



IS THE EXTENDED VIRTUAL WORKFORCE HERE TO STAY?

A qualitative case study of how virtual
work becomes the new normal

Simone Ahlsröd & Julia Fridén

Essay/Thesis:	30 hp
Program and/or course:	Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level:	Masters/Second Cycle
Semester/year:	St/2021
Supervisor:	Ola Bergström
Examiner:	Petra Adolfsson

Abstract

Essay/Thesis: 30 hp
Program and/or course: Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level: First Cycle/Second Cycle
Semester/year: St/2021
Supervisor: Ola Bergström
Examiner: Petra Adolfsson
Report No: xx (not to be filled in by the student/students)
Virtual work, Organizational path dependence, COVID-19, process approach, pandemic, organizational change, practical mechanisms, self-reinforcing mechanisms, home-based working
Keyword:

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to create a better understanding of how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. To reach this understanding, an organization where virtual work has been established as a new way of working after having been forced to move to virtual spaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will be analyzed. Specifically, by investigating how the employees have made sense of the adjustments carried out in practice during the establishment of virtual work.

Theory: The study builds on the organizational path dependence: a process view framework developed by Sydow and Schreyögg (2011). This framework brings the opportunity to identify practical actions and decisions that have taken place during the establishment of virtual work and to analyze if these adjustments can be deemed to have been drivers for virtual work becoming the new normal. Thus, enabling to study this establishment from a process approach.

Method: A qualitative case study was conducted. The data material was collected through 29 retrospective interviews. Two interviews were unstructured with two employer representatives, whilst 27 interviews were semi-structured and open-ended with employees in shifting hierarchical roles within the organization. These were coded according to grounded theory and thematically analyzed.

Result: The empirical findings revealed that the practical adjustments in terms of decisions and actions taking place during the establishment of virtual work could be identified as drivers for virtual work becoming the new normal. It was found that these had triggered self-reinforcing mechanisms that had led to a lock-in on a path of a hybrid-version of virtual work. This result shed light to the favorable aspects of studying virtual work from a process approach as it was shown that by analyzing the process unfolding over time, practical mechanisms causing virtual working to be the new normal were revealed. Further, the findings disclosed that attitudes shifted throughout the process, showing that attitudes were a byproduct of the actual practical adjustments taking place.

Foreword

First of all, we want to thank every respondent that participated in this study and contributed with interesting insights. Your participation has been invaluable for this study. Secondly, we want to thank the case organization for giving us the opportunity to study virtual work in such an interesting context. Last but not least, we want to thank our supervisor Ola Bergström for his great support and advice throughout this process.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1 Purpose and research question.....	8
1.2 Disposition of the study.....	9
1.3 Virtual work defined	9
2. Previous research	11
2.1 Technological perspective	11
2.2 Office and cost-savings perspective	13
2.3 Flexibility and work-life balance perspective	14
2.4 Employee discretion perspective	17
2.5 Socio psychological perspective.....	18
2.6 Concluding remark.....	20
3. Theoretical framing	22
3.1 Organizational path dependence: a process view framework.....	22
3.2 Limitations and critique.....	24
3.3 Relevance for the research aim.....	25
3.3.1 Analytical application	26
4. Methodology	27
4.1 Rationale behind the research design	27
4.2 Setting and sample.....	28
4.2.1 Setting	28
4.2.2 Sample	28
4.3 Data collection.....	29
4.4 Data analysis.....	30
4.5 Trustworthiness	32
4.6 Ethical considerations.....	32
5. Empirical findings and analysis	34
5.1 Stage one – The transition towards virtual work.....	34
5.1.1 Work procedure adjustments	34
5.1.2 Work routine adjustments.....	36
5.1.3 Physical adjustments	38
5.2 Stage two - The exploration of virtual work.....	39
5.2.1 Work procedure adjustments	39
5.2.2 Work routine adjustments.....	45
5.2.3 Physical adjustments	47
5.3 Stage three - The stabilization of virtual work	48
5.3.1 Work procedure adjustments	48
5.3.2 Work routine adjustments.....	48
5.3.3 Physical adjustments	49

6. Discussion	52
6.1 Main findings and contributions.....	52
7. Conclusion and limitations	55
7.1 Conclusion and implications for future research.....	55
7.2 Limitations.....	56
8. References	57
Appendix 1 –Interview guide employer representatives	67
Appendix 2 – Interview guide employees	69

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic's emergence has shocked the world and has at its current state infected approximately 98 million people around the world, causing a death of over two million (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). To avoid the spread of the virus, organizations from every corner of the world have been disrupted from their normal work processes to quickly adapt and reform to a more ambiguous and uncertain context (Auer, 2021; Caligiuri et al., 2020). To be able to foresee the restraints caused by the pandemic, organizations have moved towards virtual work as a solution to avoid further infections through keeping social distance by working from home, which has previously been said to be an important strategy for organizational survival when facing epidemics (Contreras et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2010; Kramer & Kramer, 2020). Therefore, this pandemic has been termed to be a people-based crisis (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Further, the COVID-19 pandemic is the first pandemic that has occurred at a time when information and communication technology has advanced to that degree that many organizations and departments have been able to continue its processes, but in a virtual and different manner. However, the fast adaptation to more virtual work has also challenged the traditional and physical way of working and forced organizations to move from their comfort zones towards virtuality (Contreras et al., 2020; Kramer & Kramer, 2020). Along with this drastic change, the question of whether this way of working will be the new normal has intensified. This debate is now more extensive than ever before and different individuals in shifting societal roles have given their opinion. Whilst the majority anticipate that virtual work is here to stay, sceptics have argued for the opposite. In either way, a broad range of explanations and causes for how virtual will be a part of the future is used in their rhetoric. Further, these explanations and causes for the future of virtual work tend to be mainly based on arguments derived from attitudes and perceptions of this way of working (Berlin, 2021; Byråvärlden, 2020; Hedström, 2021; it-kanalen, 2020; Katheryn, 2020; st, 2021; Zanardi, 2020).

The debate regarding the future of virtual work could hence be perceived to be a new phenomenon, however, this is far from the truth. From the very start when telework, i.e., virtual work, was coined as a concept (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Nilles, 1975; Raiborn & Butler, 2009), its future has been of great interest both in the public eye, but as well in a large body of research. Consequently, researchers have for several years tried to make anticipations for the future of virtual work (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Baruch, 2001; Benhamou, 2018; Grubert et al., 2018; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). On the one side, scholars have argued

that virtual work is the future as technological developments have taken place that have made this way of working possible (Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Neufeind et al., 2018; Mello, 2007; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). Others have argued that the benefits of work-life balance and flexibility that virtual work entails are the main explanation for that it will imprint the way of working (Ferrell & Kline, 2018; Neufeind et al., 2018; Perez & Sanchez, 2003). Beyond that, some have instead turned to the cost-savings it can bring due to reduced office spaces, whilst others have countered with explanations in terms of lack of managerial control and ergonomic safety (Ellison, 2012; Illegems et al., 2001; Janneck et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2003; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). One factor that has been widely referred to when talking about the shift from traditional working structure into virtual spaces has been the one of autonomy and enhanced employee discretion, partly arguing that this will lead organizations to turn to virtual solutions (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Raghuram et al., 2003; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). At the same time, the lack of social interaction has been one of the major counter arguments for virtual work not being the future way of working as it has been claimed that technology and home offices cannot ensure the same interactions and community (Alexander, 1997; Ferrel & Kline, 2018; Grubert et al., 2018; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003). These anticipations of virtual work have thus posed both benefits and shortcomings of this way of working. Researchers have further presented factors and solutions for outweighing the shortcomings and instead turning them into favorable outcomes. These factors seem to be based on different actors' perceptions of virtual work, such as that certain benefits would generate favorable outcomes for particular parties (Green et al., 2003; Madlock, 2013; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003; Nilles, 1975; Raghuram et al., 2003).

But still, the question remains, why is the future of virtual work not decided? If we are all aware of these factors related to virtual work and have access to these anticipations and solutions for shortcomings, why haven't the research field already provided a united explanation? When searching for an answer to this question, it becomes prevalent that the traditional working spaces and the structure and processes connected to it, are strongly embedded within organizations, referring to the concept of path dependence (Baruch, 2001; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Raiborn & Butler, 2009; Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011). In other words, a potential explanation for why organizations have not moved towards virtuality to a greater extent can be due to that they have been locked-in into another path of traditional working at the office. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, this external shock could be said to have led to potential path dissolution. Namely,

that organizations have had to quickly adapt to external forces and hence move from their traditional structures into a new potential path creation (Auer, 2021; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Contreras et al., 2020; Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011; Sydow et al., 2020). To understand how this pandemic will affect the future of virtual work, it is thus beneficial to study the practical decisions and actions that have taken place within an organization that may have initiated the causes of virtual work going forward. But also, how the prior traditional structure interferes with the emerging one to understand the complexity in each specific organization. In other words, previous studies seem to have had a more general approach. Thus, forgetting an important ingredient to the actual causes of this new way of working, the organization itself and the specific mechanisms taking place within (see e.g., Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). In addition, it should also be underlined that these prior studies have not been conducted in an equivalent context to the one prevailing now (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Ferrell & Kline, 2018; Illegems et al., 2001; Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). Thus, stressing the opportunity for studying the future of virtual work in a different manner than before. Hence, in this study, a multinational tech organization situated in Sweden, where virtual work has been established as the new normal way of working after it was enforced by the pandemic, will be in focus. Specifically, the practical mechanisms in terms of adjustments for the establishment of virtual work within this organization will be analyzed through the lens of path dependence as potential drivers for path creation. In this case, the establishment of virtual work being the new normal post the pandemic.

1.1 Purpose and research question

This study draws attention to the prevailing polarized research field concerning the future of virtual work. More specifically, the gap regarding organizational specific mechanisms as drivers and thus explanations for whether organizations will keep having virtual workforces to the same extent as they do today after the pandemic. Drawing upon this, the subject for this study is the largely increasing extent of virtual working enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this study is to create a better understanding of how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. To reach this understanding, an organization where virtual work has been established as a new way of working after having been forced to move to virtual spaces as a result of the pandemic will be analyzed. In detail, the employees will be in focus. Specifically, by investigating how the employees have made sense of the adjustments carried

out in practice during the establishment of virtual work. From this, a research question for reaching this understanding was formulated:

How have the employees made sense of the adjustments carried out in practice during the establishment of virtual work, and can these be considered drivers for virtual work to have become the new normal way of working?

1.2 Disposition of the study

This study consists of six sections. First, in section one, a definition of virtual work is elaborated, explaining the meaning behind the concept. Thereafter, the second section covers previous research concerning virtual work. In the third section, the theoretical approach is depicted. Firstly, a description of the organizational path dependence: a process view framework is given. Secondly, limitations and critique are discussed. After that, its relevance for the research aim is laid out and the analytical application is elaborated. Section four covers the applied methodology in this study, including design, setting and sample, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In section five, the empirical findings and an analysis of these are portrayed. These findings and contributions are then discussed in relation to previous research in section six. In section seven, a conclusion and implications for future research is given. Thereafter, limitations of the study are considered. Last is section eight, consisting of the references.

1.3 Virtual work defined

Virtual work is a multidimensional concept that has been given several definitions throughout the years (McCloskey & Igarria, 2003). In 1973, Jack Nilles a rocket scientist, coined the term ‘telecommuting’ (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). When introduced by Nilles, it referred to aspects such as reducing air pollution and traffic (Nilles, 1975; Raiborn & Butler, 2009), whilst later it became termed as teleworking and comprised any work performed virtually. Hence, shifting the meaning from a travel process to boundaryless work arrangements in virtual spaces. (Baruch, 2001; Benhamou, 2018; Burke & Ng, 2006; Ince, 2013; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Thus, this concept includes both the virtual spaces per se, and the individuals operating within them (Chatzoglou et al., 2009). In more recent years, people have talked about virtual platforms and technological opportunities, in which this way of working is included. Therefore, it is now associated with the term ‘virtual’. Thus, introducing a third name for the concept; virtual work. Virtual work will hence be the used term in this study and reflect the

description of being able to work from anywhere anytime, and in the context for this study, from home (Auer, 2021; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Benhamou, 2018; Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Gorse et al., 2020; Mello, 2007; Müller & Niessen, 2019; Neufeind et al., 2018; Vernon, 2007).

2. Previous research

When scanning previous research, five main perspectives of virtual work could be identified: technological, office and cost-savings, flexibility and work-life balance, employee discretion and socio psychological. In this section, these are presented to pose an illustration of how virtual work has been studied before and how the future of virtual work has been previously anticipated.

2.1 Technological perspective

The prevailing technological development has been said to cause a revolution to take place, moving from phones and fax machines, towards information technology, allowing white collar workers to work from home (Chen & McDonald, 2015; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Khanna & New, 2008; Mello, 2007; Wojcack et al., 2016). This technological development has been debated to be one of the most critical elements of virtual work and has hence been explained to be the driver behind the move towards virtual work as the new normal way of working. This argument is based on the claim that technology is essential for the integration of virtual work and thus for making it successful. Commonly, this is followed by the statement that without the right and sufficient information and communication technologies (ICT), it is not feasible to move employees out of the office space into other alternative locations. This line of reasoning often ends in the conclusion that technology is therefore the main determinant for the future diffusion of virtual work (Dittes et al., 2019; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Hoffman, 2002; Illegemens et al., 2001; Lewis, 2013; Perez & Sanchez, 2003).

Further, virtual work is an organizational phenomenon. Therefore, it has been argued that the organizational structure must be designed in such a way that technology can make up for all the essential aspects of work when entering virtual spaces (Benhamou, 2018; Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Khanna & New, 2008; Perez & Sanchez, 2003; Shin et al., 2000). Taking the perspective of Alexander (1997) and his study concerning virtual boundary management, he sheds light to the importance that digital tools and systems need to cover up for the physical presence at the office. Particularly, that the digital tools should provide the necessary interactions that the physical workplace offers, but through advanced technology (Alexander, 1997). In this respect, Illegemens et al. (2001) illustrates that moving from an office space to virtual work leads to a change in information flows. In detail, it tends to move from more complex communication patterns to a one-way path. To ensure that the efficiency remains from a virtual space, ICT should hence be as comprehensively developed as possible so that the

communication patterns and information flows can stay complex, allowing interactions to be equivalent to when employees are being physically present at the office (Alexander, 1997; Illegemens et al., 2001). In line with this, it has been stated that technology must ensure that all essential work tasks can be performed at home to make virtual work successful and thus cause a greater diffusion (Perez & Sanchez, 2003; Mello, 2007; Müller & Niessen, 2019). In other words, scholars manifest that both the design of the work systems must fit the organization and the work tasks, but also that the employees are offered the right hardware and digital tools. Altogether, these two factors have been explained to determine how employees get their work done and what tasks that can be performed virtually (Contreras et al., 2020; Harpaz, 2002; Müller & Niessen, 2019).

