to be at least somewhat more ergonomic, but that also seems low on the list of priorities. We believe that this is mainly due to the interviewees thinking of their remote work situation as short-term and as such have not bothered with ergonomics or making any major changes to their workspace. On the other hand all of the industry experts that we studied placed great importance on both ergonomics and getting fresh air and exercise (Donovan, 2020, GitLab, 2020, Marais, 2020, Microsoft, 2020, Ryder and Moon, 2020).

Previous research has explored the negative effects of commuting (Chatterjee et al. 2020, Grant et al., 2013), they found that they have a high impact on subjective wellbeing and E1 confirms this in his interview, saying that not having to commute is one of the best things about remote work. Additionally both Bloom et al. (2013) and Choudhury et al. (2019) the reduced time spent commuting due to remote work is not only a positive for the mental health of the worker but the reduction in pollution can have a positive effect on society in general. We believe that this is accurate for most, but a comprehensive study of pollution before, during, and after the crisis will have to be done in order to gain empirical evidence of the effects that remote work due to corona has had on the environment.

5.2.5 Separating Work from Leisure

Remote workers seem to have struggled with the separation between work and leisure, leading to stress. Previous research has found proof that when working remotely it is more difficult to leave work when the day ends (Grant et al., 2013, p. 541). Our interviewed employees had different experiences with this, E1 seemed fine with just closing the laptop at the end of the day and had learned to adhere to proper working hours. However, E1's organization seemed to have no overtime which has been found to be something that can exacerbate the problem of separation (Grant et al., 2013, p. 541).

GitLab (2020) also raised the importance of leisure time, saying that: working from anywhere does not mean working all the time. GitLab further stresses the importance of taking time off and that organizations should not celebrate working long hours or on weekends. Our interviewees seem to be doing a good job of not working on weekends but E2 found that it was easier to work longer hours from home than it was at the office. E3 worked slightly longer due to starting work when she would otherwise leave for her commute, while E4 had not seen any major difference between remote and office work with regards to number of hours worked.

We believe that it is still difficult to say how working remotely in this crisis will affect the separation of work from leisure, however, we believe that the fact that most people are working remotely has a way of making people more forgiving and understanding. Knowing how difficult it can be to make the separation could lead to more empathy among co-workers. However, since the employees we interviewed had had no in-depth discussion regarding overtime with their managers. there is certainly a risk that overtime could be celebrated or at least somewhat expected.

5.2.6 Opportunities and Challenges

The opportunities that arise from remote work seem to be similar in the current crisis as previous studies have found. The reduced commute, increased focus, higher productivity, and the fact that remote work works (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, English, 2017, Grant et al., 2013). The challenges also align with previous research, lack of socialization, difficulties communicating, managing information, and the lack of face-to-face interactions (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019, English, 2017, Grant et al., 2013). The belief that the situation is short-term seems to be a reason why the issues are not prioritized, since employees seem to believe that this is a situation that they need to get through. Our secondary sources found similar challenges and highlighted the importance of adapting to the new settings (Farrer, 2020). However, this seems like something that our interview subjects are struggling with. The industry experts that we gathered tips from focused heavily on the responsibility of managers to create working solutions to the socialization and communications issue, which seems to be prominent in not just those who are working remotely due to COVID-19, but remote workers in general.

There is however an opportunity to create stronger and more intimate bonds between employees (Cramer and Zaveri, 2020), through the increased insight into each other's lives and as E4 said, there is an opportunity for this crisis to be a team building experience. However, we believe that managers have a responsibility to find ways to capitalize on these opportunities. Transparency in communication between managers and employees will be key to ensuring that the opportunities are not missed. This is emphasised by Trello (Ryder and Moon, 2020). However, the importance of adaptability is raised in previous research (Larson and Makarius, 2017) which also puts some of the responsibility on the employees to be able to change their

ways and routines. All of our interviewees have shown some ability to adapt and the fact that they have made remote work work, even in a crisis like COVID-19, should be proof that employees are able to handle the transition quite well. However, time will tell whether the transition will continue to work smoother than expectations. There is also the question of what happens if the situation goes on into the long-term, and what opportunities and challenges will arise from that. Therefore, we would like to see a follow-up study in a couple of months or at the end of the crisis in order to fully evaluate the consequences of remote work in a crisis.

