



REMOTE WORK: TOOL OF CHANGE OR MERELY A MIRROR OF OLD PRACTICES?

A qualitative study on remote work experiences and gender regimes in Slovak context

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Abstract

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Purpose: The study explores how employee remote work experiences may vary based on the local context, status position and gender of the employees. The study explores these relationships and their implications in the context of two companies situated on the Slovak labour market.

Theory: Gendered organizations theory by Acker serves as the main theoretical framework for the study, as it is used to explain the labour market behaviour and how the employee experiences are being shaped. Additionally, Hochschild's concept of emotion work is used in combination with Acker in order to explore how employees manage their emotions and behaviour in order to accommodate for the expectations and norms they are subject to.

Method: The study applies a qualitative research design, employing in-depth semi-structured interviews with employees of the two companies alongside using company documents as a secondary source of data. The eleven interviews have been transcribed and analysed through the grounded theory approach.

Result: The results demonstrate that both genders had, overall, a positive attitude towards remote work. Men and women, however, had different reasons for this as they found different aspects of remote work important. Similarly, a distinction can be seen between the two companies as one group of respondents stated they prefer remote work, while the other still saw working from the office as the better option., which the study connects to the role of local context, as well as the status position of the employees.

Foreword

I would like to express my gratitude towards everyone that has had a contribution in the making of this thesis. Firstly, I would like to thank the case companies and the contact persons within for agreeing to my request and providing me with a possibility to conduct this study, as well as helping me to get in contact with the interviewees. I would also like to thank the interviewees for their time and their participation in the interviews. Additionally, I am also grateful to the interviewees for their willingness to share and discuss their thoughts and experiences, which were of great importance for the development of the thesis.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a horizontal line.

Trencin, May 29, 2022

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1. Introduction

It comes as no surprise that the nature of work has changed significantly over the course of recent years. This can be attributed to the world itself also constantly changing due to factors such as technological advancements, influx of new knowledge and the ever-changing values and priorities. The labour market and human resources are no exception to this phenomenon. A prime example of how the nature of work has changed in order to accommodate for the new conditions is the shift towards remote work as response to the COVID-19 crisis (Jacks, 2021). The term “remote work”, as explained by Nakrosiene, Buciuniene and Gostautaite (2019), refers to the ability to perform one’s tasks digitally, at a distance, rather than having to be physically present at one’s workplace. Yang et al. (2021) illustrates the onset of remote working, showing that only 5% of American citizens worked remotely in early 2019. This number had, however, risen drastically, being as high as 37% by April 2020, while also keeping an upward trajectory. Moreover, other studies such as Franken et al (2021) document a similar phenomenon in other countries across the globe.

While working remotely had been relatively underutilised until the year of 2019, one could say that remote work had become the “new normal”, as it had turned into a common way of working in areas that allow for it (Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker, 2020). The education and the IT sector can both be used as an example of this phenomenon. While the nature of work had changed significantly in the areas that allow for it, in some sectors, a necessity to conduct work in a specific environment, and in person, remains. Jobs requiring physical or manual activities or those that rely on the use of fixed equipment can be used as an example, as remote work often does not suffice under these conditions (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit, 2020). Similarly, some workplaces might try and stick to office work, even though remote work is a possibility, while others fully make the transition. Different workplaces adapt in their own way, based on what they deem as the best response for them, or the “best fit” concept by Purcell (1999) also highlight the role of local context when it comes to remote work.

The sharp rise of remote work may also be the reason for some of the concerns relating to this phenomenon. Bonacini, Gallo and Scicchitano (2020), as well as Orr and Savage (2021), question the inclusivity, claiming that certain groups, like men or higher-educated individuals, tend to benefit more than others. They emphasize the inequality dimension of remote work and outline the need for more developed legislation in order to address this issue. One of the most prevalent remote work concerns is the issue of gender equality. The term “gender” refers to the expectations men and women are attributed in a given society (Philips, 2005). Remote work had been subject to criticism from a gender equality standpoint due to the fact that women still remain under-represented in leadership positions and there is a lack of legislation incentivising gender equality at the workplace, with some arguing that the shift towards remote work had only made these issues more glaring (Foley & Cooper, 2021).

The setting for this study is the Slovak labour market. Slovakia is no exception when it comes to gender equality concerns outlined above, as several sources (European Commission, 2021; Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020) claim that the country is facing significant issues when it comes to workplace gender equality. This, alongside the fact, that, the Slovak context remains relatively under-explored when it comes to gender and remote work make it a viable setting for exploring these concerns.

1.1. Objectives and research questions

The research explores how remote work experience of employees might differ as a result of the local context, employee status and gender. While some researchers, such as Orr and Savage (2021) or Partridge (2021), suggest that remote work fosters workplace inequality if unattended, this research attempts to explore the practicality of these claims. This is done via exploring how the employees themselves experience remote work and what factors they believe play a role in shaping their remote work experience.

The research can also be helpful when evaluating the applicability of such claims in the context of a Central European country. Lastly, it can help to provide a new viewpoint on remote work in the Slovak context, as the topic of remote work and equality, still, remains somewhat scarcely explored with most of the local research, for example, Karacsony (2021) or Fedakova and Istonova (2017) focusing on different areas of remote work, such as work-life balance or job satisfaction of remote workers. In contrast to the previously mentioned work, this study explores the phenomenon of remote work through the lens of employee experience in relationship to gender, status and the local setting. The aim of this qualitative study is, thus, to explore how employee remote work experience may vary based on local context, as well as status position and gender of the employees.

The research questions the study seeks to answer are:

1. How do tertiary educated employees in a Slovakian company setting experience remote work?
2. How are their experiences connected to their status position and work tasks?
3. How does gender influence the employees' experiences of remote work?

The article begins by exploring remote work background and previous research in the field, alongside further exploring the concepts of gender and remote work. Afterwards, the theoretical framework used as a basis for the study is presented and followed by the methodological section, which illustrates how the study had been conducted. Thereafter, the study findings are presented and further explored in the discussion. Finally, the concluding section summarises the study and presents the concluding remarks on the topic.