Other researchers have taken another standpoint within the technological perspective of virtual work, arguing that one must recognize that it is not only the technology that demands investments, but also a well-functioning support for assistance whenever difficulties arise. From an organizational perspective, this could be considered a costly investment. Nevertheless, it has been concluded that technology and the surrounding costs is a necessary investment that will determine the outcome of virtual work (Barron, 2007; Bentley et al., 2016; Bosua et al., 2013; Burke & Ng, 2006; Khanna & New, 2008; McCloskey & Igarria, 2003; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Additionally, scholars have argued that workplaces must go through this technological revolution in terms of turning to technological solutions and advancement to stay competitive and survive in their context (Contreras et al., 2020; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Khanna & New, 2008; Wojcak et al., 2016). Several researchers mean that digital work does not hinder the organization's productivity, but instead intensifies it, if employees receive the right tools and hardware (Crandall & Gao, 2005; Green et al., 2003; Hesse & Grantham, 1991; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). In either way, this previous argumentation for technology has been shown to be built upon the belief that virtual work is less likely to be long lasting without investing in technology.

Deriving from the explanations of technology as the driver of virtual work, it is argued that digital development has allowed employees to increasingly turn to virtual spaces. However, this has not been the most general way of working before the pandemic (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Green et al., 2003). Thus, indicating that organizations have not left their traditional way of working to the degree that was already anticipated in the 1970s' (Nilles, 1975; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Toffler, 1980). As Allen et al. (2015) puts it, telework has traditionally solely

been used temporarily when needed, posing a shift towards today when employees are working from home to a much greater extent due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

2.2 Office and cost-savings perspective

The emergence of virtual work has initiated office changes to take place. These changes have been said to result in organizations encountering the possibility of cost-savings in terms of lower estate costs by the decreasing need to house as many employees as previously. These estate savings have been explained to be the outcome of both having employees working from home permanently, but also, from employees working from home part time (Dittes et al., 2019; Barron, 2007; Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Harpaz, 2002; Perez & Sanchez, 2003; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). This part time virtual working can take the form of employees e.g., booking rooms when coming into the office. Hence resulting in a decreased need for space (Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Perez & Sanchez, 2003). Additionally, the argumentation for these cost-savings does not simply refer to the estate costs per se, but further reduced operational costs in terms of taxes and maintenance too (Barron, 2007; Mello, 2007; Harpaz, 2002). Therefore, shedding light on reduced office-costs as an explanation for why organizations choose to work virtually.

Furthermore, when implementing virtual work and thus moving employees into virtual spaces, scholars have empathized that employees encounter a new way of working without their normal structure and routines that a physical organizational presence entail (Grubert et al., 2018; Standen, 2000). Thus, leading to the argument that the physical change that virtual work encompasses must be taken into consideration to make sure that the work environment stays satisfactory (Ellison, 2012; Janneck et al., 2018, Mello, 2007). An important factor of this is the office equipment. Referring to that employees that work from home suffer from a higher ergonomic risk, making it essential that these employees receive the same ergonomic standards of office equipment in terms of e.g., desks, chairs, lamps, and screens as those working at the office (Ellison, 2012; Mello, 2007; Robertson et al., 2003). To avert this ergonomic risk, it has been suggested that it is of interest for employers to formulate ergonomic standards and guidelines for virtual workers where employers make sure that necessary equipment for every employee's preferences and needs are provided. This logic departs from the fundament of employees' health, as this is vital for organizations in terms of costs, due to that a healthy workforce is also a cost-efficient workforce (Ellison, 2012; Janneck et al., 2018; Robertson et

al., 2003). Again, highlighting the cost-efficiency aspect of office changes as a determinant for extended virtual work.

When looking further at the differing conditions between traditional office spaces and home office spaces, it has been stated that traditional office spaces are commonly designed to reduce disturbing characteristics and provide official structure and habits. Accordingly, causing a debate of whether the home office environment can guarantee this to the same extent or not. Hence, posing an explanation for why the office changes and cost-efficiency provided by virtual work have not caused this way of working to emerge as anticipated by others (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Grubert et al., 2018; Jenneck et al., 2018; Müller & Niessen, 2019; Standen, 2000). This argumentation has been elaborated as that the office is constructed by the employer and its sole purpose is to provide a space for working whilst the home environment is a place where the individual has his or her whole life. Thus, meaning that it can be troublesome to find a good place for working at home. Therefore, unfolding in the statement that the office space could be a more suitable place to avoid stress factors that are related to the individual's personal life (Clark, 2000; Jenneck et al., 2018; Kossek et al., 2006; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Nevertheless, some researchers have countered these arguments by instead shedding light on the fact that some office spaces may be very noisy and in these cases the home environment may be the better option. The entering of open office landscapes is one example of this line of reasoning. Namely, the increasing reports that employees working in these open landscapes are being disturbed in their work as they are frequently being interrupted and distracted by different interference variables (Banbury & Berry, 2005; Ferrell & Kline, 2018). Building on this discussion in a more general manner, fewer interactions take place in the home context, thus eliminating the potential disruption this would bring (Ferrell & Kline, 2018; Grubert et al., 2018; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Consequently, ending up in the logic that this could result in employees being more efficient when working from home and thus entail the outcome of higher productivity (Tunyaplin et al., 1998). Therefore, illustrating the polarized explanations for the future outcome of virtual work within this perspective.

2.3 Flexibility and work-life balance perspective

When scanning previous research regarding virtual work, one can see that flexibility is a factor that has been related to this way of working since it first emerged as a concept (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Flexibility has thus been the most highlighted benefit of, and driver, for integrating virtual work. When researchers have presented flexibility as a

desirable outcome of virtual work it has been described from the employee perspective as allowing employees to find a feeling of empowerment in terms of deciding their own work times and structure (Allen et al., 2015; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Raghuram et al., 2001). Additionally, that employees are given more freedom to follow their own ‘time clocks’ which can lead to an improvement in productivity, efficiency, and lower perceived levels of stress (Green et al., 2003; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; McCloskey & Igarria, 2003; Mello, 2007). From the organizational point of view, virtual work has been illustrated as a way for organizations to better adapt to external challenges and to utilize employees independent of time and space (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Contreras et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2010; McDonnell, 2011; Mello, 2007; Neufeind et al., 2018). Both these perspectives of opportunities associated to flexibility that derives from virtual work have hence been related to the possibility of having employees working from other spaces than the office spaces (Allen et al., 2015; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Perez & Sanchez, 2003; Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

This further leads on to the aspect of commuting, meaning that work located from home reduces the commuting for employees (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Green et al., 2003; Kossek et al., 2010). The commuting aspect of virtual work has been described to bring flexibility for employees in terms of reduced time spent on travelling to work. Thus, leading to the argumentation of that working from home is said to be beneficial in terms of reduced costs in connection to less commuting, food, and clothing, referred to as a ‘virtual raise’ for employees (Hill et al., 2003; Kelly, 1988; Kossek et al., 2006; Raiborn & Butler, 2009; Van Wee, 2013). Furthermore, reduced commuting has been said to bring favorable outcomes in terms of decreased carbon footprints both for the individual and the organization as both the daily travels and international business travels can be scaled down. Consequently, ending up in the argument of that virtual work therefore positively contributes to environmental aspects too (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2013; McCloskey & Igarria, 2003; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Moreover, increased flexibility and reduced commuting are argued to expose the possibility for organizations to reap new talent that would not have been accessible if home-based working would not be prevalent. Therefore, arguing that employees in non-urban areas would be more prone to apply for jobs located longer from their home. This further lays the path to that virtual work could bring the opportunity for employees to move to more rural areas, and also to live in one city, but embracing the opportunities of another one (Muhammad et al., 2008; Nilles, 1975; Van Wee, 2013). Accordingly, suggesting that organizations can access larger talent pools, offering more and new talent (Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009).

Another opportunity with enhanced flexibility has been argued to be that the employees gain more free time per day to spend e.g., with their family and generally on their personal life (Allen et al., 2015; Baruch, 2000; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Further, this leads on to the concepts of work-life balance and work-family conflict. Previous research has concluded that one of the most common problems in Western societies is that employees are not having a good balance between work, family, and personal life. Thus, meaning that they do not have a sufficient work-life balance and may experience work-family conflicts, which causes distress for employees and therefore also organizations (Gálvez et al., 2012). Looking further into the concept of work-life balance, virtual work is said to pose a shift from clear lines between work and life, to becoming more blurry, as traditional boundaries change (Ashforth et al., 2000; Dittes et al., 2019; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). There have been polarized arguments for whether virtual work brings benefits regarding this. On the one hand, it has been said that having the opportunity to work from home could be a solution for this problem, and as follows, increasing the individual's experienced work-life balance. Thus, implementing virtual work has been argued to bring favorable outcomes considering these aspects (Green et al., 2003; Mello, 2007; Perez & Sanchez, 2003). However, on the other hand, it has been shown that along with this blurred line, family and personal life is increasingly more likely to interfere with work, as well as the other way around (Clark, 2000; Kossek et al., 2006). In this sense, virtual work has been identified as a potential factor for work-family conflicts (Mello, 2007). Besides that, the vaguer distinction between these two contexts could also lead to longer working hours, as one cannot 'walk away from work' (Raiborn & Butler, 2009). These negative aspects of virtual work have been countered by the advocacy that organizations can provide and encourage healthy and safe habits concerning working hours as a solution to this. These recommendations could be to inspire workers to work within normal office hours and to take regular breaks, to achieve a healthy life situation (Adamovic, 2018; Chen & Fulmer, 2018).

Having a better work-life balance through increased free time has also been shown by other scholars to result in a lower tendency to experience work-family conflicts. Explained by that more time spent on family duties leads to better family relations. Ultimately, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction for the individual (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Raghuram & Wiesenfeld, 2004). Less family conflicts have been argued to be of importance for organizations as it has been shown that when employees experience that they cannot meet their family obligations, their turnover intention rises. In other words, the turnover rate in organizations is likely to increase when employees experience their work-life balance to be

insufficient (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Noonan et al., 2007). Altogether, this reasoning ends up in the claim that the satisfaction from having a good work-life balance can take the form of increased efficiency and productivity. Thus, generating important aspects for revenue and competitive advantage for organizations (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012; Green et al., 2012). Further, researchers have concluded that new strategies are needed for managing these new boundaries for avoiding the potential drawbacks when all aspects of life are integrated (Contreras et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2003; Mirchandani, 1999).

2.4 Employee discretion perspective

Virtual work is as already described an organizational phenomenon, meaning that a shift in organizational structure and overall design of work is needed when moving from the office location into virtuality. Namely, changing focus from where and when work should be conducted, to how and what work tasks that should be performed (Alexander, 1997; Dittes et al., 2019; Illegems et al., 2001; Wiesenfeld, 1999). Furthermore, it has been claimed that virtual work poses an adjustment in practices that concerns managerial activities, such as control and monitoring towards enhanced autonomy and responsibility for employees (Alexander, 1997; Green et al., 2003; Mello, 2007; Nilles, 1975; Raghuram et al., 2003). Consequently, explained as that the overall employee discretion must be magnified when employees physically move away from their managers. Hence, the managers must accordingly be aligned with this new way of working, meaning that they understand the changes in management it brings. Ultimately, resulting in a need for mutual trust between employees and managers to make this new decentralized work design succeed. Further, bringing forward the argumentation of that managers can be a hinder for the emergence of virtual work if not onboard with the changes in structure and control that it dispatches (Mello, 2007; Raghuram et al., 2003; Raiborn & Butler, 2009; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Altogether it has been described that virtual work advocates independence among employees. Thus, allowing them to decide more over themselves, which is said to commonly cause a perception of psychological work control to arise. Research has shown that many employees treasure this autonomy, and it has been said to result in generally higher job-satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009; Wojcak et al., 2016). Hence, shedding light to the benefit of increased retention of talent (Illegems et al., 2001; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003; Mello, 2007; Harker Martin & Macdonnell, 2012). Moreover, scholars have stated that when organizations give their employees increased autonomy, it commonly initiates a feeling for the employee that the organization trusts him or her. This feeling of being trusted has in turn been

proved to enhance the employee's psychological commitment towards the organization. Hence relating to the increased retention that follows from higher employee discretion (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Harker Martin & Macdonnell, 2012; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Following this presented argumentation, the autonomy that virtual work entails is declared to bring rigorous positive outcomes, if handled in a good way. Consequently, meaning that it would encourage a further implementation of virtual work as the future way of working (Clear & Dickson, 2005; Harker Martin & Macdonnell, 2012; Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009).

Nonetheless, scholars have shown that there is no 'one-way fits all'. Employees differ in individual characteristics where some are more appropriate for working this way than others, and hence also need to be more or less supported by the organization to thrive in this context. Specifically, it has been claimed that some individuals entail more agile characteristics and prefer having more responsibility, whilst it can instead cause a feeling of ambiguity among others. Thus, indicating a preference for having a managerial presence and not working from a distance (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Frone, 1990; Shaffer et al., 1999; Raghuram et al., 2003). Further, Raghuram et al. (2003) have demonstrated that when individuals that are not fit for working remotely are put in these roles, organizations are plausible to suffer from cost-inefficiency. Nevertheless, researchers have posed that organizational support can decrease these negative effects. Many scholars have made the case that it is the organization's responsibility to implement and provide the needed support through communication practices to guide employees when working in these virtual spaces. When carried out in a good manner, it is plausible that the feeling of ambiguity will be reduced, and increased autonomy would again be something that generates positive outcomes (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Green et al., 2003; Madlock, 2013; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003; Nilles, 1975; Raghuram et al., 2003). This line of reasoning is especially true in ambiguous and novel contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as these contexts initiates an increased need for community and affiliation (Gump & Kulik, 1997; Sarnoff & Zimbardo, 1961; Takeuchi et al., 2009; WHO, 2021).

3.5 Socio psychological perspective

Turning to the socio psychological work environment of virtual work, the most commonly expressed claim within this perspective is that employees get detached from their normal physical context and time constructions when leaving their organization's physical office (Müller & Niessen, 2019; Standen, 2000). Along with this, several aspects that change when entering spaces where other individuals are not physically present have been identified. The core aspect of these is the one of social isolation, as individuals move from daily physical

interactions to lower social stimuli when moving into home offices (Alexander, 1997; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Illegems et al., 2001; Mello, 2007). In more detail, that virtual work leads to minimized levels of media richness, such as facial expressions and body language (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Further, Alexander (1997) and, Ferrell and Kline (2018), have raised that the face-to-face interactions occurring in traditional workspaces also decreases when entering virtual spaces, which in turn could lead to less information sharing, trust, and collaboration between colleagues. Hence, changing the prior group dynamics within teams and the overall organization (Mello, 2007). Moreover, another highlighted risk with social isolation is employees perceiving a lack of organizational identity and belonging (Belle et al., 2015; McCloskey & Igarria, 2003). In other words, the physical distancing could lead to a mental distance as well, which could harm the organization in terms of both lower organizational commitment but also lower efficiency in terms of teamwork. Therefore, posing an explanation for why virtual work has not yet been implemented to the extent anticipated by other scholars (Alexander, 1997; McCloskey & Igarria, 2003; Mello, 2007).