5.2.7 Future

Our interviewed employees are optimistic about increased opportunities for remote work and E1, E3, and E4 want to telecommute (work remotely 1-3 days a week) in the future. Surprisingly, it seems that the employers are more optimistic about telecommuting in the future, which indicates that there is a lack of transparency in the communications between employers and employees. It could be worth noting that, as E3 explained, it could be difficult to return to "normal" when the crisis is over. E1 on the other hand believes that she will return to the office as normal when the crisis is over. Again we found differing opinions among our interviewees, secondary sources found that 67% of workers are interested in working remotely past crisis, which aligns with the findings of Bloom et al. (2013) where the majority of subjects stayed remote after the program ended and some returned to the office.

E4 raised an important point, that there might be team building value in this experience, as well as insight into the response of the organization. All around it seems like the outlook for remote work, post crisis, is positive and we believe that telecommuting will become the new normal.

5.3 Key Findings

In the table below we outline key findings, practical and societal impacts, impacts on previous research, and relevant advice from experienced companies. This will provide an overview of our results before we draw conclusions in the upcoming section.

Key findings	Impacts	Previous research	Advice from experienced companies
Increased productivity.	Gains for organizations.	Agrees with previous research.	
Less but more efficient communication.	More time for other activities. Loss of socialization	Agrees with previous research.	Communicate clearly and often.
Loss of body language.	Misunderstandings in communication.	Agrees with previous research.	Include video in meetings and conversations in order to restore some of the lost body language.
Increased loneliness and isolation.	Can be damaging to mental health. Loss of "team-feeling" and unity in organizations.	Agrees with previous research.	Encourage casual and non-work communication between employees. Recreate the breakroom virtually.
Fewer casual interactions	Less time for bonding between employees. More efficient work.	Agrees with previous research	Encourage casual and non-work communication between employees.
Less commuting	Positive effects on mental health. Positive impact on environment. More time for work or leisure.	Agrees with previous research	
Separation of work and leisure is difficult for some people	Can be damaging to social life and mental health	Partially Agrees with previous research	Allow flexible workhours. Do not celebrate overtime. Encourage regular breaks and physical activity. Create regular routines.
Poor ergonomics	Can be damaging to physical health	Adds to previous research	Invest in the needed resources, help employees create a suitable workplace.
Increased opportunities for remote work in the future (1-3 days per week)	Retain the positives and solve most of the negatives.	Needs to be further researched after crisis.	Many companies are offering remote work either part time or full time already. Expected to increase.

Table 5, Key findings, impacts, previous research, advice from experienced companies

6. Conclusion

This section concludes our thesis. We will answer the research question "how do organizational members handling the transition to remote work in times of crisis?" as well as, provide practical suggestions and potential future research.

6.1 Conclusion

Considering the ongoing pandemic, we initially believed that the abrupt transition to remote work would be tough for organizational members who have little or no experience working and leading remotely. Our findings indicate the opposite. Both managers and employees are handling the transition well. Productivity is the same or better, focus has increased, meetings are more efficient, and the future prospects of remote work are bright, even in organizations with no history of remote work programs. However, our interviewed employees and the secondary sources support telecommuting (working from home 1-3 days per week) rather than a fully remote workplace. People still need the socialization of the office and miss it when they are forced to work from home. Striking the balance between remote and office work will be key to maintaining the positive aspects and offsetting the negative. Flexibility on the manager side will be important in order for each employee to create the optimal schedule, balancing remote and office work.