2. Background and previous research

This study explores remote work experience in post-socialist context, more specifically, the Slovak labour market. While there is literature linking remote work and gender in Europe and in post-socialist countries and how the change of a regime has led towards a change in gender norms (e.g., Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020), there does not seem to be that much research in this field and, moreover, there does not seem to be any literature focusing on this topic for Slovakia specifically. This means that the study should allow one to see how well the findings from previous research, both post-socialist and global, translate into the context of Slovakia. Slovakia is a country which has, to the researcher's knowledge, not yet been explored, especially in the context of smaller business with a qualified workforce.

Furthermore, Slovakia performs rather poorly when it comes to gender equality when compared to other European countries. In 2021, Slovakia had ranked as the 24th EU country in the Gender Equality Index presented by European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), receiving less than average scores in many categories (EIGE, 2021). The categories that had been rated poorly included, for example, the representation of women in leadership, decision making, as well as a lack of female representation in specific areas, such as Science & Engineering (S&A) or Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (European Commission, 2021). Some of the issues outlined by the study is that, while small improvements are gradually happening, women remain under-represented in leadership and decision-making positions and there is a lack of legislation promoting gender equality. These results, as well as the concerns tied to remote work, show that workplace gender equality is, definitely, an issue that deserves attention in this context. Moreover, this study can also prove valuable as a large body of research on the remote work-gender equality relationship comes either comes from non-European countries or more western countries, such as the UK. This study, on the other hand, explores the topic in a Central Europe post-socialist setting, which seems to be less extensively explored when compared to the Western context.

Working remotely can provide many benefits to both the employee and employer alike. Some examples include an increased degree of flexibility, reduction of travel and estate costs, as well as an opportunity to achieve a better work-life balance in some scenarios (Franken et al, 2021). On the other hand, remote work also entails various challenges, such as infrastructure and education costs, new dimensions of responsibility for both employers and workers alike, as well as issues connected to the inclusivity and availability of remote work (Wang et al., 2020).

The question of inclusivity and availability, in the context of remote work, is particularly important to talk about. While both men and women made transition towards remote work, many studies in the field, such as Feng and Savani (2020) or Partridge (2021), suggest that the transition towards remote work has not been the same for the two genders. One of the common claims against remote work is that it inhibits gender equality, creating and widening gender gaps, by reverting the gender roles and norms towards a traditionalist setting, where the man is seen as the breadwinner, while the woman is the caretaker, negatively affecting the position of women on the labour market as (Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020). Alongside these claims, there has been a wide array of literature portraying remote work as a threat to gender equality based on research conducted in countries all around the globe, such as Feng and Savani (2020) or Partidge (2021). One element that all the mentioned research has agreed upon is the claim that remote work poses a threat to work life gender balance and is particularly dangerous for women's position in the labour market. While sources such as the Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2021) suggest some steady improvements, they also

emphasize that these happen at a slow rate. Similarly, they point out that women, still, remain rather under-represented in decision making or leadership positions and are likely to do so for some time given the current trajectory and a lack of equality-promoting legislation among several of the countries explored.

2.1. Remote work

As discussed above, remote work had become increasingly prevalent over the course of the recent years and has been the topic of an ever-increasing amount of literature. Nakrosiene et al. (2019) provide a definition of the term “remote work” or telework, stating that it, fundamentally, refers to the ability to perform work from different locations, such as one’s home for example, rather than only being able to conduct your work from one’s workplace exclusively. The same authors also emphasize that telework offers many advantages for both the employers and employees alike, such as advanced flexibility, reducing estate costs or maintaining the work-life balance of employees, making it a desirable alternative to the more traditional way of working, where the tasks are conducted in person from one’s workplace.

One thing, however, that should be mentioned when discussing the pros and cons of remote work is the topic of work-life balance and how the distinction between one’s professional life and their private life can become blurred (Feng & Savani, 2020). Employees may no longer commute for work and the working hours might be more dependent on when the employee chooses to, rather than being set by the employer, when working from home. It becomes increasingly more likely that one might end up mixing both work-related tasks with tasks related to their private life. While this may fit some workers, there are also workers who prefer to have a set routine for everything, rather than the more chaotic nature of remote working, where the workers often end up with a responsibility of dividing and managing their time themselves. This responsibility could lead to an increase in stress, loss of motivation or lesser productivity, which can be related to the previously mentioned stress or a lacking level of motivation, as well as the possibility one might lack the ability to plan and manage their time in a meaningful way (Feng & Savani, 2020).

Hochschild’s (1979) concept of emotion work, which is described in greater detail in the theory section should also be mentioned when talking about the shift towards remote work. In summary, the term “emotion work” refers to individuals managing their emotion in order to feel and behave in a way that is consistent with the norms they are subject to (Hochschild, 1979). This is especially prevalent in professions revolving around interpersonal interaction. One side effect of the remote work shift is that many workers experience less interpersonal interaction, at least in person, as a lot of tasks are now conducted at a distance. It is possible that this has reduced the degree to which emotion work is required, however it is likely that emotion work is still present to some extent with the goal of adapting one’s emotions and behaviour to the expectations and norms at the workplace, which is discussed in greater detail in the theory section.

Feng and Savani (2020) explore the gender gaps in dual-career families working from home in the United States. The findings show that while there were no gender differences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the lockdown women have reported a lower degree of job satisfaction and job productivity than men did. The authors argue that the reasoning behind this is that when both parents are working from home, women are expected to devote more of their time towards housework and childcare than men are. This expectation can affect the gender balance as women revert back to a position, where they are expected to take care of

children and the household as there is no school/childcare institutions, while men's position remains unchanged. It could be argued that this is a revert towards the old power dynamic, where the man is concerned with career and providing for the family, while the woman is expected to be the one taking care of the household and children. This phenomenon, subsequently, leads to the creation and widening of gender gaps, as it reduces the degree of gender equality that had been attained over the course of years within the society, while also making women more dependent on their partner (Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020). The same idea also holds a lot of significance in the Slovak context, particularly, as Slovakia, similarly to other countries in the area, has only stepped away from the breadwinner and caretaker roles only relatively recently, while some elements of these views are still present in particular areas, which is discussed at a later point in the thesis.