Researchers have countered the previously presented arguments by pinpointing that the level of trust employees share with each other is an effective tool for overcoming these barriers and to minimize employees' feelings of social isolation. To succeed in this manner, organizations need to have techniques and tools for assuring that the openness within the organization remains (Breuer et al., 2016; Ferrell & Kline, 2018; Germain et al., 2014; Rosen et al., 2007). For example, Green et al. (2003) shows that having more occurring meetings is an imperative initiative for remote employees to compensate for the lack of informal interactions. Additionally, it has been argued that face-to-face interactions are not always the most feasible option and that virtual interactions instead can be better suited in some cases (Ferrell & Kline, 2018). Further, Bentley et al. (2016) investigated the role of organizational social support and specific support for teleworkers in their qualitative study. This study was carried out by using social isolation as a mediating variable. They found that it is essential that teleworkers, i.e., virtual workers, receive sufficient support specifically directed towards them. But also, organizational support in general for building a satisfactory environment for the virtual workers, to achieve the possibility to reap the benefits that virtual work entails (Bentley et al., 2016). Moreover, it has been shown that organizational support is a standing critical element no matter what life situation individuals find themselves in, meaning that it is an adamant part for making virtual work successful (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Kraimer et al., 2001; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

When looking further into this perspective, it has been posed that virtual work can bring favorable changes in the social aspect in terms of team constellation, geographical limitations, and equal opportunities (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Ferrell & Kline, 2018). Hence, it has been illustrated that having well-designed techniques for managing social aspects of virtual work can bring rigorous positive outcomes instead of causing negative features to emerge. Firstly, it has been claimed that teams that are virtual and hence not bound to a context can be better matched in terms of personalities and competencies as the constraints due to location ceases. Therefore, suggesting an improvement both socially and in terms of productivity for employees (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Ferrell & Kline, 2018; Mello, 2007). Further, the resolution of geographical limitations that traditional office spaces manifest has been said to present better conditions for employees that may be more introverted. This has been argued to be a consequence of that everyone when working virtually has equal conditions concerning access to managers, ability to contribute and, to show their talent. Thus, indicating a more inclusive social environment within organizations (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Mellahi & Collings, 2010). Henceforth, advocating why virtual work is to be the future way of working (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Ferrell & Kline, 2018; Mellahi & Collings, 2010).

To meet both sides of the debate, it has been initiated that the best version of working virtually is the hybrid one. In other words, that employees work from home certain days a week and are present at the office other days, to be able to reap the benefits of both different ways of working (Contreras et al., 2020; Bentley, 2014; Bentley et al., 2016). However, Bentley (2014) suggests that more evidence is needed before this can be considered a general fact.

2.6 Concluding remark

Altogether, these presented perspectives of virtual work all hold benefits, shortcomings, and solutions. Hence, illustrating that the existing body of research is conflicting. Some are arguing that the implementation of virtual work leads to cost-savings and hence cause a positive attitude among employers (Barron, 2007; Harpaz, 2002; Khanna & New, 2008), while some are arguing that the decrease of social stimuli causes the employees to hold negative attitudes towards virtual work (Alexander, 1997; Mello, 2007). With this in mind, previous research seems to derive from the understanding that in order for virtual work to become the new normal in organizations, employees and employers must see pre-determined benefits with this way of working. Further, these perspectives appear to derive from a general approach without considering how these factors unravel in specific organizations. Therefore, offering the opportunity to investigate how all these factors unfold in practical actions and decisions within

specific organizations to reach a better understanding. By doing so, one might see how and why these factors unfold differently and thus impacts the establishment of virtual work, causing this research field to be adverse. Moreover, this presented research has one overarching thing in common, it has all been carried out in a context where virtual work was voluntary. Now however, the transition to virtual work has been enforced upon organizations as a consequence of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. Leaving us at where we are today, with a majority of employees working virtually and a suspense of its future. But also, with the ability to study virtual work in a new manner. Namely, to investigate how virtual work has unraveled in practical terms within organizations, and how this may have caused virtual work to become the new normal or not.

3. Theoretical framing

In this section, the organizational path dependence: a process view framework will be presented. Firstly, the framework will be described. Secondly, limitations and critique of the framework will be discussed. Thereafter, its relevance for the research aim will be introduced. Lastly, its analytical application is elaborated.

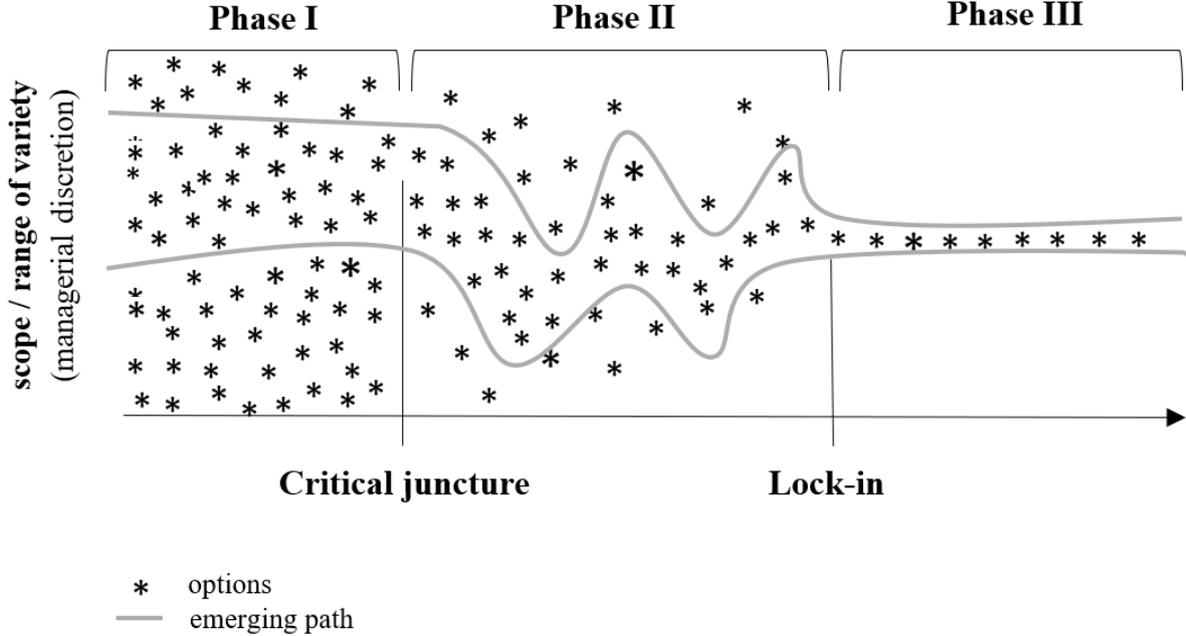
3.1 Organizational path dependence: a process view framework

The organizational path dependence framework is developed by Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) and builds on the seminal work by Paul David (1985) and Brian W. Arthur (1994). This framework derives from path dependence theory and builds on the understanding that self-reinforcing mechanisms drive forward a process for path dependence that will eventually lead to lock-in where organizations are found in a state where organizational decisions and choices can be predicted. The process of becoming path dependent is said to emerge through three phases, the preformation phase, the formation phase, and the lock-in phase (see Figure 1). The first phase, the preformation phase, is characterized by a broad scope of action and manifests itself as the phase where choices and decisions cannot be predicted. Nevertheless, these choices are influenced by initial conditions and/or prior events, meaning that history matters. When a choice and thus a decision has been made it can seem like a small event, but it may set off the self-reinforcing process. This can be referred to as a critical juncture, setting off the self-reinforcing process and thus ending the preformation phase. When entering the second phase, the dynamics of self-reinforcing mechanisms take the lead, and a certain preferred action pattern has taken form. Consequently, the process becomes more and more irreversible, meaning that an organizational path has begun to emerge. However, decisions are not yet fully predictable even if they are not accidental anymore. The dominant pattern that has emerged in phase two, gets locked-in in phase three. Hence, the process is now bound to a certain path and choices are more or less predictable, leaving some scope for variation within the replication of the path. There is a prevalent risk connected to becoming locked-in as it may cause inefficiency due to that organizations may become less prone to adapt to new emerging circumstances that would grant more benefits (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011). Nevertheless, external shocks in terms of crisis and alike are sources for path dissolution. Namely, consolidating factors that may lead organizations to break out from an existing path into a new one. Therefore, referring to that an external lens can bring potential path creation. However, actors within organizations must act on these external forces for a new path to emerge. Otherwise, the old path is likely to keep being reinforced. Thus, the already existing self-reinforcing processes that

led to a lock-in in the first place will not be interrupted and still be prevalent and active (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow et al., 2020).

Figure 1

The construction of an organizational path inspired by Sydow et al. (2009).



At the very core of the process in this framework, four major self-reinforcing mechanisms can be found. These are the main drivers towards organizational path dependence, namely, coordination effects, complementary effects, learning effects, and lastly adaptive expectation effects. Self-reinforcing mechanisms drive the process of path-formation. The logic behind these four mechanisms is founded on the conception of increasing returns as expressed by Arthur (1989; 1994) and a continuum of positive feed-back loops (Beyer, 2010). Thus, all these mechanisms are founded on the belief that they emerge as a result of cost-efficiency and positive feed-back loops. The first mentioned effect is driven by the favorable outcomes that rule-guided behavior brings about. Through actors' increasing use of organizational rules and routines, behavior can be anticipated in advance, and processes and interactions become more efficient. Hence, the more rules and routines are practiced, the more attractive it becomes in the perception of other individuals to follow them too. Altogether, resulting in that coordination costs can be decreased. Secondly, the complementary effects refer to when two or more resources that are separated are becoming integrated and together in synergy add further value than they would have alone. When activities are interrelated, the fit between these is leading to more cost-efficient solutions compared to having them separated. Further, combining these

interrelated activities does not simply refer to combining activities to add the value of them, but that the interconnectedness instead adds value beyond that. Ultimately, resulting in that it is more beneficial and attractive to utilize the synergy between interrelated resources, activities, and routines. Thus, leading to that the interrelatedness of activities becomes more dominant and integrated into the organizational structure. Moving further, the learning effect derives from the fact that what we do the most, we learn to do the best and hence most efficient. Showing that the more effort that is put into one activity, the less prone we are to change focus. This is due to that by practice comes skills, the more we perform a certain task, the more faultless the process will be. Hence, resulting in cost-efficiency and that the learnt process promises certain revenue. The last mechanism refers to preferences that develop as responses to the expectations of others. Specifically, that the more others expect an individual to prefer something, the more prone this individual is to find it appealing. Therefore, this mechanism is founded on individuals' desire to belong to the winning side, meaning that they are willing to adapt to certain circumstances because they believe others will do so too (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011).

3.2 Limitations and critique

One limitation of this framework is that all companies are not path dependent, indicating that the framework cannot be applied to all companies. However, one must recognize that path dependency is a process. Even if organizations have not yet reached the state of lock-in, the theory can uncover underlying processes that display a tendency to move towards a lock-in (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011). Hence, the theory can be used in terms of understanding the underlying mechanisms that cause changes, i.e., adjustments, to be deemed as drivers or not. Previous research has also posed critique towards the inefficiency aspect of path dependence. Referring to the fact that when an organization becomes path dependent it may result in inefficiency as other emerging alternatives that would have been more beneficial to adopt will not be taken into consideration. With that being said, these critics argue that the role of agency is left out, resorting to that individuals may avert from the path (Staw & Gartland, 2003). These critics pose 'mindful deviation' as an explanation of this divergence, which means that individuals instead can bring value to new unexplored paths, hence exerting path creation (Agogué et al., 2012; Staw & Gartland, 2003). However, when consulting Sydow et al. (2009), and Sydow and Schreyögg (2011), one can see that this underlying assumption concerning path dependence was considered when developing their organizational path dependence framework. Sydow et al. (2009) clearly states that there can be a deliberate break of an organizational path,

but that the alternative must be a superior one. Therefore, agency is not forgotten, and the assumption of inefficiency being predetermined is averted. Above all, Sydow and Schreyögg's (2011) framework derives from an organizational perspective, meaning that lock-ins are not a path that cannot be changed, but rather includes organizational dynamics such as decision making.

Looking deeper into the agency critique, one can see that this further is clearly misdirected as agency is prevalent in every step of the process of path creation. For example, in the preformation phase, where the path creation sets off as a result from actions. Hence, referring to actors practicing agency in terms of decisions and actions (Sydow et al., 2020). The inefficiency argument can likewise be countered in other ways than presented above. For example, by looking at the strategic management scholars, specifically, the resource-based view (RBV). Path dependence has in RBV scholars been presented as a way to differentiate and to create value as the historical synergy of capabilities within organizations is a source for heterogeneity. Thus, generating competitive advantage (Sydow et al., 2020).

3.3 Relevance for the research aim

The organizational path dependence framework can be used to analyze how virtual work becomes the new normal way of working in organizations. By identifying self-reinforcing mechanisms within organizations, it is possible to analyze how some activities become more persistent than others by observing positive feed-back loops and cost-efficiency (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011). Hence, this framework offers the opportunity to determine whether captured adjustments can be deemed to have been drivers during the establishment of virtual work within the case organization. Therefore, posing the opportunity to build a better understanding for how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations by investigating the process of the establishment of virtual work.

It is important to notice that the framework derives from an organizational perspective (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011). As it is the employees that make up for the greatest part of organizations, the data collection in this study focuses on the employees. Further, employees compose an important part of an organization's structure and influence, making them active actors practicing organizational choices and decisions. Consequently, connecting to the earlier expressed need to develop an understanding for the very practical mechanisms within organizations that affect how virtual work comes about. Hence, uncovering the possibility to find an alternative explanation for the future of virtual work by identifying

actions triggering a path creation. Namely, to understand how virtual work becomes the new normal.

Further, it has been expressed that there is a need to investigate the perspective of individuals' role concerning organizational path dependence. Specifically, to analyze individuals' responses to organizational arrangements and learning habits as individuals constitute a great part of the pattern building process in organizations (Sydow et al., 2009). Previous research concerning path dependence have not focused on individuals' role of path dependence to a great extent, but rather concern areas such as innovation (Rosario Perello-Marin et al., 2013), organizational decline (Heine & Rindfleisch, 2013), career development (Dlouhy & Biemann, 2018), strategic inertia (Carvalho et al., 2018), dynamics of industrial space (Yang et al., 2021), and organizational culture (Staber, 2011). The limited amount of existing research that focuses on the individuals' role of path dependence do not focus on individuals from an organizational perspective, but rather from an individualistic point of view, reflecting individuals own paths (Dlouhy & Biemann, 2018). Therefore, further indicating a gap in the research area concerning the role of individuals in path formation from an organizational perspective, which is the focus of this study.

3.3.1 Analytical application

This framework constituted the analytical foundation for the empirical findings in this study. Hence, it was applied to reach an understanding of how virtual becomes the new normal in organizations through a process view approach by looking at actions and decisions. Thus, the gathered data in this study was analyzed by identifying adjustments taking place over time and by determining if these could be considered to have triggered self-reinforcing mechanisms. Therefore, to investigate if these adjustments could be perceived to be drivers and thus to have caused a path creation to take place (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011; Sydow et al., 2020). Ultimately, to explain the continuing of virtual work post the pandemic within the case organization. Thus, also shedding light to the important role individuals' actions and decisions plays in anticipating virtual work going forward. Accordingly, stressing the framework's compatibility with the aim of this study.

4. Methodology

The following section introduces the methodological choices: the rationale behind the research design, setting and sample, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. Beyond that, ethical considerations are presented.