Our findings are in line with previous research in most aspects, meaning that even though the remote work in this crisis is largely involuntary, the pros and cons translate quite well. This means that even though there is uncertainty as to the duration of the crisis, it might be worth to make the necessary investments (ergonomics, video conferencing, increasing socialization etc.) now rather than later, especially if the intent is to allow more remote work in the future.

Managers will need to play a more active role in aspects of work that have been natural and autonomous at the office. Mainly communication and socialization between employees. The break room is gone for now, so people need to get those interactions elsewhere. Facilitating this new type of socialization will be key to a happy and healthy workforce. We suggest that video chatting become a priority in order to bring some of the body language back into communication. Also, that structured sessions of "fika" or other social activities should be scheduled and common. Perhaps creating an open video chat server where people can pop in and out as they please, a virtual break room. Video chats may be awkward at first, but many of the industry experts, with extensive experience of remote work, recommend it in order to reintroduce some personality into communication.

We further believe that the long-term health aspects of a less than ideal workspace need to be considered when discussing the resources provided to employees. It may not be enough to offer that they can take their desks from the office, but rather to have desks shipped to their homes. Fresh air and exercise need to be of greater importance, and managers should find ways to incentivise it among their employees. Make a game of it and reward those who get daily exercise.

Although we cannot predict the future, we firmly believe that remote work will be far more common post COVID-19. Adaptability and flexibility, by both managers and employees will be key to the success of organizations. So far remote work is working for the majority and we

hope that trend will continue, however, it can only do that with the help of all members of the organization.

6.2 Future Research

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 induced remote work programs remain to be seen and a study of organizational members post crisis will be needed in order to gauge the true results of the transition to remote work. Further there are aspects of remote work that require longitudinal studies, such as, the effects of the isolation and fully remote work on physical and mental health, relationships, organizational cohesion, and productivity. From our study we can only see the short-term results of remote work in a crisis. Whether the pros and cons are sustained over longer periods remains to be studied. Although, since our results were largely in line with previous studies, we see no apparent reason why it should not continue to be a positive way of working. Further, it would be interesting to see what actions managers take, should the crisis and the remote work become long-term.

7. Truth Criterion

In this section we will outline the truth criterion that we have adhered to while writing this thesis. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Our thesis has ensured credibility through following best practices for research, as well as, making sure that our perceptions of the world are clear in the thesis (Bell et al., 2019, p. 363). We would have liked to double check our results with the interview subjects, however, time did not allow this.

Transferability

In order to ensure transferability, the context that our thesis is written in has been made clear. It should be clear to which contexts our thesis is transferable to (Bell et al., 2019, p. 365), in choosing to interview members of organizations who have recently transitioned to remote work due to COVID-19 and speaking to both managers and employees, we have ensured that our study can be transferred to other organizations in similar situations.

Dependability

Dependability is apparent through our recordkeeping and the availability of recordings and transcriptions. This makes an audit of our research possible and ensures the dependability of our study (Bell et al., 2019, p. 365). Further dependability means that we have been transparent throughout our research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability means that the authors have not been influenced or added any personal opinions to the thesis (Bell et al., 2019, p. 365). We clarified our preconceptions regarding remote work in the method section and our interview guide is designed in an impartial way without leading questions. Transcriptions and recordings of the interviews are also available for audit in order to ensure that we did not insert our own opinions into the interviews.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview Guide

Introduction template

Hello,

We are Elias Eriksson and Arpine Petrosian, business students at Umeå University and we are doing our degree thesis on the sudden change from office work to remote work in a crisis situation (COVID-19). For this purpose, we would like to conduct an interview covering your experience with remote work so far, and the opportunities/challenges that you have seen. All interviews will be anonymous, and you may decline to answer any question that you consider inappropriate or that violates any confidentiality within your company. The results from our interviews will be contrasted with information found from other resources in order to come to a conclusion regarding best practices for abrupt shifts to remote work and provide a set of tools that are supported by both industry experts and research. We will happily share the final thesis paper with you when the review process is over and hope that you will gain insights from it.