Wang et al. (2020) believe that, alongside the ability to influence gender balance, the shift towards remote work can also be challenging in other areas. One of these challenges is the fact that the workers need to get accustomed to this mode of working and become more skilled with the technology, which relies on the workers having the willingness and ability to do so. Working remotely introduces a new dimension of employee responsibility, which might have not been present previously as it relies on the employee becoming accustomed to this type of work and using the technological devices necessary in order to work efficiently. In the same body of work, Wang et al. also state that it is not only the workers themselves taking up new responsibilities but also the employers, which are responsible for building an infrastructure that allows for an efficient use of remote work. The infrastructure can be challenging in several ways, as, other than being costly, it can also require a significant amount of time and resources to be invested by the company.

Another issue worth considering are the claims that the use of remote can make workplaces even more unequal. Research by Bonacini et al. (2020), as well as Orr and Savage (2021) suggests that remote work advantages specific groups, such as men and educated individuals. Partridge (2021), in a similar manner, emphasizes that the implementation of rules and their careful monitoring is necessary to prevent specific groups being disadvantaged while working remotely. While this might be the case, most authors such as Franken et al. (2021) believe remote work is here to stay as the current situation as well as the benefits remote work brings with it make it a very viable and even desirable way of working.

2.2. Gender

The conceptualisation of gender for the purpose of this thesis is based on the definition of gender provided by Phillips (2005). Phillips makes the distinction between sex and gender, claiming that while sex refers to a, relatively unchanging, biology of being male or female, genders entails the roles and expectations that one is subject to on the basis of being a man or a woman, adding that these are subject to change over time, place and life stage. While sex is a biological construct, gender is a social construct in this line of thought. While the biological characteristics of sex, such as genetics and hormone profile remain constant, across societies, the characteristics of gender are influenced by the roles, norms and values tied to it in specific society or time frame. Phillips mentions bearing a child as example that can be used to distinguish the two. While the ability to bear a child is biological and should be something all healthy women have in common, the expectation for a woman to bear a child or to take care of it in a specific way can be linked to gender and these expectations can vastly differ between cultures, age groups or between different time periods.

2.3. Gender equality at the workplace

Based on Acker (1990), gender equality at the workplace can be described as a setting, where both men and women are treated equally, evaluated in a consistent manner and given equal opportunities in areas such as personal growth and career progression. There is, however, a vast amount of literature discussing the topic of gender at the workplace with many of them implying that the previously mentioned elements of gender equality seldom take place.

Acker (1990), for example, claims that men, in general, have a higher possibility for career progression than women do. Acker talks about how traits seen as masculine, such as full commitment towards one's work life over their personal and family life, are widely sought after and expected from both men and women. Moreover, Acker argues that tasks such as involving the management of finances, mostly performed by men, are evaluated more highly than interpersonal tasks, which are predominantly undertaken by women, which can be another source of imbalance. All of the elements discussed above lead towards an environment that advantages men over women, rather than promoting equality as initially. Foley and Cooper (2021), who focused on the Australian labour market during the COVID-19 crisis talk about how the pandemic had played a role in accelerating and exposing the labour-related gender inequalities in this setting, while also suggesting this to be a global phenomenon. Moreover, Foley and Cooper also outline the idea that men are being advantaged in the professional sphere in the COVID-19 era, which is a conclusion compatible with several other articles mentioned in this paper.

2.4. Gender equality in post-socialist countries

The information in this section is mainly based on the research conducted by Dobrotic and Stropnik (2020), which explores gender equality and parenting related leaves among post socialist countries in Europe. The paper outlines how the socialist systems in these countries have made a commitment towards gender equality, introducing childcare systems and parental leaves, while female participation in the labour market had risen. An issue with the parental leaves, however, was that they were rather mother-centric, and they did not promote gender equality. While paternity leaves had been introduced, they were often underdeveloped and impractical. This had led to a situation, where most fathers either did not have a valid reason to use the leave or could not afford to do so due to the limitations, such as the low value they would get out of it. Dobrotic and Stropnik claim that the leave policies developed in European former socialist countries (EFSCs) were gendered and mother oriented.

Childcare leaves were meant as a mother's right that could be transferred to the father, meaning that women had remained the primary caregiver, meanwhile men fulfilled the secondary caregiver role. Since the 2000s, the leave policies have started to become more gender-neutral, with many countries making improvement to their paternity leaves policy. While progress had been made since the 2000s and the policies have become more gender-neutral, the rate of progress had been slow as out of the twenty-one countries investigated, only three currently have leave policies that can be described as equality-transforming (Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020). Some of the other countries possess an equality-promoting framework, meaning there are policies that create considerable incentives for fathers' involvement in care while a significant amount of the EFSCs still have frameworks the authors describe as equality-impeding, Slovakia being a part of this group. The fact that many of the post-socialist countries currently possess a system that can be defined as equality-impeding can be related to how Partridge (2021), or Orr and Savage (2021) emphasize a need

for better legislation and monitoring when it comes to remote work and gender equality at the workplace. The findings from Dobrotic and Stropnik show rather than focusing only on remote work gender equality legislation, in some countries it might be needed to focus on gender-equality legislation as a whole, since it seems to be underdeveloped in more areas than just remote work gender equality. The EIGE (2021) data can be used as an example of this as it finds several issues relating to gender equality in Slovakia, while also describing the gender equality legislation as insufficient.