4.1 Rationale behind the research design

The purpose of this study was to create a better understanding of how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. This understanding was reached by analyzing how employees had made sense of practical adjustments during the establishment of virtual work. A qualitative methodology was chosen for this case study, as this research design derives from the foundation that one creates value by understanding, rather than measuring correlations among variables (Lewis, 2014). Furthermore, this research design empathizes exploring how individuals make sense of their social realities through behaviors and experiences (Bryman, 2011), which further stresses the fit between the aim and this methodology. Additionally, this method offers the possibility to examine and investigate aspects that individuals have the greatest insight within, in an open-ended and in-depth manner. Moreover, as the purpose of this study demonstrates a gap within the research field, it is more reasonable to first conduct a qualitative study to reach an understanding, than to start by measuring similarities and differences among several cases (Bryman, 2011; Charmaz, 2014; Lewis, 2014). Further, it is favorable to conduct case studies when investigating unexplored areas of a research field. Thus, also when investigating previously unfamiliar explanations for known occurrences. In addition, in-depth case studies are said to bring beneficial aspects when searching for a deeper understanding of phenomenon in particular settings. Hence, illustrating the relevance of conducting a case study for the presented purpose of this study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

An abductive approach was carried out in the study, meaning that a continuous comparison between theory and empiricism was carried out. The aim of adopting this abductive approach was to assure constant reflections when conducting the study to reach the most plausible interpretation of the collected data. Resulting in that the conclusions reached in the study have been acquired from a reflective and iterative process between empiricism and theory throughout (Charmaz, 2014).

4.2 Setting and sample

4.2.1 Setting

The case organization for this study was chosen based on several criteria. First of all, the case is an example of an organization that quickly transitioned to virtual work to decrease the infection, which was recommended by the Swedish government after WHO had recognized COVID-19 as a pandemic (Krisinformation, 2021; WHO, 2020). In March 2020, 88-92% of the employees started to work virtually from home fulltime. Thus, providing the possibility to study a case where virtual work was enforced and widespread within an organization. This change was drastic for the organization. Before the transition, the organization had a traditional office setting with no developed structure for having a virtual workforce as virtual work was found to solely be for rare occasions. Hence, the employees were not used to working virtually from home to this great extent. This extensive change allowed the researchers to both capture the previous conditions for virtual work, and what actions and decisions within the organization that took place to adjust to the new reality of virtual work. Thus, posing a suitable venue for investigating practical mechanisms as drivers for the future width of virtual work post the pandemic. Moreover, the employees had been working virtually for one year when the study was conducted. Hence, granting the possibility to analyze the establishment of virtual work from the beginning until a year later when virtual work had become the new normal way of working. Altogether, making the organization an interesting case to analyze for the purpose of this study.

To get access to the case organization, a gatekeeper was contacted. This gatekeeper provided information for contacting an individual that held the mandate to officially accept the study. After accepting the study, this individual took the role as a contact person. Throughout the process, several meetings with the contact person took place to out-line terms for the collaboration and to provide information regarding necessities, such as sample access.

4.2.2 Sample

Since the desire was to capture how employees had made sense of adjustments during the establishment of virtual work, participants were selected through a purposive sampling. To reach a relevant sample, the employees from the chosen case organization were selected based on the criteria that they all should have been working virtually since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in March 2020 and that they should be white-collar workers. The reason for targeting white-collar workers was due to the fact that they have had a greater opportunity to work from

home than blue-collar workers (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996). Additionally, only employees situated in Sweden were targeted as they had been affected by the same governmental recommendations throughout the pandemic. These individuals were considered to be best suited to provide rich, detailed and comprehensive data for the purpose of this study. Further underlining the relevance of adopting a purposive sampling strategy (Rapley, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2014). Consequently, all units in this sample shared some features, making it homogenous (Ritchie et al., 2014).

This purposive sample was reached by the help of the contact person within the case organization. The contact person provided needed information for targeting and reaching out to the desired sample. Requests for participating in the study were sent through email in which information regarding the study and interview were given. In addition, ethical considerations were presented. Furthermore, the reached sample, i.e., the employees held different hierarchical roles, consisted of 73% men and 27% women, and the mean value for age was 39 years old. The employer representatives were from the human resource department and the employees were from the research and development department. All respondents except for two, who started to work from home in April and May 2020, started to work from home in March 2020.

4.3 Data collection

The data collection took place in two stages. Firstly, unstructured interviews with two employer representatives were carried out. These interviews were of retrospective character. Thus, the questions were formulated to capture what practical actions and decisions the employer had performed throughout the establishment of virtual work. The interviews included relevant areas of examination, formulated as themes in the interview guide, that were founded on previous research regarding virtual work (See Appendix 1). Bryman (2011) explains that unstructured interviews tend to create the atmosphere of a regular conversation, which were considered favorable as the desire was to enable the respondents to talk openly about how virtual work became established as the new normal. Thus, to ensure that no important aspects were overseen. Hence, the findings from these interviews inspired the interview guide for the next stage by shedding light to areas of interest for further data gathering.

Secondly, 27 semi-structured and open-ended interviews with the ability to ask follow-up questions were conducted. The questions in the interview guide were retrospective to capture how the employees had made sense of practical actions and decisions throughout the establishment of virtual work. Further, it contained questions that reflected the matter of the study from different angles (See Appendix 2). By using semi-structured interviews, greater

flexibility to explore certain answers, feelings, and tacit assumptions arise. Therefore, offering the possibility to reach below the surface to uncover underlying mechanisms, which were necessary for the aim of this study. Thus, entailing a gathering of more detailed data (Bryman, 2011; Charmaz, 2014; Lewis, 2014). Furthermore, the interviews were in-depth, which granted the opportunity to reach even more comprehensive data (Lewis, 2014). Consequently, this chosen data collection approach and qualitative design reflected the desire to gain a rich and deep understanding of the presented phenomena of the study. Before the 27 interviews were carried out, two pilot studies were performed to assure that the questions were adequate for the research aim and comprehensible for the interviewees. The interviews were held virtually by using the software tool Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) with video cameras to minimize the risk of missing meaningful physical expressions and other details of importance. Likewise, to keep social distance due to the on-going pandemic (Auer, 2021; Bryman, 2011; Microsoft, 2021). The choice of using MS Teams emerged as it was found that this was the integrated communication tool within the case organization. Hence, it was assumed that the employees would be most comfortable using this tool, making the interview process uncomplicated for the respondents. Thus, this is in line with Bryman's (2011) reasoning that the respondent's comfortability is beneficial in terms of the quality of the collected data.

Furthermore, the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and were between 40 and 60 minutes long. The interviews were held in English and Swedish, depending on what language the respondents were most comfortable with. Thus, resulting in six interviews being held in English and 23 in Swedish. All the interviews were later translated to English during the transcription process. The interviews were held during the month of March 2021. For the timeframe of this study, 29 interviews were initially planned with the intent that more interviews would be conducted if this would be deemed necessary to reach a satisfactory level of data saturation.

4.4 Data analysis

Data saturation was perceived to be reached when major repetitions were prevalent in the different interviews (Bryman, 2011). The interviews were recorded and transcribed word by word, other expressions such as hesitations were transcribed as well. Further, words that were non-comprehensible were marked XXX. These transcriptions were coded according to grounded theory (GT) and thematically analyzed. After the interviews had been transcribed, the coding was initiated. The coding was made in two stages, initial and focused coding. In the first stage, each sentence was coded, also called line by line coding, which allowed the researchers

to stay close to the data and to attain all details in the early stage of the coding process. The data was coded according to practical actions or decisions, demonstrating adjustments that had taken place, for example, 'learning information sharing' and 'moving to a new apartment'. Furthermore, this initial coding was carried out independently of theories to explore all possibilities for the analysis. To ensure that the initial codes remained open, no conclusions were made during this phase (Charmaz, 2014). During the initial coding, the codes were continuously compared, which both helped to sift through the data, and to set out an indication for categories during the focused coding phase. In the focused code phase, codes became narrower and more directed to explain larger parts of the data. Hence, moving from smaller, initial codes to larger, more comprehensive, and abstracted codes. This process held emergent and iterative characteristics as new ideas and insights continuously appeared when the gathered data was analyzed, which left space for reflection during the process to reach the most accurate explanation for the retrieved data (Charmaz, 2014). During the coding process, a memo was written to keep notes of emerging categories (Bryman, 2011). From these notes, it became evident that there were great similarities of how the employees had made sense of adjustments for working virtually from home. It was also evident that their attitudes had changed over time. For example, some of the focused codes that manifested these similarities were: 'sat at a temporary place in the beginning', 'moving home office to a more permanent space', 'wanting to work from home 2-3 days/week', 'being positive to working from home after a while', etc. When comparing how the employees and the employer representatives had made sense of adjustments, it was evident that there was a consensus of certain matters, such as that the employer had developed the digital systems when entering virtual spaces. This found coherence was thematically analyzed, referring to that one searches for similarities, which then constitutes abstracted themes that explains larger segments of the data (Bryman, 2011). In this case, the focused codes were grouped into different sub-themes. This thematic analysis resulted in a categorization of the employees' and employer's adjustments to virtual work. Firstly, these adjustments were divided into three categories: work procedure adjustments, work routine adjustments and physical adjustments. Physical adjustments, for example, included factors related to the employees' home office environments. Secondly, when analyzing these sub-themes, they were identified to have taken place in three different time-periods during the establishment of virtual work. The three identified time-periods manifested the main themes in this study. Thus, the main themes were: the transition towards virtual work, the exploration of virtual work and the stabilization of virtual work.

4.5 Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness consists of four different criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility, the first criteria, refers to the degree the researchers' interpretations are congruent with the findings of the study's social reality (Bryman, 2011). To reach a high credibility in this study, complete anonymity was applied throughout. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word by word, including hesitations and such. These transcriptions were assigned a number to assure that interviews were coded according to each respondent and the quotes were labelled with a number and respondent category, e.g., 'Employee 1'. When using quotes, care was taken to not reveal the identity of the respondents by not using words that were found to be specific for a certain individual. Further, all transcripts were continuously compared to make sure that the findings would reflect the social reality, e.g., adjustments that had taken place. The second criteria, transferability, concerns to the extent the findings can be generalized. Transferability is difficult to achieve when conducting case studies (Bryman, 2011). Specifically, as this case study is conducted in a unique setting. Namely, a setting where a global pandemic is occurring. Nevertheless, formal generalizability is not the only value bringing method for collecting essential knowledge to a field of research. Instead, a descriptive case study could bring important insights through exploring new aspects (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Hence, the findings of this study can still be argued to be of value for learning how temporary outbreaks causing forced actions can lead to more long-lasting changes being integrated into organizations' structure. The third criteria, dependability, concerns the consistency throughout the study and thus to which degree the reached conclusions can be justified (Bryman, 2011). In this case, the dependability was determined by the credibility and transferability. In addition, sample characteristics, such as mean age and field of work, is displayed to ensure transparency. The last criteria, confirmability, covers the objectivity of the study. Referring to which extent the findings are congruent with the respondents' statements (Bryman, 2011). Thus, reflecting to what degree the researchers have been objective and acted in good faith. To limit the researcher bias, the methodology was described in detail and awareness of limitations were shown by discussing them in the study.

4.6 Ethical considerations

The study has been conducted in line with ethical guidelines for scientific research (Bryman, 2011; Charmaz, 2014; Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). When first contacting the employees, information regarding the aim of the study, participation and non-disclosure, data collection,

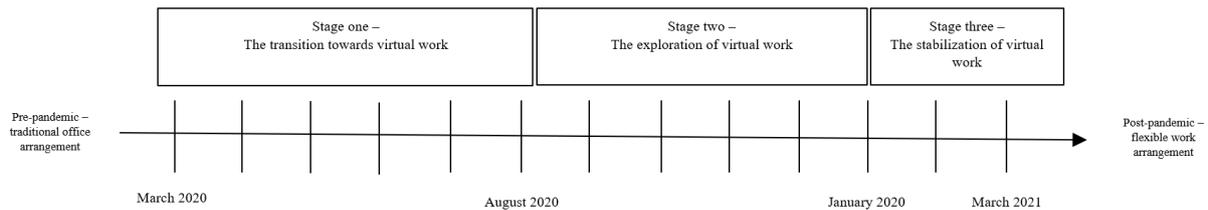
and publication of the study was given. This was to ensure that the participants knew their rights from the beginning and would feel comfortable during the interview. Before the interview started, the researchers assured that the participant had taken part of the information and asked if they had any questions. Second, no interviews were recorded without the consent of the respondent. The respondents were also notified that they could skip questions that felt uncomfortable, stop the interview at any given time, could interrupt and ask questions and for clarification, and that breaks were allowed. Third, the respondents were informed that all information obtained from the interviews would be anonymized, confidential, and deleted after the study was finalized. Fourth, the organization was anonymous to enable the participants to speak openly. Finally, both the organization and the interviewees were given access to the study when it was published. Ultimately, these described actions and attentiveness were considered appropriate for the topic of this study.

5. Empirical findings and analysis

This section consists of the empirical findings and the analysis of these. The analysis revealed that the establishment of virtual work within the organization followed three stages (see Figure 2), similar to the organizational path dependence process which Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) explain as leading to a lock-in (see Figure 1). Thus, referring to that an organization is found in a state where choices and actions can be more or less predicted. In this case, illustrating the establishment of virtual work becoming the new normal. The first stage describes the organizational state right after the transition to virtual work has been initiated. Thereafter, the second stage presents the exploration of virtual work within the organization after the transition had taken place. The third stage portrays the stabilization of virtual work to continue post the pandemic. Below, the dynamics in each stage will be analyzed in further detail.

Figure 2

The establishment of virtual work unfolding over time within the case organization.



5.1 Stage one – The transition towards virtual work

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the case organization was locked into a path of traditional working structure, i.e., working at the office. The employer responded quickly to the emerging pandemic, which caused a path dissolution to occur and a new potential path to appear. As found in this case, the one of virtual work. The employer responded in practical actions upon this new enforced reality by sending all the employees home. During this stage of the timeline, a broad range of actions and decisions that could not be anticipated in advance took place as adjustments for the transition to virtual work. In line with Sydow and Schreyögg's (2011) organizational path dependence framework, this manifests the first phase, the preformation phase.

5.1.1 Work procedure adjustments

When moving into the virtual home office, both the employees and the employer thought that this was going to last for a short period of time. Many respondents held conflicting attitudes

regarding this sudden move into virtual spaces. Some were found to be negative and nervous, while some held more relaxed attitudes. Fortunately, the employees conducted much of their work in already existing digital systems, which were expressed to facilitate the move into virtual spaces.

‘...we already had digital systems... we already worked in digital systems, so that was something... that made it easy to start working from home.’ [employee 7]

However, the employees quickly discovered that these digital systems were not functioning to a satisfactory degree, as the bandwidth was not sufficient for working at home full time. Thus, a barrier for transitioning to virtual work was prevalent. Nevertheless, the employees acted upon this by informing their employer about their difficulties. The employer responded by developing both the bandwidth and other technology as a necessity for overcoming this barrier.

‘In the beginning, the bandwidth was so bad... so the employer told us to not have our camera on and other things... but now we have better bandwidth after the employer upgraded it, so we do not have to think about that anymore.’ [employee 4]

The employees were in an exploring stage of virtual work, testing different ways of working. Therefore, a broad range of actions were playing out. As the communication at the office and at home differed to a great extent, employees started to develop new procedures for communicating with each other, such as increasingly calling and chatting through MS Teams. These new ways of communication were found to be a compensation for the lack of spontaneous conversation that happened at the office, as one employee expressed it:

‘... we have a recurring meeting that we established only to like... talk in the group, to like... make up for the lack of communication that used to ‘just happen’ at the office. We also created a chat in MS Teams where we can just write to each other... small things... really just to keep talking to each other.’ [employee 14]

The need for an improvement in communication did not pass the employer unseen. As a consequence, the employer encouraged the managers to implement more recurring meetings for their teams.