Questions to managers

General
- What industry is your company part of?
- How many employees do you manage?
- How many of these employees are working remotely?
- Have you managed remote workers previously?
- What if any resources for remote work have you used (handbooks, tips, etc.)?

Remote Leadership
- How did you come up with the way work will be governed? bottom-up or top-down?
- Have you discussed the change with the employees, before and after the start of working remotely? How were the expectations before and how did they turn out to be?
- How do you measure the results for the workers when they work remotely? Does it differ from the way of measuring when they work at the office?
- How do you judge the performance in work when comparing between office work and remote work?
- What are your views on overtime/overworking?
- Have you noticed any employees struggling with the separation of work-life from home-life?
- Do you try to help your employees separate work-life from home-life? If yes, how do you make sure that your employees separate work-life from home-life when they work remotely?
- What have you done to ensure that your employees have the tools that they need in order to work?
- Do you make sure that they are working in a separate space that is as ergonomic as possible or can they choose themselves where they work?
- To what extent do you keep tabs on your employees? How has trust between you and your employees changed?
- How do you communicate with your employees? How often? What is the difference in the meetings when comparing between working at the office and working remotely?
- How do you work with giving feedback when leading remotely? How does it differ from the "ordinary" way of giving feedback?
- What are your views/policies on non-work conversations? (in general, and at meetings)
- What have you done to facilitate the continued socialization between co-workers? (e.g. group meetings, "water cooler" conversations?
- How much importance do you put into making sure that all employees are seen and heard? In what way do you make sure that people feel heard and included?

- How do you make sure that the mental and physical health of your employees is being maintained?
- In what way do your workers seek support when needed? What about the difference in need of support while working remotely and working in office? Are the "problems" the same or do you feel that they experience different problems?
- How has the sick leave and absence changed compared to when work was done from the office?

Opportunities and challenges
- What opportunities have you seen with the situation with COVID-19 and remote work?
- What obstacles do you experience with remote leadership?
- What part of the leadership do you find most difficult when leading remotely?
- What is "new" with the way of leading remotely compared with leading in an office?
- How will this situation change your way of working (long term) after Covid-19?

Questions to workers

Background questions
- What responsibilities do you have in the organization and what exactly are you doing/working with?
- Have you worked remotely before?
- Does your manager have experience managing remote workers before?
- Have you used any handbook, tips, etc. when shifting to remote work?

Remote working
- Where do you do your work? (e.g. separate office in home/bedroom/kitchen)
- What have you done to improve the ergonomics of your workspace?
- What tools/resources has your manager provided in order for you to create an ergonomic workspace?
- What are your routines throughout the day and how have they changed from when you worked in the office?
- In what ways do you communicate with your co-workers? Do you feel that it is possible to socialize virtually as you would normally?
- How do you manage your physical and mental health? Does your manager check-in on you for non-work-related reasons, if yes, in what way and how often?
- How important is exercise and fresh air to you?
- Do you feel like you are being heard by management?
- What communication channels are used to stay in touch with colleagues and leaders? What works well with the channels and what would you like to change?
- What do you miss the most when working remotely instead of the traditional office?
- How would you judge your own productivity when working remotely vs working at the office?
- Does it take the same time to fulfil a task remotely as at the office?
- How will this situation change your way of working (long term) after covid-19?

Challenges and opportunities
- What obstacles do you experience when working remotely vs working at the office?
- What opportunities do you gain from the current situation with working remotely because of COVID-19?
- How has your need of feedback and support developed when working remotely compared with working at the office?
- How do you separate work-life from home-life when working remotely? Does your manager set the hours that you work, or can you adapt them to suit your prime times for working?
- Do you find it a challenge to balance work life and private life?
- Is there any task that you cannot do remotely? What kind of tasks are they? (Something that requires that you are at the office)
- Do you experience any difficulties with focusing when working remotely? What do you do to enable you to focus?
- Which part do you find most difficult when working remotely?