The leave policies were often a result of the current regime and ideologies, for example the rise of female participation and equality after World War II and the communist ideology. During this period, full-time employment had become the norm for women, which is why childcare and education services were offered to the workers. While this is the case, men were still rarely associated with the topic of childcare or housework, meaning that leave policies have not changed in their nature and remained mother centric (Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020). Dobrotic and Stropnik also argue that the mother-centric leave policies were detrimental for female careers and the representation of women in the labour market, while also increasing their dependency on their spouses. The caretaker-breadwinner dilemma is also brought up among the interviewees and discussed in the results section. The caretaker-breadwinner situation can also be linked to the work of Feng and Savani (2020), as they come up with a similar conclusion in the context of dual-career families in the US. Feng and Savani find that women report a lower degree of job satisfaction and performance, when compared to men if both parents work remotely. They speculate that this can be attributed to women being expected to devote more of their time to taking care of the household and children and, thus, they end up being distracted or unable to focus on their career how they otherwise would. Both of these articles show that men and women may be subject to different expectations even if both of them are in the same position. While Feng and Savani talk about how it is, mostly, the woman's responsibility to take care of the household when both parents work remotely, Dobrotic and Stropnik illustrate the same line of thought by showing how women, rather than men, are expected to take parental leaves, even if both parents are working.

The transition towards capitalism, which had started around 1989 had also significantly influenced gender equality in EFSCs. The combination of decreasing employment rates, falling standards of living, as well as low fertility rates with lengthy paid parental leaves introduced as a response has led many women to choose the paid parenthood over unemployment (Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020). While the family received money this way, it further cemented the role of woman as the "caregiver", while the man was the "breadwinner". The long parental leaves were also a detriment for women seeking to re-integrate into the labour market when it comes to promotion opportunities as well as earnings.

While there have been some gradual improvements in this area, the parental leaves are still rarely taken-up rate by fathers, often due to the low pay rate the leaves offer (Dobrotic & Stropnik, 2020). The persistent low take-up rate among fathers means that the potential to transform gender norms in these countries remains limited. Dobrotic and Stropnik believe that, in order to address the issue, the EFSCs need to adjust their policies in a way, where both fathers and mothers are given a sufficient incentive to take a leave in order to be able to impact the gender norms within the country.

2.5. Gender equality in Slovakia

This section will focus on the topic of gender equality in the Slovak context specifically. According to the European Commission (2021), Slovakia had ranked 24th among the EU countries on the Gender Equality Index scale constructed by the EIGE. One of the criteria used to evaluate gender equality within the country is the degree of female representation in decision-making positions, which finds that, while an increase in female participation had been recorded, it is still men that are mostly in charge when it comes to making decisions. Moreover, even though the study has identified a positive trajectory in areas such as education, the changes seem to be happening at a slow pace and women still remain under-represented in these areas when compared to men. For example, the study finds that there has been an increase in women's representation at the highest level of academia (24% to 27%), as well as among the heads of institutions in the Higher Academic Sector (17% to 23%) from the last point of examination, which was in 2015 (EIGE, 2021). Similarly, the percentage of female doctoral graduates had also improved from 48.89% in 2010 to 49.15% in 2018, taking a step towards gender parity. This data shows that, while positive changes might be happening, a gender gap is still present, while also demonstrating that while there might be a relative degree of equality at a lower level (doctoral graduates %), this equality does not necessarily transition to the highest level (female representation in academia leadership).

While the country seems to be moving towards gender equality in some areas, based on the relatively close gender share of doctoral graduates, this is only the overall number and females remain rather underrepresented in certain areas, such as engineering or IT, as Psenak, Kovac, Kacer and Skypalova (2018) show. This can also be related to another finding in the survey, such as the fact that, the country has a rather low rate of female professionals in the areas of Science & Engineering and Communication Technologies, with women only representing 18.67% of the workers in 2018, which is below the European average of 24.9% (EIGE, 2021). Psenak et al. (2018) mention how women might encounter more difficulties than men would when trying to enter the labour market in a specific field. The authors focus on the Slovak IT sector and discuss the difficulties related to education and recruitment. They come to the consensus that women have a harder time securing employment, which can be connected to the local culture and perceptions as most employers in the field prefer to employ men if given the choice. Furthermore, they motivate this behaviour by arguing that there is a perception of IT as a "man's job" and there might be a stigma regarding women that choose to pursue this career path leading most employers to choose men based on this perception. While it might be difficult to confirm the exact reasoning for this behaviour, the article helps to illustrate the gender equality issues outlined above.

While the EIGE (2021) document states that one way to promote gender equality and improve working conditions for men and women is through institutional reform, it also believes Slovakia, as it is now, lacks the legislation and is in need of a reform. There are no requirements for Gender Equality Plans in public Higher Education Institutions (HEI) or Research Performing Organisations (RPO) made through national legislation according to the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) (2021). The data also shows that only 46.9% of HEIs and 31.9% of PROs in the country touch upon gender equality and ways to strengthen it on their websites.

Overall, the data shows that women remain under-represented in decision making and leadership positions with most of the figures only reaching around 25% at most and being under the European average. Research conducted by Kottulova and Mitkova (2016) carries the same message, emphasizing the lack of female representation in the positions of power

within the country. The paper illustrates this by saying that an overwhelming majority of leadership jobs in the country's most successful businesses are occupied by men- with the percentage of women in leadership positions being 15%, while also stating that only 5% of the companies explored had a woman in the highest-level executive position. While some areas, such as education, show some progress, the results seem rather underwhelming as many areas show either a low rate of improvement or none at all, while also being under the EU average (European Commission, 2021). An important takeaway from this data is the fact that women remain under-represented in higher positions, as well as the mentioned lack of legislation promoting gender equality, further illustrating the concerns with gender equality in the Slovak context.

2.6. Remote work inclusivity

Most of the studies concerning the topic of gender and workplace equality seem to suggest that we have not reached a point, where it can be said that every single individual is even, be it intentionally or unintentionally, as of now. The common belief seems to be that remote work had not changed that, while some go as far as to say that workplace gender equality had decreased as a result of remote work (Partridge, 2021). Some authors, however, seem to perceive the shift towards remote work as an opportunity and emphasize the need to introduce new rules and regulations.