‘We, managers got the instructions that we were to test if it was good to have a recurring meeting with our team members each week instead of every other week. At first, I thought that it was a bit unnecessary, but I tried it out, and it was good, so we kept that structure. I mean... it’s valuable as the communication got so much better when implementing that.’ [employee 3]

During this stage, more meetings were generally implemented as a solution for the experienced problems regarding communication. The employees expressed that they now had many more meetings than before leaving the office space.

‘I have more meetings now, especially in the beginning after going home, we had sooo many meetings. I think that... it was like... a fast solution for the communication issue we had...’ [employee 2]

An increased accessibility was experienced when moving into virtual spaces and it was expressed to be more timesaving to contact each other now as not having to look for each other at the office. Employees started to utilize more technological functions that were accessible to them. For example, they adapted their ways of collaborating to this new digital environment by creating groups for discussions and by using screen sharing with mutual editing to a greater extent when working on tasks together. This was quickly experienced to be an efficient working procedure as everyone could follow the work process and thus still work closely together. Hence, analyzed through the lens of organizational path dependence (Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011), this was found to set off positive feed-back loops.

‘A lot of screen sharing now, we work with coding and it’s often better to just look at the code together, like when we have XXX programming, you always do that in a large team, in those cases it’s often one person who works on the code and the rest of us follows by screen sharing and thinks about solutions, or... like... how to code it... it’s very efficient.’ [employee 25]

Furthermore, it was expressed that the move into virtual spaces demanded enhanced and more instant information sharing and documentation as one could not simply approach someone at the office. Thus, this was found to be a barrier towards efficient interaction. Nevertheless, the employees started to explore new digital working procedures, as expressed by one employee:

‘Before you could just turn around and ask people... things... but you can’t do that now. So... I... I mean we discovered that we needed to get better at sharing information. So, we tried to share more information in chat groups and in other ways to try to see what worked best for us... like, what was most convenient...’ [employee 19]

Thus, it was evident that the employees responded to the perceived barrier and worked actively to find solutions for overcoming it.

5.1.2 Work routine adjustments

The employees quickly started to enjoy the enhanced flexibility that virtual work entailed. The majority who used to commute to the office expressed that they now had more time to put on

things such as sleep, family, and friends. Further, it was widely expressed that not having to get ready in the morning saved time.

‘Well, it is not like it has been a disaster, I haven't traveled that far, it took 15 minutes. But it is still 30 minutes per day... So... I gain more time to spend with the family, and that actually makes a difference. To just have 30 minutes of extra sleep per day is great as well.’ [employee 3]

Personal life and work were described to have become more integrated when entering virtual spaces. The employees described the line between work time and free time to have become blurred.

‘Work and free time... there is no clear line anymore, they blend together. Like, I can work in the evenings now, I did not do that before, but that’s just because I may have gone out during that day to... I don’t know... just do something else....’ [employee 7]

However, this was not something that was necessarily labeled as negative. Many followed this description by expressing that they preferred the enhanced flexibility. Explained as not having to adjust the days according to work anymore, but to one’s own preferences. Thus, illustrating a positive feed-back loop (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011) deriving from working virtually.

‘... in some way I like it though, I can focus more when working from home... sure I lose track of time sometimes, but that’s just because I don’t have to match others working hours anymore, I can go out in the middle of the day for a walk or for errands, I really like that... like you can decide your own days much more now, you don’t adjust your life to work... it’s more freedom and I don’t want to lose that...’ [employee 15]

At this stage, people were not yet comfortable with calling colleagues and having the camera on in MS Teams. Additionally, having social activities virtually in general was seen as unpleasant by many. Even though coffee meetings were initiated early in the process of working from home, the number of participants was low. Besides that, some employees expressed that having social interactions virtually was hard as only one person could talk at a time in MS Teams.

‘My boss has scheduled digital coffee meetings every Friday, I have never participated. That is because, when we used to have coffee meetings at the office you could sit down in smaller groups and really talk for real, but it does not work now when you are 25 persons in the same call on teams. You cannot have these smaller spontaneous conversations.’ [employee 19]

The managers were responsible for scheduling virtual coffee meetings for the employees, which were encouraged by the employer. Nevertheless, the employees did not experience the employer to have encouraged any social interaction.

‘I cannot say that I have noticed any work regarding social activities at all. I guess it would be the initiative our manager has taken to do digital coffee meetings, but otherwise, I cannot say that the organization has in any way tried to create any kind of engagement that you should hang out virtually.’ [employee 10]

Hence, the employees expressed that they did not perceive the employer to have provided support for social interaction.

5.1.3 Physical adjustments

In the very beginning of the transition towards virtual work, the vast majority of the employees did not set up an office at home, some sat e.g., in their kitchen or on the sofa while working. Nonetheless, a minority bought office equipment right away, such as office chairs and web cameras, to facilitate their working days at home.

‘When it comes to chairs, I bought an office chair almost immediately because I realized that when I sat on a regular chair I got back pain already on the first day of working from home. So... the first weekend I bought it and that one has worked well.’ [employee 17]

After working in virtual spaces for approximately two weeks, the employer offered the employees to borrow computer screens, keyboards, and other office equipment from the organization’s office space. The employees expressed that they appreciated this as it contributed to their ability to work from home in a good manner.

‘In the beginning I had my own chair and that was terrible, it felt like my back would break and fall off. But the employer was pretty fast with allowing us to borrow home an office-chair, so it was not an issue after that.’ [employee 19]

The employees quickly discovered that they were not being disrupted to the same extent as when they were working in an open office landscape at the organization. Expressed in terms of being able to be more focused while working. Along with this improvement of the working environment, the employees conveyed that they could be more productive.

‘It’s much easier to focus when working from home... at the office, we sit in an open-office landscape, so it’s harder to... focus when working. Now it’s a better workflow and easier to get into the mood like: ‘let’s do this’, so you are more productive now.’ [employee 15]

The increased productivity experienced by the employees was something that the employer quickly became aware of. The employer sent out surveys to the employees to analyze how the employees responded to this new working situation, where experienced productivity was included. Further, the employer matched the rated experiences of productivity to booked deliveries. This performance measurement showed that the experienced productivity was correct, it had increased. This feed-back from the employees was a positive surprise for the employer:

‘We’ve seen a higher level of productivity that actually surprised us. When we saw that, it gave us a picture of how virtual working was beneficial... I mean it’s... success...’
[employer representative 1]

This expressed increase of productivity deriving from the experience of being more focused when working from home, can be identified as positive feed-back loops. But also, cost-efficiency as it was found from the employer’s performance measurement that the productivity had increased after transitioning towards virtual work.

5.2 Stage two - The exploration of virtual work

When entering stage two of this timeline, the first transition towards virtual work had taken place approximately five months ago and the emerging working procedures had started to form patterns of actions and choices. Thus, manifesting a critical juncture, which illustrates the ending of the first phase of the organizational path dependence framework and the movement into the second phase of the framework, the formation phase (see Figure 1). These found action patterns indicated that self-reinforcing mechanisms had begun to unfold and to form the new emerging path towards the stabilization of virtual work. Thus, the practical adjustments carried out by the employer and the employees started to become more and more irreversible. Nevertheless, actions and choices were yet not fully predictable, but neither occasional. These patterns of actions were found to emerge in the form of the four self-reinforcing mechanisms of the organizational path dependence framework: learning effects, coordination effects, complementary effects and adaptive expectation effects (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011).

5.2.1 Work procedure adjustments

At this stage, the employees expressed that they recognized several beneficial outcomes of virtual work. All the employees who were working on an international level stated that the international collaboration had become increasingly better. They described that everyone now

had equal conditions, both in terms of accessibility and meetings. Consequently, colleagues working at the same sites no longer prioritized each other as they were not present at the same office space anymore. The procedure now was that everyone instead went through MS Teams, creating an equal ground for accessibility. When considering the meeting aspect, it was explained that before, the ones working at the same site sat together in a meeting-room while the others joined the meeting through MS Teams. Hence, the ones sitting in the same meeting room often ended up having discussions that the other ones could not follow. Thus, explained to result in barriers for international collaboration and an unequal dynamic. Now, everyone participated on equal conditions in meetings, meaning that the collaboration was expressed as being more well-functioning. Thus, illustrating that the employees had learnt to collaborate and how to coordinate international collaboration in this virtual environment.

‘... before, we sat in one room together and the other person where like we are now, in MS Teams view. The ones that sat together always discussed together and the other party could not follow the discussion... Now it’s equal conditions for everyone....’
[employee 2]

The employer noticed this improvement in collaboration between different sites as well. Explained as that the move into virtual spaces had created a common ground in terms of having equal opportunities and that this new working procedure had resulted in much better outcomes than before. Further, meaning that the combination of working through MS Teams and performing international tasks generated more value together than before when these had been separated. Thus, making it more attractive to reap the value of these routines and activities when interrelated, than when separated. As a result, what Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) refer to as a complementary effect had taken place.

‘All of our colleagues are located in other places. If you’re not located in a main office, you are more included today than before. Before, it was us that sat in this MS Teams view for them... now it’s much easier to participate than before. From that point of view, it works much better today as everyone has the same opportunity to speak up now, it’s... equal conditions.’ [employer representative 1]

Furthermore, the employees had now started to learn what working procedures were most beneficial for them to adopt when working virtually, one prominent being information sharing. Before the transition towards virtual work, the information sharing was stored in digital spaces, but there was no set or developed procedure for how and where this should be done. Hence, it was described that they went to each other at the office and asked if they could not find the information they needed. The employees described that the physical distance that working from home caused, had forced them to learn to set up rules and procedures for where information

and documentation should be stored and how this should be done. Different procedures were explained to have been repeatedly practiced until a satisfactory procedure was found. The employees further explained that they had practiced the established procedure for information sharing to such an extent that it had become increasingly efficient. Moreover, the employees expressed that they wanted to continue with this procedure because they found it to be highly beneficial. It is plausible to claim that this described learning process for information sharing caused a learning effect to unfold. This claim builds on the fact that this procedure had been practiced to such an extent that it was now known and expressed to be skillfully performed. Accordingly, it is described that individuals are less prone to leave a known skillfully performed procedure for another unknown alternative which does not promise certain value based on experience (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011).

Moreover, it was described that this learnt procedure resulted in a higher transparency, making it easier to coordinate information sharing than before moving into virtual spaces. This was explained to have led to timesaving and therefore increased productivity. Thus, it was found that the employees knew where to find information and that everyone now was following the same routine. Following the logic of the framework (Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011), a coordination effect was thus found to have taken place. This coordination effect was identified from the given illustration that it had become increasingly appealing for individuals to follow this procedure as others' actions could be anticipated in advance. Referring to that everyone knew where to find the information they needed and likewise where to store it for making it easy for others to retrieve desired information and documentation.

'... we will see if people continue to share information this way after the pandemic, I believe that it should be continued... this was a problem before and now we have found ways to do it efficiently, I... I mean, it's really beneficial.' [employee 15]

Most of the information distribution from the employer to the employees was described to be handled in the same way as before, but digitally. However, more information videos and more emails were sent to the employees to further distribute information, described as an intent to foster a feeling of organizational belonging.

'... we have our information channels within the organization, recorded videos... and physical information meetings now take place digitally... we want to create a feeling that you are a part of the organization...' [employer representative 2]

Another procedure that employees described that they had learnt by now was how to best reach out to other people virtually. When being at the office, the MS Teams function was expressed

as not having been used collectively to a great extent, which made it slow to use for communicating. However, after the transitioning to virtual work, employees had to increasingly use MS Teams and learnt that they got quicker answers when writing and calling in MS Teams than when they were being present at the office. The majority of the respondents also explained that the chat function in MS Teams now was very convenient to use when having quick questions, but also for starting a dialogue when they needed assistance in certain matters. Further, an overarching learning was found to be that it was better to communicate by calling instead of having discussions in the chat, which they had in the beginning of entering virtual work. It was further stated that the chat was good to use as an opening before calling someone.

Considering the above stated insights, it became evident that the actions towards communicating virtually had triggered a learning effect to occur. The employees were found to have learnt how to communicate over time and the more they practiced it, the better they became at doing so. In line with Sydow & Schreyögg's (2011) framework, the employees expressed that the procedure had become more efficient during the time it had been practiced. Hence, indicating that the procedure had become more faultless and thus promised to generate certain positive outcomes, expressed by the employees as increased productivity. Along with this switch into having more conversations verbally, it was also shown that people had become more comfortable with calling over time.

‘So, we call in MS Teams and discuss things that way, it is much easier than to write to each other, and thus is much more convenient. So, we call and talk, and discuss how things are going... in the beginning we wrote more than called, I think people were a bit uncomfortable calling, at least I was...’ [employee 11]

Further, when the employees discovered that it was inconvenient and not efficient to have discussions solely in the chat in MS Teams, they turned to different coordination solutions. One example of this is a team that implemented a policy called ‘call first’ with the aim of making calling the standard procedure. They expressed that difficulties were more quickly solved after implementing the policy. Ultimately, described to have increased the efficiency when working. Thus, this new rule for coordinating communication can be identified to have set off what Sydow & Schreyögg (2011) calls a coordination effect.

‘... we implemented a policy called “call first” to try to encourage people to call each other to avoid XXX and stuff... chatting when needing to discuss something was inefficient... I mean the chat is convenient for other things, but not for discussing.’ [employee 27]

Following the earlier presented sequence of events, these new learnings and the coordination of communication combined with the increased accessibility were described as leading to higher efficiency. Respondents argued that ‘people were easier to reach now’, resulting in a more immediate response when needing help etc. Hence, it was now possible to solve upcoming problems faster and thus finish work tasks quicker than before. Therefore, the activity and routines of communication in digital systems, combined with the resource of accessibility that virtual work entailed, had led to a higher value than when being at the traditional setting where resources are more separate and more difficult to combine. Thus, illustrating what Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) refer to as a complementary effect: when two or more resources that are separated are becoming integrated and together in synergy add further value than they would have alone.

‘It’s much easier to reach people now through MS Teams instead at the office. If you have a problem and need help it’s easier now to reach that person and ask for help, in that way, you solve your problems faster now and do not get “stuck” ... So, you can move on with your work quicker and be more productive...’ [employee 18]

Meetings were another aspect of working procedures that the employees expressed that they both had learnt how to manage and plan for in virtual terms. When first moving into virtual spaces, it was found that the employees experienced that they had too many meetings. It was stated that there were so many meetings that it was an obstacle for getting their own work done. However, over time they learnt how many meetings and what meetings that were necessary to have and thus what meetings that should be diminished. Hence, it was at this stage found that they had set a structure for meetings. Therefore, illustrating the self-reinforcing mechanism termed by Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) as the learning effect to have been triggered.

‘It’s been more meetings, it escalated in the beginning... I think it escalated because we booked meetings to make up for every contact we had at the physical office. So, you did not have time for your own work... We realized that we had to change this, so now we have less meetings... like meetings that are necessary and removed the rest.’ [employee 23]

When scanning the data, it was continuously found that the employees had experienced several benefits of having virtual meetings. They expressed that one did not have to look for meeting venues anymore and that it was possible to invite more people to meetings now. Consequently, it was explained that this led to a more efficient process as it was easy to plan for meetings now and that it was not necessary to have several meetings to address the same topic. Therefore, it was described to have facilitated the coordination of meetings. Furthermore, it was also expressed that the working day overall became more efficient due to that one did not have to

run between meeting venues anymore, hence causing an increase of time efficiency to arise. Thus, showing what Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) describes as a coordination effect to have taken place.

‘When you have meetings like one person to many, there’s no limit regarding how many you can invite now when you have virtual meetings, it’s easier now, like everyone can join and the information reaches all interested parties immediately, you don’t need to have multiple meetings regarding the same topic...’ [employee 8]

The employees’ experienced increase of efficiency and productivity was something that was evident for the employer as well. This was quite surprising for the employer as it was expected that the first noticed increased productivity would go down after a while.

‘... we have seen a change curve, like that you adjust and then you get fed up with it. It has passed in waves... but the productivity has remained high, which surprised us. We thought it was plausible to assume that it would decrease after a while, but it hasn’t, it has increased and stayed high...’ [employer representative 1]

The employees expressed that with the enhanced efficiency, the workload increased over time. This was described to be an effect by that they got more work done when working from home. The increased workload was described as the result of a domino effect: ‘when one gets more done, one automatically sends more tasks to others, resulting in an overall increase of work tasks’. This unintended effect gradually emerged over time. The increasing workload and the experience of enhanced productivity was said to be an outcome of the adjustment of the virtual working procedures. The employees’ experiences of a higher productivity and the employer’s measurements showing increased productivity thus provided a positive feed-back loop and cost-efficiency that derived from the earlier presented self-reinforcing mechanisms.

‘Yeah, it’s like... collective, it is like many thousands of people working within the organization.... So, it’s a collective result, one person does a bit more per day... let’s say this person needs my help or that someone asks one more question that he would normally have done and if a thousand people have it the same way, then it becomes more questions and tasks to do for everyone. So, we all have in some way increased the workload together. I mean, I have probably increased the workload for others because I get more tasks done per day now than before, and due to that I have more questions to ask or tasks to divide to others that have to be done.’ [employee 26]

The employer representatives were increasingly confident that employees would perform their tasks from home. Virtual work was described as contributing to increased autonomy and employee discretion, shown by a shift in focus among the managers from procedure to results. This shift was evident among the employees as it was described that they planned their work independently and presented their outcomes. The employer representatives explained that the

increased independence among the employees was a must when working virtually, as the employees now had a physical distance to their manager. They must be able to plan their own work and to conduct their work tasks without the need for physical supervision, as one employer representative explained:

‘... it’s definitely an increase in independence among the employees now, they have to be independent, it’s a must now, we expect them to be...’ [employer representative 1]

The employees, on the other hand, described the enhanced independence as a possibility to adapt their working procedures to the increased flexibility that derived from virtual work. As the working days were now perceived to allow more flexibility, employees claimed that they worked more when it suited them best and that they could be more efficient when working in accordance with their own ‘time clock’. Suggesting that they had learnt what working hours that suited them best in terms of when they could work most efficiently, as one employee explained:

‘It is simply like this; instead of setting an alarm in the morning that I used to do before to get to work on time, I just go up when I wake up naturally. The effect is very positive. Suddenly, I can wake up and be energized, instead of being tired and getting to work, it affects my productivity very positively. I am not a morning person and now finally I don't have to be... I don't want to lose that...’ [employee 19]

Hence, the employees planned their work in accordance with their own liking, which were explained to generate positive outcomes such as increased productivity and efficiency. This increased productivity can be seen to be a positive feed-back loop in terms of more content employees and cost-efficiency in terms of working more time-efficiently. Learning to plan work according to their own preferences can thus be seen to have triggered what Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) call a learning effect: what we do the most, we learn to do the best, and hence most efficiently.

5.2.2 Work routine adjustments

The previously enjoyed flexibility was found to have affected how the employees’ shaped their new working routines. For example, employees generally took longer breaks in the middle of the day to go for errands and walks. Further, the employees expressed that they had learned how to set more distinct boundaries between work life and private life, making it less blurry. Several employees explained that they had learned different tactics for maintaining these boundaries, such as taking walks directly after work, turning off the computer and phone notifications, and telling other family members that one’s workday was over. These new

routines were increasingly preferred, and several respondents expressed that they wanted to keep these adjusted routines as these now had become a habit. Thus, employees slowly learned how to deal with working virtually, developing new routines that allowed them to separate private and working life, in a way that was beneficial for both. The employees repeatedly expressed that they had tried different routines when first entering virtual work and now, over time, had found what routine suited them best. Followed by the description that they wanted to keep the outcomes these routines generated.

‘... I have started to structure work and say to my family when I have stopped working I tell my whole family like: I have stopped my working day for now, to like make it more decided so you get a clear end of the work day and then I basically just close the door to that room.’ [employee 21]

To support the employees, the employer presented guidelines for how to think regarding working virtually from home, touching upon subjects such as when to contact colleagues, when it is acceptable to not answer, and maximum working hours. The employer posted these guidelines called ‘way of work’ on their website.

‘... At first it was like a chaos because there were no official guidelines from the employer for how and when to work. But... like when it came guidelines, they were reasonable and I believe that it solved any problems that were prevalent, such as people expecting an answer by 11pm and alike, that was disturbing.’ [employee 16]

The guidelines reinforced the routines established among and between employees. Thus, providing a positive feed-back loop, contributing to what Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) call a coordination effect: through increasing use of organization rules and routines, behavior can be anticipated in advance, and processes and interactions become more efficient. The more these rules and routines are practiced, the more attractive it becomes in the perception of other individuals to follow them too.

‘... like it was difficult in the beginning... like before we got the way of work guidelines... you never knew when you were supposed to be present and not, so I think the guidelines really helped to solve all problems regarding these things... You know when people are present and not now...’ [employee 19]

One of the areas that still was hard to exchange from the physical office was the social interaction with colleagues when working from home. Along with time, an increasing number of activities were implemented to ease this effect, such as virtual coffee meetings, discussion forums, listening in on each other's team meetings and other social activities. After a while, the employees expressed that they had become more comfortable with interacting virtually:

‘Some doesn't like having the camera on, like it's uncomfortable, but we're trying. Like now, we have the camera on more often, we have gotten used to it.’ [employee 23]

The employer also carried out activities to keep social interaction, such as implementing larger information meetings each other week to interact with its employees and to spread information. Additionally, a few social activities such as beer tasting were provided by the employer. In the beginning of 2021, the employer started to offer monetary support for social activities to the teams to further encourage employees to maintain social contact.

‘I think the company has realized that the social aspect has suffered so they try to push for doing corona friendly things within the teams, so we are actually going to have a barbeque today.’ [employee 10]

Hence, the employer increasingly tried to improve social interaction within the organization, which the employees expressed that they now had acknowledged.

5.2.3 Physical adjustments

At this stage, the employer realized that virtual work would continue until further notice as the COVID-19 pandemic was still prevalent with no indication of an approaching end. During this period, the employer started to offer the employees to buy elevating desks which the employer would pay for. Many of the employees seized this opportunity and expressed that they were grateful to further being able to develop their working space at home into a more satisfactory one.

‘This with the elevating desks, it took a bit longer. It came like... when people realized this would last longer than just a couple of months...’ [employee 1]

The employees also described that these investments by the employer made them believe that virtual work was going to be long-lasting, and that the employer was devoted to virtual work. Along with this, the employees described that they had started to create a more ergonomic and suitable working space by themselves, to make virtual work more sustainable over time. This was carried out by for example moving into spare rooms and establishing ‘office-corners’ in their living rooms. Moreover, some interviewees started to think about moving into larger apartments and houses to gain more space to be able to set up better offices at home.

‘... after working from home for a while, I started to think like... I want to move to a larger apartment, so I have more space for a home office.’ [employee 9]

Thus, the employees adapted to make virtual work more long-lasting in terms of both setting up, and planning for a more satisfactory workspace at home.

5.3 Stage three - The stabilization of virtual work

During the prior stage, both the employer and the employees had made extensive investments that had triggered self-reinforcing mechanisms to emerge. Taking these investments into consideration, it becomes prevalent that when virtual work had been practiced for a while, both the employees and the employer had seen positive effects deriving from this way of working. Ultimately, this process was found to have led to a change of mindset to now preferring virtual work. Hence, these action patterns had become more dominant and integrated into the organization's structure. Thus, marking the entering of the third phase in the organizational path dependence framework, the lock-in (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011).

5.3.1 Work procedure adjustments

Moving into the last stage of the timeline, the employees had now practiced the new working procedures for virtual work for a while and had gotten used to this way of working. This was shown by that it was expressed that going back to the office full-time felt impossible, for example due to the increased workload. When stating so, it was explained that it felt impossible to keep the enhanced productivity at the office, elaborated as that one would again be less focused due to the open office landscape. Accordingly, anticipated to cause the found efficiency to decrease:

'... going back to the office would mean not being as efficient anymore... we would not... not be able to produce as much. Like, you would not be able to be as focused as you are now. I don't see how that would work.' [employee 27]

Therefore, illustrating that the employees now held a reluctant attitude towards going back to their traditional way of working at the office full-time.

5.3.2 Work routine adjustments

The social aspect of work was not something that the employees experienced to be satisfactory yet. Notwithstanding, this aspect was perceived as becoming increasingly better throughout this time process. However, it was not virtual work that was expressed as being the main barrier towards achieving sufficient social interaction. The employees continuously expressed that the pandemic was the main factor that put boundaries on their social life in general.

'I mean, it is boring during a pandemic. Things that you could do before you don't do anymore, you are home now. Sometimes you may meet some friends to go for a walk, but not much more than that. But I mean... that has to do with the pandemic.' [employee 16]

Further, there was a general expectation that the social aspect would significantly improve when the pandemic was over.

‘... after the pandemic I think that we will meet up more, like go out for after works’ or go bowling or something, like we used to do before. So... I’m sure we will see each other even if we work from home...’ [employee 20]

Thus, clearly indicating that the employees held a positive perception of that the social aspect would improve post the pandemic, even if working virtually.

5.3.3 Physical adjustments

During this time-period, the employer started to display the results from the surveys that had earlier been sent out to the employees. The main result that the employer shed light on was that the majority wanted to work from home two-three days a week going forward.

‘Now when the employer has asked questions, like “how do you, or, how would you like that we worked after the pandemic” it was like 80% of the workforce that wanted to work like 2-3 days a week from home.’ [employee 1]

It was found that the vast majority of the employees were positive towards virtual work and had found it to be a pleasant working arrangement. Many employees had changed from a more negative attitude towards virtual work into a positive attitude after working this way for a year. Nevertheless, some employees still held more negative attitudes at this stage. In either case, the employees ended up in the conclusion that they wanted to work from home two-three days a week. Hence, shown to answer in accordance with the result from the survey that the employer presented. This adaptation to the majority’s preference can be seen as an attempt to belong to the ‘winning side’, thus identified to be what Sydow and Schreyögg (2011) call an adaptive expectation effect. Hence, meaning that the employees regardless of what their initial opinion was, or what attitude they held, all adjusted to the survey result as it was the most common opinion. Therefore, the presentation of the survey result can be argued to have triggered an implicit expectation that everyone should prefer to work from home two-three days a week.

‘I mean like... at first I didn’t like working from home, but after a while it turned out to be really good. I’ve seen like, from the surveys that... many thinks that we should continue to work from home, at least part-time, and I am one of those who thinks that 2-3 days a week or such would be good ...’ [employee 19]

At this stage, the employer had recruited new employees to such a high extent that everyone would not be able to be at the office at the same time due to a lack of space. This increased recruitment by the employer combined with the lack of space was a factor that was shown to

further make the employees expect virtual work to be an integrated part of the organization post the pandemic. Thus, again referring to that an adaptive expectation effect (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011) had been triggered, as it was expressed by the employees that this recruitment made them believe that they were expected to want to work from home.

‘It is very clear that it will be a mix for us, like especially because we hire very many people, and we don't have space for everyone...’ [employee 2]

The employer made it clear that working from home fulltime was not the future vision. They wanted the employees to have a physical connection to the office. This vision was in line with the employees' shown preferences of future working structure that had been received through the collected surveys. Thus, indicating that the employer's actions were aligned with the employee's found preferences.

‘Our perception about this, virtual work, as a company is that we still want a connection to the physical office. We want a community among our employees.’ [employer representative 2]

At the end of this stage, the employer presented their future vision of work called ‘future way of working’. This vision entailed a flexible work arrangement, including booking places when going to the office. Hence, referring back to the employer's desire that the employees still should have a connection to the office space and not be working full-time virtually.

‘We will need to make adjustments for our needs. We will not get back to what we had before, we have to think about our future workplace. We plan to not have a set working place for everyone but more activity-based.’ [employer representative 1]

After the ‘future way of working’ had been presented, the employees started to realize what their future working arrangements would look like. Along with that, the employees were found to now both desire and expect virtual work to proceed to a certain degree, which was found to further motivate personal investments towards more permanent adjustments in their home structure and living situation. With that said, the employees had now made reality of their thoughts concerning getting a larger apartment, re-building houses and establishing more permanent home offices in general.

‘We will move to a house in a couple of months so we will get more space and you have space for a home office because now we live in an apartment, and it has not been optimal for homework. So, we will invest in a better working space in that way...’ [employee 24]

This stage thus ends this timeline in March 2021, with the employer having introduced ‘future way of working’ and the employees having made large adjustments in their personal lives adequate for working virtually from home. Hence, the ending of this process was the presentation of a hybrid-version of virtual work within the case organization. The employees and the employer had both made extensive investments, making these actions more irreversible as individuals are less prone to switch courses when having invested in something to a great extent (Sydow et al., 2009; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2011). Consequently, this process was found to have become rather bound to a certain path. Therefore, choices and actions were not accidental anymore, but could be more or less predicted. Thus, demonstrating a preferred action pattern to have taken form. Henceforth, clearly illustrating that the adjustments carried out during this described process were drivers for virtual work becoming the new normal. Indicating, what Sydow et al. (2009) calls a lock-in to a certain path to have occurred. In this case, a path of a hybrid-version of virtual work.

6. Discussion

In this section, the study's main findings and contributions will be elaborated and discussed in relation to previous research.

6.1 Main findings and contributions

The aim of this study was to create a better understanding of how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. Drawing upon the analysis of adjustments unfolding in an organization where virtual work has been established as a new way of working after being forced to transfer to virtual spaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study contributes to previous studies in at least three ways.