Foley and Cooper (2021) serve as an example of this stance, outlining the five areas they believe must be addressed in order to achieve workplace gender equality. The five areas identified by the authors are: addressing gender-based labour market segregations and discrimination, building access to mutually beneficial flexibility, ensuring a more gender equitable distribution of unpaid care, confronting gender-based violence at work and beyond and, lastly, mobilising union actions through gender equality bargaining. According to Foley and Copper, the ability to address these areas should allow for more labour market inclusivity, as well as greater degree of equality within the market.

Orr and Savage (2021) seem to hold a similar standpoint as they recognize to benefits of remote work, but they argue that these benefits are not evenly distributed. Orr and Savage argue that different occupational, socio-economic and demographic groups have varying access to remote work and the benefits it brings, which shows that there are multiple spheres that play a role in the how much access one has to remote work and its benefits. Furthermore, they argue that new policies need to be introduced to ensure everyone has a possibility to access and benefit from remote work equally.

The last research to carry a similar message is Bonacini et al. (2021) as it also claims that these benefits are distributed unevenly, as the system tends to favour males, while claiming that the distribution is also affected by other factors besides gender, such as age and education. Bonacini et al. (2021) conclude that the individuals favoured the most are older, male, higher educated employees, fostering the idea that gender, alongside the other factors mentioned influences the remote work experience of employees.

The consensus in this case, seems to be that remote work did not lessen the gender inequalities at work. It is further stated that changes in terms of legislation and regulations need to be introduced in order to make workplace equality truly attainable, i.e., remote work may become more inclusive among workers regardless of the workers' status via improved

legislations and regulations. However, since legislations tend to change rather slowly, it is important to understand employee's different preconditions and experiences in actual settings.

3.Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework section is introduced by firstly exploring the topic of inherent inequality that is present in the professional sphere, segueing into a brief introduction of the gendered organisations theory presented by Acker (1990). Afterwards, Hochschild's (1979) theory regarding emotion work is introduced, and a connection with Acker's gendered organisations theory is drawn. Thereafter, the study returns to Acker's gendered organisations theory, exploring it in greater detail, while further illustrating connections between Acker and Hochschild, as well as Friedman's (2016) concept of "class ceiling".

3.1. Inherent inequality in the professional sphere

A study conducted in the context of dual-career families working from home in the US has found that women have reported they feel a lower degree of job satisfaction and productivity when compared to before the lockdown took place. The productivity and work satisfaction of men, on the other hand, remained the same as pre-pandemic (Feng & Savani,2020). While women are expected to be more focused on the household than they were prior to the pandemic, the expectations from men have not really changed. It is possible that men, on average, had an easier time becoming accustomed to these changes, due to the fact, that, their role in the family has changed significantly less than the role of a woman. This variation in how significant the changes were can be linked to how male satisfaction remained the same, while women found themselves lacking enjoyment and motivation when working online as a part of dual career households. Another element that could contribute to this situation is the fact that women often work in sectors, such as retail, where interpersonal communication is a key part of the job, making the transition towards remote work even more pronounced, while men might be more used to jobs where interpersonal communication plays a lesser role than in the sectors previously mentioned, making the change less taxing for them (Miliken, Kneeland & Flynn, 2020).

Another study that could be linked to the topic, even if it is not concerned with remote work itself would be Acker (2006). Acker's study goes over the gender regime in the banking sector and is closely related to the theoretical approach discussed in the following section of the study, which makes it meaningful to mention. Acker talks about how regardless of banking being a female-dominated sector purely in terms of numbers, but in terms of power the sector is led by men. While the majority of women are working low-status and low-pay jobs, it is the men that are at the forefront occupying the positions of power. Alongside a wage gap, tasks and hierarchical positions are distributed differently among men and women. New male employees are often treated differently from the female ones, they are given different tasks, with the aim of making them more ready and suitable to fulfil a managerial position in the future, while women are given more ordinary and less important tasks as they are expected to keep working in the same position, rather than advancing in the hierarchy.

Not unlike the other studies mentioned, Acker (2006) also believes that some groups benefit more from remote work than others, while also implying that different local contexts might also influence the nature and inclusivity of the benefits, which is also reflected in the sample selected for this study in particular. It would seem like the unequal treatment of different groups persists even when work is being done from one's device, rather than in person. A change of environment does not seem to change the fact that members of different groups face different expectations and thus are left to handle different tasks and treated differently. Partridge (2021) believes that alongside implementing regulations relating to remote work, these regulations and policies need to be carefully monitored by employees in order to

prevent the disadvantaging of women. Similar to the previously mentioned literature, Partridge argues that, if left unattended, the shift towards remote work can deepen workplace-related inequalities as this type of work tends to favour men most of the time. In other words, this shift seems to make these inequalities even more pronounced, which is why there is a need for more legislation and rules, as well as monitoring of these rules, in order to even be able to think about equality.

Overall, most literature in the field seems to suggest that there is a degree of inequality inherently related to remote work, such as the impact of social class introduced by Bonacini et al. (2020). Whether intentional or not, the research indicates that remote work does, indeed, favour specific groups, such as educated people over the less educated or men over women, which suggests that the chosen sample group should be able to reap the benefits of remote work as they are all educated, it might, however, be interesting to see if educated men experience remote work differently than educated women. These findings can be connected to Friedman's (2016) notion of mechanisms of sameness and "class ceiling", claiming that one's belonging to a specific group, either on the basis of wealth, gender, ethnicity or education can impact their working experience.

Most research seems to suggest that the shift towards remote work does, in fact, have a negative effect on workplace equality as men become more advantaged by this mode of work as suggested by Partridge (2021) or Bonacini et al. (2020). As outlined above, male workers are more sought after and evaluated higher than their female counterparts in many areas where work is conducted remotely. This means that not only men have an easier time securing a job, they also seem to be able to advance in their career path more smoothly than most women do (Acker, 1990). Therefore, several of the mentioned authors outline how crucial it is to implement and monitor rules concerned with remote work in order to make workplace gender equality attainable and more possible to sustain (Orr & Savage, 2021). This is important as it is unlikely for remote work to just disappear from one day to another. While it had become so prevalent due to the COVID-19 restrictions that started taking place two years ago, remote work had become a key part of life for many people and companies and it is likely here to stay, as suggested by the sources outlined above. Foley and Cooper (2021) also suggest that remote work is here to stay as a result of the infrastructure already being in place, as well as the benefits that remote work provides. While it is not possible to predict the future, all the signs suggest that remote work is here to stay, which makes it rather wise to make sure that there is a sufficient degree of rules regarding remote work as well as the ability to monitor if they are obeyed.

3.2. Gendered organizations theory

The central theoretical framework of the thesis is the *gendered organisations theory* as the concepts introduced serve as a basis for the idea that gender is a factor that influences employee experience. The gendered organisations is a theory introduced by Acker (1990), which argues against the view of the organizational structure as gender neutral. Rather than being neutral, Acker believes that gender assumptions underlie the documents and contracts, which are used to construct organizations and theorize about them. This results in the fact that they end up occupying a large majority of the most powerful organizational positions. Another argument Acker makes is about the image of the "universal workers", which is meant to be genderless and disembodied. According to Acker, this universal worker is, in reality, a man. This means that the desired characteristics an "ideal employee" should have

are, mostly, the characteristics a good man ought to possess. These include the ability to have absolute control over one's emotion, acting based solely on rationality, decisiveness as well as being fully committed to one's career even if it means disregarding their personal life.

3.3. Emotion work

While considering Acker's (1990) claims about the ability to control one's emotion, acting rationally and behaving in a way consistent with the norms and expectations they are subject to, and the desirability of these traits, one can relate this to Hochschild's (1979) concept of emotion work. Hochschild also believes that humans are subject to certain norms and customs, which dictate what kind of behaviour is seen as acceptable or unacceptable in a given situation. The term "emotion work" in this case refers to an attempt to change an emotion or a feeling, or in other words to "manage the emotion".

Thus, there might be a discrepancy between what the individual feels and what he wants to feel in a specific situation and emotion management aims to get rid of this discrepancy by changing the feeling the individual currently has to the feeling he wants to have. The desired feeling is often consistent with what the norms define as an adequate emotion and behaviour for the specific situation, for example mourning and being sad during a funeral. When applied to the labour market, an example of emotion work is how clerks or customer service workers are expected to be un-irritable and resolved to help regardless of the issue or the attitude of the customer. Another example is how waiters or hostesses are expected to behave in a polite and warm manner. It could be said that every individual conducts emotion work in order to make their feelings and behaviour consistent with the situation to a degree, both professionally and in private life. This, however, is often with the goal of obeying the rules and norms, rather than based on one's personal desires. This is also tied to the question asking in whose interest these rules function. The positive and helpful demeanour of a customer service worker regardless of how agitated the customer might be likely is more profitable for the company employing him than the workers own well-being. Some jobs require higher degree of emotion and display management than others, typically jobs revolving around interpersonal interaction such being a secretary, airline hostess, clerk or even just functioning as a part of a work team (Hochschild, 1979).

The way this could be related to Acker is that employees likely manage their feelings in order to be consistent with the company standards and what is seen as desirable. More specifically, linking the work of Hochschild with what Acker describes as desirable, it could mean that employees often conduct emotion work in order to become more rational, reduce impulsivity or attempt to act in a way that shows their commitment to their career, even at the cost of their personal life in order to be consistent with the norms and expectations present at the workplace or field of work. Even if the workers adapt, it does not change the fact that the norms and expectations can still serve as a source of inequality. For example, even if a male and a female workers both behave in the same manner, it does not necessarily mean they will receive the same treatment as the norms and expectations among the organisation and leadership can portray the man as a better fit for the job and company, meaning he might be advantaged over his female co-worker, similar to how Karacsony (2021) talks about how most employees prefer men over women in the Slovak IT sector due to the common perception of IT as a "man's job".

3.4. Evaluation of men and women on the labour market

Acker (1990) explains how gender means that one is going to be subject to a specific set of roles and expectations corresponding to the given gender. Once again, this is correlated to the social class aspect discussed by Friedman (2016), as it is one's belonging to a specific group that serves to shape these roles and expectations. An example of how one possesses specific roles and expectations based on their gender is maternity; a woman is, traditionally, expected to carry a child at some point in her life, while also being expected to care for the child subsequently (Acker, 1990). This is in contrast with the previously discussed idea of an "universal worker" fully dedicated to their job (Acker, 1990). On this basis, the bias towards men could be explained as a woman is expected to carry a child and take care of it afterwards, which inhibits her ability to be fully focused on her career, while, for a man, there should be nothing that constrains his ability to be fully dedicated to his career and career advancement. It seems rather difficult to sustain both a successful career as well as family life- especially in the early years, it could be argued that this becomes a bit more accessible once one has been working for some time and reached a certain status at the workplace. It could be said that one is supposed to prioritize career over family, especially when it comes to young people. This is also applicable to the local context- in order to be able to have a good life, one is traditionally expected to have some sort of career and take care of himself. Having a family is usually seen as something one would do, once they have reached a certain point in his career that is seen as sufficient. While it might be possible to have both at some point later in life, it seems rather difficult to have a family and a successful career in the early working years. In the Slovak context, this can be attributed both to the local welfare system being less developed, as well as the social norms as being devoted to family life is often seen as an obstacle to one's career. While this applies to both men and women, it can be related to the previously mentioned bias, where the society sees men as more career oriented, as opposed to women, even though this might not always be the case. In other words, securing employment and career advancement is often easier for men than it is for women (Acker, 1990).