To begin with, this study contributes to current debates of whether virtual work will be the new normal way of working in the future (Berlin, 2021; Byråvärlden, 2020; Hedström, 2021; it-kanalen, 2020; Katheryn, 2020; st, 2021; Zanardi, 2020). Further, previous studies (Alexander, 1997; Baruch, 2000; Crandall & Gao, 2005; Neufeind et al., 2018; Raiborn & Butler, 2009) suggest that if employees or employers have positive attitudes towards virtual work, virtual work is more likely to become established in organizations. These studies were found to derive from the assumption that attitudes are stable. Whether these attitudes are positive or negative, they will persist, and therefore serve as a predictor for the future of virtual work. By following the process in which virtual work becomes established in an organization, the findings of this study reveal the limits of such previous studies and provide an alternative explanation to how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. Firstly, it was evident that the attitudes concerning working virtually changed throughout the studied time-period. From expressing that virtual work was unthinkable before entering virtual spaces, to preferring this way of working. Following the process, it was possible to explore the mechanisms which contributed to the changing attitudes. As shown, the practical actions enforced by the transition to virtual work generated different sets of attitudes throughout the process of virtual work becoming established. The more investments in time and money that was put on these activities, the more prone individuals were to keep them. In addition, when generating positive outcomes, actions escalated over time, leading to a change of attitudes. In this way, the attitudes changed as a byproduct of the actions, and not the other way around. Secondly, these attitudes did not only derive from individuals' own actions. Both actions and attitudes were adapted according to what others did, and the interactions between employees and their employer throughout the process. This adaptation was found to take place when certain actions had resulted in positive feed-back loops, hence enforcing these actions patterns.

Thus, the continuation of virtual work is not dependent on the attitudes of employees and employers, it depends on what they do and what other people do, reinforcing positive attitudes towards working virtually. The study thus provides a deeper understanding of how virtual work becomes established in organizations as the new normal.

The study also contributes to studies of the future of virtual work more broadly. Previous research has been preoccupied with the question whether virtual work will be the future way of working. These studies share one fundamental characteristic, namely that the future of virtual work is mainly determined by the benefits or shortcomings regarding virtual work. These benefits and shortcomings are presented in the light of employee and employer beliefs of virtual work, such as that employees will feel isolated (Alexander, 1997), that employers will hold positive attitudes due to potential cost-savings (Barron, 2007), that employees desire flexibility and will therefore have a positive attitude towards virtual work (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). The case where virtual work is enforced upon employees limits the possibility to generalize the findings to other contexts where virtual are or could be implemented and leaves room for some reflections. Since the transition to virtual work in this case was forced upon both the employer and the employees, it invited both actors to an exploratory process. In the beginning of the process, negative attitudes and perceptions towards virtual work dominated. Throughout the process of the establishment of virtual work, the attitudes changed. Therefore, the forcing aspect itself in this case led to an insight. Namely, that when a change is voluntary, one has the opportunity to consider benefits and shortcomings and hence to build perceptions regarding it. But when it is enforced, as in this case, individuals are pressured to leave their habits behind and are forced to learn new ways of working, to explore new venues, and new ways of thinking. Hence, leading to outcomes that could not have been discovered without having to practice it, as found from the process in this case. Again, referring to that another path was prevalent within the organization and that an external shock was necessary to push the organization towards another path creation. This was illustrated in this study, as the first actions in the process were brought forward as a necessity deriving from the enforced context, not voluntary actions based on forecasts of outcomes. Another found confirmation for this was that an experienced barrier at the beginning of entering virtual work could be overcome and instead turned into a benefit. In this way, this study illustrates the benefits of following processes that evolve, rather than focusing on the attitudes at a single point in time. But it is also important to note that it is a unique case, founded upon an enforced transition towards virtual work. Nevertheless, even if it is a unique case, we can still learn how radical changes within organizations emerge in other contexts as well. For example, within the human resources field, it is quite common that studies

focus on predicting radical changes of work, competencies, and organizational structures as a consequence of e.g., technological changes. This study shows that such changes take place under specific conditions.

Finally, by focusing on the role of individual employees in exploring new ways of working, this study also contributes to studies of path dependency in organizations. As mentioned earlier, this perspective both seemed to be lacking within the research field of path dependence and has also been described to manifest a research gap by Sydow et al. (2009). Thus, this study uncovered how individuals' learning habits and responses to organizational change and arrangements contributed to the pattern building process. Therefore, showing how individuals' responses during the establishment of virtual work had driven the process towards a lock-in. That is to say, demonstrating what role individuals had regarding path creation from an organizational perspective.

7. Conclusion and limitations

In this section, the conclusion will be presented together with implications for future research. Thereafter, the limitations of the study will be discussed.

7.1 Conclusion and implications for future research

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have been forced to transfer its employees to work virtually from home to decrease the infection. Thus, resulting in an increase of virtual work worldwide, but also the question of whether this extended virtual workforce is here to stay. In this study, the aim was to create a better understanding of how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. To reach this understanding, an organization that had established virtual work as the new normal way of working post the pandemic was analyzed. This analysis was carried out by investigating how employees had made sense of practical adjustments during the establishment of virtual work, and if these could be deemed to be drivers for virtual work becoming the new normal. Therefore, the process of the establishment itself towards virtual work was analyzed by applying the organizational path dependence: a process view framework. From this, it was found that the process initiated actions and decisions carried out over time that eventually was found to have determined the continuation of virtual work post the pandemic. This study has both derived from a different approach and another focus than previous studies. Namely, a process approach and a focus on what is being done in practical terms rather than attitudes founded on benefits and shortcomings. This study contradicts the foundation of previous anticipations for the future of virtual work, as attitudes were quickly found to be ruled out as determinants, and instead offered an alternative explanation. With this in mind, an implication for future research within this field is to further study organizations' processes towards virtual work being the new normal to gain a deeper understanding for how practical actions and decisions stabilize this way of working. Furthermore, the prevailing pandemic context is unique, and this study has illustrated that it offers an opportunity to study virtual work in a different manner. Henceforth, another implication for future research is to continue studying virtual work in this context where it is possible to look at organizations' forced transitions to virtual work and consequently to examine what may have caused it to be established as the new normal or not post the pandemic.

Furthermore, another implication for future studies concerns the application of the organizational path dependence: a process view framework. It was proven favorable to take on an organizational perspective by looking at the employees as path creators. Suggesting that it would be interesting to broaden the usage of the framework in this manner to explore this

bottom-to-top perspective further. Lastly, a new understanding for radical change and how practical mechanisms interplay in these contexts is suggested to be further studied in the strategic human resource management field, as it can bring important insights for managing organizational change.

7.2 Limitations

It is of importance to address the limitations of this study, one of them being that this study is case specific and was set in a unique context, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, its results cannot be formally generalized in that sense that it is not plausible to predict how other organizations' paths concerning virtual work will unfold without analyzing these in detail and in their specific context. However, as argued before, the aim of this study was not to generalize it to other cases, but rather to create a better understanding for how virtual work becomes the new normal in organizations. Thus, to generate a potential indication for why the previous anticipations have not determined the future way of working. Therefore, to contribute with a new perspective and an alternative explanation to the existing body of research.

Furthermore, another limitation is that the study is not conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, which would be favorable in terms of seeing how the organization's path kept being replicated after the recommendations by the Swedish government had ended. Therefore, this study does not cover all actions and decisions that might unfold over a longer time-period. Thus, an implication for future research is that longitudinal studies carried out within this subject through the usage of organizational path dependence would grant even richer insights. Nevertheless, the found results can still be used as guidance for going forward. Hence, the empirical findings still succeeded to initiate a new approach within the research body of virtual work. Namely, that studying specific organizations from a process approach, through the usage of organizational path dependence, is beneficial for creating an anticipation for the width of virtual work in the future by investigating what drives it or not to become the new normal.

8. References

- Adamovic, M. (2018). An employee-focused human resource management perspective for the management of global virtual teams. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(14), 2159–2187.
- Agogu e, M., Le Masson, P., & Robinson, D. K. R. (2012). Orphan innovation, or when path-creation goes stale: a design framework to characterise path-dependence in real time. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, 24(6), 603-616.
- Alexander, M. (1997). Getting to grips with the virtual organization. *Long Range Planning*, 30(1), 122-124.
- Allen, T. D., Golden, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2015). How Effective Is Telecommuting? Assessing the Status of Our Scientific Findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(2), 40-68.
- Arthur, W. B. (1989). Competing technologies, increasing returns, and lock-in by historical events. *Economic Journal*, 99, 116–131.
- Arthur, W. B. (Ed.). (1994). Increasing returns and path dependency in the economy. University of Michigan Press.
- Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25, 472-491.
- Auer, M. (2021). Covid-19 Crisis Communications: The Challenge for Environmental Organizations. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 115(2021), 151-155.
- Bailey, D. E., & Kurland, N. B. (2002). A review of telework research: findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23, 383- 400.
- Banbury, S., & Berry, D. (2005). Office noise and employee concentration: Identifying causes of disruption and potential improvements. *Ergonomics*, 48(1), 25-37.
- Barron, J. (2007). Making the virtual leap: Ten issues to consider about telecommuting. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 39(7), 396-399.
- Baruch, Y. (2000). Teleworking: Benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 15(1), 34-49.
- Baruch, Y. (2001). The status of research on teleworking and an agenda for future research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 3(2), 113-129.
- Belle, S. M., Burley, D. L., & Long, S. D. (2015). Where do I belong? High-intensity teleworkers' experience of organizational belonging. *Human resource development international*, 18(1), 76-96.

- Benhamou, S. (2018). THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2030: Four scenarios. In M. Neufeind, J. O'Reilly, & F. Ranft (Eds.), *Work in the digital age: challenges of the fourth industrial revolution* (pp. 259-269). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bentley, T. (2014). How can organisations realize the positive benefits of 'anywhere working'? *Human Resource Magazine*, 18(6), 8–11.
- Bentley, T. A., Teo, S. T. T., McLeod, L., Tan F., Bosua, R., & Gloet, M. (2016). The role of organizational support in teleworker wellbeing: A socio-technical systems approach. *Applied ergonomics*, 52, 207-215.
- Berlin, E. (18 February 2021). Kvinnor mer positiva till hemarbete än män. *Du & jobbet*. <https://www.duochjobbet.se/nyhet/kvinnor-mer-positiva-till-hemarbete-an-man/>
- Beyer, J. (2010). The same or not the same - On the variety of mechanisms of path dependence. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 1–11.
- Biron, M., & van Veldhoven, M. (2016). When control becomes a liability rather than an asset: Comparing home and office days among part-time teleworkers. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37(8), 1317-1337.
- Bosua, R., Gloet, M., Kurnia, S., Mendoza, A., & Yong, J. (2013). Telework, productivity and wellbeing: an Australian perspective. *Telecommunications Journal of Australia*, 63(1), 1-22.
- Breuer, C., Hüffmeier, J., & Hertel, G. (2016). Does Trust Matter More in Virtual Teams? A Meta-Analysis of Trust and Team Effectiveness Considering Virtuality and Documentation as Moderators. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(8), 1151-1177.
- Bryman, A. (2011). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder* (2 ed.). Liber AB.
- Burke, R. J., & Ng, E. (2006). The changing nature of work and organizations: Implications for human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(2), 86-94.
- Byråvärlden. (2020). *Den digitala vägen är här för att stanna*. Retrieved 15-02-2021 from: <https://byravarden.se/darfor-fortsatter-den-digitala-vagen-efter-pandemin/>
- Caligiuri, P., De Cieri, H., Minbaeva, D., Verbeke, A., & Zimmermann, A. (2020). International HRM insights for navigating the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications for future research, and practice. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 51, 697-713.
- Carvalho, D. M., Filho, E. G., & de Almeida, V. E. (2018). Organizational performance and strategic inertia: The case of a Brazilian heavy construction company. *Organization Studies*, 32(3), 337-363.
- Cegarra-Leiva, D., Sánchez-Vidal, M. E., & Cegarra-Navarro, J. G. (2012). Understanding

- the link between work life balance practices and organisational outcomes in SMEs. *Personnel Review*, 41(3), 359-379.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Chatzoglou, P., Karasavvoglou, A., & Mylonakis, J. (2009). A survey on the necessary business profile constituents for the implementation of teleworking. *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management*, 9(4), 334-357.
- Chen, Y., & Fulmer, I. S. (2018). Fine-tuning what we know about employees' experience with flexible work arrangements and their job attitudes. *Human Resource Management*, 57(1), 381–395.
- Chen, W., & McDonald, S. (2015). Do Networked Workers Have More Control? The Implications of Teamwork, Telework, ICTs, and Social Capital for Job Decision Latitude. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(4), 492-507.
- Clark, S. (2000). Work/Family Border Theory: A New Theory of Work/Family Balance. *Human Relations*, 53(6), 747-770.
- Clear, F., & Dickson, K. (2005). Teleworking practice in small and medium-sized firms: management style and worker autonomy. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 20(3), 218-233.
- Contreras, F., Baykal, E., & Abid, G. (2020). E-Leadership and Teleworking in Times of COVID-19 and Beyond: What We Know and Where Do We Go. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1-10.
- Crandall, W., & Gao, L. (2005). An update on telecommuting: Review and prospects for emerging issues. *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 70(3), 30–37.
- David, P. (1985). Clio and the economies of QWERTY. *American Economic Review*, 75(2), 332-337.
- Dittes, S., Richter, S., Richter, A., & Smolnik, S. (2019). Toward the workplace of the future: How organizations can facilitate digital work. *Business Horizons*, 62(5), 649-661.
- Dlouhy, K., & Biemann, T. (2018). Path dependence in occupational careers: Understanding occupational mobility development throughout individuals' careers. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 104(C), 86-97.
- Dulebohn, J. H., & Hoch, J. E. (2017). Virtual teams in organizations. *Human Resource Management review*, 27(4), 569-574.
- Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550.

- Ellison, J. K. (2012). Ergonomics for Telecommuters And Other Remote Workers. (2012). *Professional Safety*, 57(6), 86-90.
- Felstead, A., & Henseke, G. (2017). Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance. *New Technology, work and Employment*, 32(3), 195-212.
- Ferrell, J., & Kline, K. (2018). Facilitating Trust and Communication in Virtual Teams. *People and Strategy*, 41(2), 30-35.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Frone, M. (1990). Intolerance of ambiguity as a moderator of the occupational role stress–strain relationship: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 11(4), 309–320.
- Gálvez, A., Martínez, M. J., & Pérez, C. (2012). Telework and Work Life Balance: Some Dimensions for Organizational Change. *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 16(3-4), 273-297.
- Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1524-1541.
- Germain, M., Mcguire, D., Bennett, E., & Mcwhorter, R. (2014). The Role of Swift Trust in Virtual Teams and Implications for Human Resource Development. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 16(3), 356-370.
- Gorse, C., Johnston, D., & Pritchard, M. (2020). *A Dictionary of Construction, Surveying and Civil Engineering* (2 ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Green, K. A., Lopez, M., Wysocki, A., & Kepner, K. (2003). Telecommuting as a true workplace alternative. *Department of Food and Resource Economics*, 1-5.
- Grubert, J., Ofek, E., Pahud, M., & Kristensson, P. (2018). The Office of the Future: Virtual, Portable, and Global. *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, 38(6), 125-133.
- Gump, B., & Kulik, J. (1997). Stress, Affiliation, and Emotional Contagion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(2), 305-319.
- Handy, S., & Mokhtarian, P. (1996). The future of telecommuting. *The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies*, 28(3), 227-240.
- Harker Martin, B., & Macdonnell, R. (2012). Is telework effective for organizations?. *Management Research Review*, 35(7), 602-616.
- Harpaz, I. (2002). Advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting for the individual, organization and society. *Work Study*, 51(2), 74-80.