Acker (1990) also talks about the congruence, or the lack thereof, between the complexities and responsibility of a job and the hierarchical position it holds. Acker's theory argues that many jobs, predominantly occupied by women- such as a nurse, secretary, or a nursery teacher, entail complexities and responsibilities that do not translate into one's hierarchical position accordingly. Moreover, according to Acker, job evaluation also tends to evaluate financially related tasks more highly than jobs entailing interpersonal interaction, such as the jobs mentioned previously. The jobs that involve managing capital are often occupied by males, while the interpersonal jobs are more commonly done by women, which can be seen as another source of male advantage at the workplace.

3.5. Company culture

The last point related to Acker's (1990) gendered organization theory is how male and female bodies are perceived in a different manner and how this perception can be translated into the company culture. This culture is strengthened through sameness reinforcement mechanisms; it is often more difficult for an employee to achieve a new position than it is to stay in the old one. This taxing nature of career progression ends up making upward mobility at the workplace less attractive than it otherwise might be for many employees as it presents a trade-off that some employees might be unwilling to take (Friedman, 2016). Friedman adds

that while upward mobility involves economic gains, these benefits come at a psychological cost, making the trade-off not worth for everyone. Furthermore, Friedman (2016) suggests that factors such as class, gender or ethnicity can also affect the trajectory of one's mobility within the workplace, be it either through speed or the range of possible upward mobility, which can be influenced by a combination of these elements, which is also known as a "class ceiling". When this line of thought is applied in comparison with Acker (1990), one could argue that women have a lower range of upward mobility, while possibly having a limited speed they can move at through the social space, in other words, career progression is more difficult and long-winded for women than it is for men.

Acker (1990) argues that while women's bodies are either ruled out of order, sexualized or objectified, the topic of male bodies and sexuality, on the other hand, is not avoided and even promoted in certain scenarios, such as discharging stress or achieving better workplace cohesion. It could be argued that this behaviour promotes a toxic masculine culture at the workplace, and one could argue that institutions possess an inherent degree of masculinity as outlined by the previous claims. This masculinity is constructed via the previously outlined practices such as the glorification of the male body and sexuality in order to strengthen the collective or relieve stress, while the female counterpart is being shunned, as well as the preference for certain traits that could be described as manly when looking for and evaluating the employees. Employees need to adapt to this culture, which implies that in order to be successful one should either be a man or a woman that exhibits the male traits previously discussed, which is something Acker discusses when she talks about women reaching high hierarchical positions within their workplace. Once again, this ties to Hochschild (1979) as, based on Acker's statement, it could be said that women emulate masculine behaviour, act rationally and try to manage their emotions in order to be able to have a successful career and ability to reach leadership positions within the organisation.

In short, this theory, fundamentally, assumes that institutions are not gender neutral but rather gendered. The image of an ideal worker comes close to the image of an ideal man, which makes men seem like more competent and more desirable workers. Moreover, there is an evaluation gap in how men and women are evaluated, which leads to inequality in hierarchical standings as well as future prospects in one's career. In other words, despite organizations often being seen as neutral and claiming that they are, the reality is that men are likely to be advantaged to an extent solely on the basis of being male.

In sum, this research focuses on the relationship between the claims Acker (1990) makes and working remotely. Based on the previous literature section, the study believes that Acker's theory is still very relevant when it comes to remote work as it seems like not only gender inequalities are still existent while working remotely, some seem to also become more pronounced and call for policy changes and monitoring. Moreover, Acker focuses on the relationship between norms and expectations and employee experience, which is very akin to what this thesis attempts to do, only difference being that, rather than focusing on employee experience as a whole, it zooms in on the remote work experience of employees. These similarities suggest that the theory remains relevant in the context of remote work and can be used as a research foundation, as well as an inspiration for future research on the topic.

4. Method and working plan

4.1. *Sampling criteria*

The research has been carried out in the environment of two companies situated in Slovakia, one being a recruitment agency, while the second is the local branch of an international automotive technology company. The criteria for choosing the companies were that they must possess a workforce comparable in size, level of education among the workers, comparable gender split of male and female workers, and, lastly, the use of remote work. A qualitative study based on the use of semi-structured interviews had been identified as the most fitting way to reach the research objectives, as it allows for discussing the issues more in-depth due to its flexibility and the ability to ask follow-up questions (Adams, 2015). Purposive sampling had been employed in order to establish initial contact and collect the first set of information. The term purposive sampling refers to the process, where the researchers purposively select participants or sources that they believe can answer the research problems (Tie et al., 2019) Snowball sampling had also been incorporated at a later point during the in-person interviews at Company A in order to increase the quality and informational value of the interviews.

The recruitment agency, currently, consists of about fifteen employees, while the automotive tech branch currently has eleven. Both firms possess an educated workplace as all of the workers are either graduates or currently studying. The two samples include people from different backgrounds possessing different views regarding telework and gender equality, which helps to illustrate the significance of local and company-level context on employee experiences and behaviour. The sample includes both men and women with tertiary education, possessing a various degree of experience with remote work as well as working within the sector overall, people possessing a different standing within the company, which allows one to identify patterns among the sample as well as deviations from these patterns. While a benefit of this sampling could be getting a wider picture of the situation, as well as how the companies operate, a potential limitation could be that if the data is too spread out, it might be challenging to identify patterns within the sample.

4.2. *Company choice rationale*

The companies sampled reflect the changing trajectory and aims of the study. The initial aim of the survey was to explore the connection between remote work and gender equality at the workplace. Initially, the study sample consisted only of Company A- the recruitment agency, where these phenomena were going to be explored. As the trajectory of the study had changed and the impact of local context and status on employee experience became a part of the research, a second firm- Company B had been added into the sample. The reasoning behind this choice had been that the role of local context and status position of the individuals can be better observed if the study explores employee experience within two companies, rather than just one. In other words, this choice was based on the assumption that these phenomena become more visible and prevalent in the context of two companies, which are similar in some aspect, while different in others. The similarity of the companies was an important factor motivating the company choice- comparable company size, gender split, and education level of the employees are what made Company B a viable second company for the project. The dissimilarities, such the different line of work, common working practices or age and experience of employees, on the other hand, are what allows for a clearer answer to the

questions of what role the status position and local context play when it comes to employee remote work experience.