- Hedström, K. (15 February 2021). "Hemarbete kommer bli en konkurrensfördel". *Arbetsliv*.
<https://www.prevent.se/arbetsliv/ledarskap1/2021/det-kommer-bli-en-konkurrensfordel-att-erbjuda-hemarbete/>
- Heine, K., & Rindfleisch, H. (2013). Organizational decline: A synthesis of insights from organizational ecology, path dependence and the resource-based view. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 26(1), 8–28.
- Hesse, B., & Grantham, C. E. (1991). Electronically distributed work communities: implications for research on telework. *Electronic Networking: Research Application and Policy*, 1, 4-17.
- Hill, E., Ferris, M., & Mårtinson, V. (2003). Does it matter where you work? A comparison of how three work venues (traditional office, virtual office, and home office) influence aspects of work and personal/family life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63(2), 220-241.
- Hoffman, E. C. (2002). Information and communications technology, virtual offices and telework. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 4(2), 1-27.
- Hughes, J., & Bozionelos, N. (2007). Work-life balance as source of job dissatisfaction and withdrawal attitudes: An exploratory study on the views of male workers. *Personnel Review*, 36(1), 145-154.
- Illegems, V., Verbeke, A., & S'Jegers, R. (2001). The organizational context of teleworking implementation. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 68(3), 275-291.
- Ince, D. (2013). *A dictionary of the Internet* (3 ed.). Oxford University Press.
- it-kanalen. (15 July 2020). *Distansarbete är här för att stanna - nu behöver vi bara anpassa oss*.
<https://it-kanalen.se/distansarbete-ar-har-for-att-stanna-nu-behoover-vi-bara-anpassa-oss/>
- Janneck, M., Jent, S., Weber, P., & Nissen, H. (2018). Ergonomics To Go: Designing the Mobile Workspace. *International journal of human-computer interaction*, 34(11), 1052-1062.
- Katheryn, L. (12 May 2020). Remote Work Is Not Here to Stay. *The Startup*.
<https://medium.com/swlh/remote-work-is-not-here-to-stay-9ef4f0f8f169>
- Kelly, M. (1988). The Work-at-Home Revolution. *The Futurist*, 22(6), 28-32.
- Khanna, S., & New, R. J. (2008). Revolutionizing the workplace: A case study of the future work program at Capital One. *Human resource Management*, 47(4), 795-808.

- Kossek, E., Lautsch, B., & Eaton, S. (2006). Telecommuting, control, and boundary management: Correlates of policy use and practice, job control, and work–family effectiveness. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68(2), 347-367.
- Kossek, E. E., Lewis, S., & Hammer, L. B. (2010). Work–life initiatives and organizational change: Overcoming mixed messages to move from the margin to the mainstream. *Human Relations (New York)*, 63(1), 3-19.
- Kramer, A., & Kramer, K. Z. (2020). The potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on occupational status, work from home, and occupational mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 1-4.
- Kraimer, M. L., Wayne, S. J., & Jaworski, R. A. (2001). Sources of support and expatriate performance: The mediating role of expatriate adjustment. *Personnel Psychology*, 54(1), 71-99.
- Krisinformation. (24 January 2021). *Anställda, arbetsgivare och företag*.
<https://www.krisinformation.se/detta-kan-handa/handelser-och-storningar/20192/myndigheterna-om-det-nya-coronaviruset/arbetsgivaretagare>.
- Lee, S. M., Park, S., & Trimi, S. (2013). Greening with IT: practices of leading countries and strategies of followers. *Management Decision*, 51(3), 629-642.
- Lewis, F. (2014). Design Issues. In J. Ritchie, & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Sciences Students and Researches* (pp. 47-76). SAGE.
- Lewis, R. (2013). The Influence of Information Technology on Telework: The Experiences of Teleworkers and Their Non-Teleworking Colleagues in a French Public Administration. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 3(1), 32-35.
- Madlock, P. E. (2013). The influence of motivational language in the technologically mediated realm of telecommuters. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 23(2), 196-210.
- McCloskey, D. W., & Igbaria, M. (2003). Does "Out of Sight" Mean "Out of Mind"? An Empirical Investigation of the Career Advancement Prospects of Telecommuters. *Information Resource Management Journal*, 16(2), 19-34.
- McDonnell, A. (2011). Still fighting “The War for Talent”? Bridging the Science versus the Practice gap. *Journal of Business Psychology*, 26, 169-173.
- Mellahi, K., & Collings, D. G. (2010). The barriers to effective global talent management: The example of corporate elites in MNEs. *Journal of World Business*, 45(2), 143-149.
- Mello, J. A. (2007). Managing Telework Programs Effectively. *Employee Responsibilities*

- and Rights Journal*, 19(4), 247-261.
- Microsoft. (2021). *Microsoft Teams*. <https://www.microsoft.com/sv-se/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>
- Mirchandani, K. (1999). Legitimizing work: Telework and the gendered reification of the work–nonwork dichotomy. *CRSA/RCSA*, 36, 87–107.
- Moynihan, D. P., & Pandey, S., K. (2007). Finding Workable Levers Over Work Motivation: Comparing Job Satisfaction, Job Involvement, and Organizational Commitment. *Administration & Society*, 39(7), 803-832.
- Muhammad, S., de Jong, T., & Ottens, H. F. L. (2008). Job accessibility under the influence of information and communication technologies, in the Netherlands. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 16(3), 203-216.
- Müller, T., & Niessen, C. (2019). Self-leadership in the context of part-time teleworking. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 40(8), 883-898.
- Neufeind, M., O'Reilly, J., & Ranft, F. (2018). Identifying the challenges for work in the digital age. In M. Neufeind, J. O'Reilly, & F. Ranft (Eds.), *Work in the digital age: challenges of the fourth industrial revolution* (pp. 1-24). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nilles, J. M. (1975). Telecommunications and organizational decentralization. *IEEE Transactions on Communications*, 23, 1142-1147.
- Noonan, M. C., Estes, S. B., & Glass, J. L. (2007). Do Workplace Flexibility Policies Influence Time Spent in Domestic Labor? *Journal of Family Issues*, 28(2), 263-288.
- Perez, M., & Sanchez, A. (2003). Top Manager and Institutional Effects on the Adoption of Innovations: The Case of Teleworking. *Prometheus*, 21(1), 59-73.
- Raghuram, S., & Wiesenfeld, B. (2004). Work-nonwork conflict and job stress among virtual workers. *Human Resource Management*, 43(2-3), 259-277.
- Raghuram, S., Garud, R., Wiesenfeld, B., & Gupta, V. (2001). Factors contributing to virtual work adjustment. *Journal of Management*, 27(3), 383-405.
- Raghuram, S., Wiesenfeld, B., & Garud, R. (2003). Technology enabled work: The role of self-efficacy in determining telecommuter adjustment and structuring behavior. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63(2), 180 –189.
- Raiborn, C., & Butler, J. B. (2009). A New Look at Telecommuting and Teleworking. *The Journal of Corporate Accounting and Finance*, 20(5), 31-39.
- Rapley, T. (2014). Sampling Strategies in Qualitative Research. In U. Flick (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 49-63). SAGE.
- Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the

- literature. *Journal of Applied psychology*, 87(4), 698-714.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., & Elam, G. (2014). Designing and Selecting Samples. In J. Ritchie, & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Sciences Students and Researchers* (pp. 77-108). SAGE.
- Richter, J., & Meshulam, I. (1993), Telework at Home: The Home and the Organization Perspective, *Human System Management*, 12(3), 193–203.
- Robertson, M. M., Maynard, W. S., & McDevitt, J. R. (2003). Telecommuting: Managing the safety of workers in home office environments. *Professional Safety*, 48(4), 30-36.
- Rosario Perello-Marin, M., Marin-Garcia, J. A., & Marcos-Cuevas, J. (2013). Towards a path dependence approach to study management innovation. *Management Decision*, 51(5), 1037–1046.
- Rosen, B., Furst, S., & Blackburn, R. (2007). Overcoming barriers to knowledge sharing in virtual teams. *Organizational Dynamics*, 36(3), 259-273.
- Sarnoff, I., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1961). Anxiety, fear, and social affiliation. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62, 356–363.
- Shaffer, M., Harrison, D., & Gilley, M. (1999). Dimensions, Determinants, and Differences in the Expatriate Adjustment Process. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(3), 557-581.
- Shin, B., Sheng, O., & Higa, K. (2000). Telework: existing research and future directions, *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, 1(2), 85–101.
- Staber, U. (2011). Creating and Breaking Paths in Organizational Culture: A Cognitive-Evolutionary Perspective. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 15(4), 45–61.
- st. (2021). *Distansarbete*. Retrieved 07-05-2021 from: <https://st.org/jobba-hemifran-ar-distansarbete-har-att-stanna>
- Stack, M., & Gartland, M. P. (2003). Path creation, path dependency, and alternative theories of the firm. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 37(2), 487–494.
- Standen, P. (2000). The home/work interface. In K. Daniels, D. A. Lamond, & P. Standen (Eds.), *Managing telework: Perspectives from human resource management and work psychology* (pp. 83– 92). Business Press.
- Sydow, J., & Schreyögg, G. (2011). Organizational Path Dependence: A Process View. *Organizational Studies*, 32(3), 321-335.
- Sydow, J., Schreyögg, G., & Koch, J. (2009). Organizational path dependence: Opening the black box. *Academy of management review*, 34(4), 689-709.
- Sydow, J., Schreyögg, G., & Koch, J. (2020). ON THE THEORY OF ORGANIZATIONAL

PATH DEPENDENCE: CLARIFICATIONS, REPLIES TO OBJECTIONS, AND EXTENSIONS. *Academy of management Review*, 45(4), 717-734.

- Toffler, A. (1980). *The Third Wave*. Collins.
- Takeuchi, R., Wang, M., Marinova, S. V., & Yao, X. (2009). Role of domain-specific facets of perceived organizational support during expatriation and implications for performance. *Organization Science*, 20(3), 621–634.
- Thomas, D., Bostrom, R., & Gouge, M. (2007). Making knowledge work in virtual teams. *Communications of the ACM*, 50(11), 85-90.
- Tunyaplin, S., Lunce, S., & Maniam, B. (1998). The new generation office environment: the home office. *Industrial Management & Data*, 98(4), 178-183.
- Van Wee, B., Geurs, K., & Chorus, C. (2013). Information, communication, travel behavior and accessibility. *Journal of Transport and Land Use*, 6(3), 1-16.
- Vetenskapsrådet. (2002). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*. Vetenskapsrådet.
- Vernon, M. (2007). Perks and perils of mobile working. *Management Today*, 11, 65-67.
- World Health Organization. (2020). *WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard*. Retrieved 26-01-2021 from: <https://covid19.who.int>
- World Health Organization. (12 March 2020). *WHO announces COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic*. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a.-pandemic>
- World Health Organization. (5 February 2021). *Physical and mental health key to resilience during COVID-19 pandemic*. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/statements/statement-physical-and-mental-health-key-to-resilience-during-covid-19-pandemic>.
- Wiesenfeld, B. M., Raghuram, S., & Garud, R. (1999). Managers in a virtual context: The experience of self-threat and its effects on virtual work organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 6, 31-44.
- Wiesenfeld, B. M., Raghuram, S., & Garud, R. (2001). Organizational identification among virtual workers: the role of need for affiliation and perceived work-based social support. *Journal of Management*, 27(2), 213-229.
- Wojcak, E., Bajzikova, L., Sajgalikova, H., & Polikova, M. (2016). How to Achieve Sustainable Efficiency with Teleworkers: Leadership Model in Telework. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 229, 33-41.

Yang, Z., Wu, D., & Wang, D. (2021). Exploring spatial path dependence in industrial space with big data: A case study of Beijing. *Cities*, 108, 1-11.

Zanardi, A. (24 September 2020). Remote Work Is Not Here to Stay: The Rise of Flexible Working. *Crunchbase*. <https://about.crunchbase.com/blog/remote-work-is-not-here-to-stay-the-rise-of-flexible-working/>

Appendix 1 –Interview guide employer representatives

Information

- Purpose of the study
- Method and approach
- Contribution

Ethical consideration

- Anonymity
- Storage of data
- Use of data
- Voluntary participation
- Permission to end interview at any time
- How to take part of the study's result

Lastly, I would thus like to ask you if you give us your consent to participate in this study and to record this interview?

General questions

- Can you please describe the sequence of events your organizations have been going through related to virtual working since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- To what degree have your organization worked from home due to the pandemic?
- What strategy has your organization had in order to meet the increasing virtual working during COVID-19?
- We have heard that you have conducted a survey concerning COVID-19 and virtual working, what specific areas did those surveys concern and what did you find?

Themes

1. Home office equipment
2. Rural living
3. Organizational support
4. Measurement and monitoring
5. Coordination
6. Collaboration and communication
7. Social isolation
8. Office reduction

9. Technology
10. Commitment
11. Productivity
12. Responsibility
13. Work-life balance
14. Flexibility
15. Job-satisfaction
16. Environmental aspects
17. Thoughts regarding the future, post COVID-19

Concluding remarks

- Is there anything that we have missed, that you have noticed within the area of virtual work and the COVID-19 pandemic, that you find important?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 2 – Interview guide employees

Information

- Purpose of study
- Method and approach
- Contribution

Ethical consideration

- Anonymity
- Storage of data
- Use of data
- Voluntary participation
- Permission to end interview at any time
- How to take part of the study's result

Lastly, I would thus like to ask you if you give us your consent to participate in this study and to record this interview?

Background:

- Tell me about your professional background.
- Can you please give me a summary of what you work with in this organization?
- How long have you worked in this organization?
- When did you start to work from home? (as a consequence of the pandemic)
- To what extent do you work from home?
- How old are you?

General questions:

- Please describe a normal day at work for you (compared to before, when working at the office, new routines).

Technology:

- What digital tools do you use when you are working from home?
- Can you describe how you share information and communicate with others?

- How do you experience that the accessible technology when working from home affects your productivity?
- What do you do if something technological would not work? (changes after COVID-19 in this procedure?)

Office

- Can you please describe what your physical working space at home looks like? (noise, interference and ergonomics)
- Have you retrieved any new office equipment? How and when did you do this?
- How do you experience the organization's efforts of providing means for achieving a satisfactory physical working environment?

Flexibility and work-life balance

- Please describe which working hours you usually work now when working from home? (flexibility in terms of time, compared to before working from home)
- Can you describe how your everyday life is different now in comparison with before working from home? (what do you do differently? commuting, work-life balance, work-family conflict, flexibility).
- Can you tell me about your balance between work and your personal life now when you are working from home? (what do you do to withhold a balance? What has this process looked like in terms of actions?)

Employee discretion and autonomy

- Can you tell me about the way you work now when you have a physical distance to your managers and colleagues? (physical distance - more responsibility)
- What is the procedure for planning your work? (differences compared to before)
- How do you reconcile your targets and progresses, and just in general where you are at in your work processes? (with managers, colleagues, etc.).

Social

- Can you describe your social life?
- Tell me about how you and your colleagues collaborate when working from home. (meetings, informal/formal, sharing information, trust)

- Can you describe how the organization has in general been working to foster social belonging and how this work has been carried out?

Closing questions

- When you look back at how you were working when first starting to work from home, is it something specific that you do differently today?
- Is there any particular learning concerning working virtually that you will bring with you after COVID-19?
- Is it something in general that has turned out to work extra well when working virtually that you would like to continue doing after COVID-19?
- How do you think the organization will work going forward, and why?
- Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we have missed?