4.3. Company background

The company information graphic below presents some of the key information about the sample companies, outlining their similarities, as well as their differences. The graphic also provides information about the respective workforces, as well as data regarding the interview sample. The following sections add to this knowledge by providing additional information about the respective companies.

Figure 1: Company information graphic

	Company A	Company B
company focus	recruitment agency	automotive tech
top executive	woman	man
employee age	≈ 30s/early 40s	≈ 40s/early 50s
education level	tertiary/ studying	tertiary
number of employees	15	11
men	5	6
women	10	5
men interviewed	3	3
women interviewed	3	2

Source: Authors own development.

4.3.1. Company A- recruitment agency

The recruitment agency studied herein focuses mostly on offering jobs abroad, in countries such as the UK, Netherlands or Germany. Most of the jobs provided are either in logistics or construction. According to their webpage, each year, they help over 1000 workers find a job abroad with 2006 being the most successful year with 1359 jobs attained through the agency. While finding employment of the applicants is one part of the job, the company also offers other services tied to local procedures related to the job, transportation of workers, provides help with housing, as well as offering help and guidance once the workers are already in the destination country. Most workers employed by this agency either have a degree or are

currently studying. There are fifteen workers working for the agency as of now, most of them (10) being female, with the owner also a woman.

4.3.2. Company B- automotive tech company branch

The second company explored is the local branch of an international company focused on providing automotive solutions to car manufacturers and retailers and connecting them with the customers. The organisation, as a whole, consists of over 2000 workers and has branches in the UK, Europe as well as the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The local branch currently has eleven employees. While the organisation focuses on researching and developing of automotive technologies and their retail, this branch only works with sales and is not involved in research. While this branch has been existent for about 8 years as of now, most of the current employees, at least the ones interviewed have been involved in this business for about 2-3 years. According to the information received during interviews, all the employees have university education and the gender split between the employees is almost even as there is currently 6 male and 5 female workers, while the top executive is a man.

4.4. Data collection

In order to collect the primary data, the study uses semi-structured interviews, a format employing a blend of closed and open-ended questions, often followed by follow up questions, such as “why?” or “how?”, while adapting to the interviewee and guiding him towards the topic of interests, rather than following a strict set of questions (Adams, 2015). The interviews have been carried out with each of the interviewees individually in an one-on-one format. 6 interviewees (three women, three men) from Company A and 5 interviewees from Company B (two women, three men) participated in the study. There was also possibility of conducting additional interviews if there was a need to do so- this could be either to address uncertainties if they arise, gain more information if the data previously collected is not satisfactory or to confirm the correct understanding of the data collected. Interviewing the respondents has been identified as the optimal method to achieve the study goals as it allows for more in-depth knowledge than a questionnaire for example, as well as the fact it allows for follow up questions if the respondent mentions something of relevance to the topic (Adams, 2015). As for secondary data, in order to better contextualise the information provided by the interviewees, the research uses organisational documents, such as brochures or the company website alongside legitimate internet sources, while the company background is also discussed in a separate section dedicated to the company data.

4.5. Interview structure and aim

The interviews take place in person or online through Zoom based on the interviewee’s preferences and possibilities- four interviews in company A were conducted in person with two being through Zoom, all the interviews in Company B took place via Zoom. The length of an interview ranges between 30 minutes to an hour but this, ultimately, depends on the specific interviewees themselves. An interview guide (Appendix A) had been constructed to serve as a rough structure for the interviews. The interviews, firstly, consist of general questions in order to gain information about the interviewee and their position within the firm. Subsequently, the interviews take a turn towards the topic of remote work, where the interviewees are asked about their experiences tied to remote work. Here, the interviewees

are asked about their attitudes as well as experience tied to remote work. Some of the more-specific topics the interviews aim to cover would be the interviewees' experiences of remote work as well as the interviewees' experiences related to local practices and norms. Moreover, the interviews are meant to be conducted in a way where the interviewees are free to talk about what they want to talk about, rather than strictly following the interview guide and the questions included (Adams, 2015). Rather than following the structure, the interviewer attempts to lead the interviewees towards the area of interest and then let them talk, while adapting the subsequent questions based on the information shared by the interviewees.

4.6. Analysing the data

In order to begin the process, the material had first been transcribed. While the interviews were conducted in Slovak language, they were transcribed as closely as possible in order to avoid misinterpretation and to preserve the interviewees' thoughts to the highest extent possible. All the citations used during this thesis were translated by the author. The original citations have not been included due to the scope of the thesis being limited, as well as the fact that Slovak is not widely spoken and, thus, they would be of little use to most readers. The transcription focuses mainly on the verbal component of the interviews, in other words, what is being said (Flick, 2007). Due to the fact that some interviews were conducted online, while some took place in person, it becomes more challenging to explore nonverbal elements or prosodic components of the interviews, which is why this study focuses on the verbal aspect.

The research looks for patterns and changes from the pattern within the research sample. Furthermore, it attempts to explore whether the patterns were group-specific or limited to a certain part of the sample (e.g., men/ women, more/less experienced employees or if a certain pattern was within one of the two explored workforces). Coding has been used in order to identify important elements and themes among the sample. The data collected during the interviews has been transcribed and subsequently coded in order to identify patterns among the sample and the deviation from the patterns found. Some of key data the study is interested in is the self-perception of the respondents, their general remote work experience, their views and evaluations towards the system and culture within the firm as well as their underlying logics for these claims and perceptions, with the focus of the interviews being mostly aimed at the local context, company culture, teleworking practices and their relationship with gender. Furthermore, while the study does have an initial trajectory, this trajectory as well as the goal might be altered if new issues and knowledge are discovered via the interviews and coding (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, the study employs the use of abductive analysis (e.g., by using Acker's conceptualisation as an important inspiration, while still being open towards new findings discovered via fieldwork and analysis) in order to formulate new theories and hypotheses based on the empirical data uncovered (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). In this line, the research questions were modified along the research process.

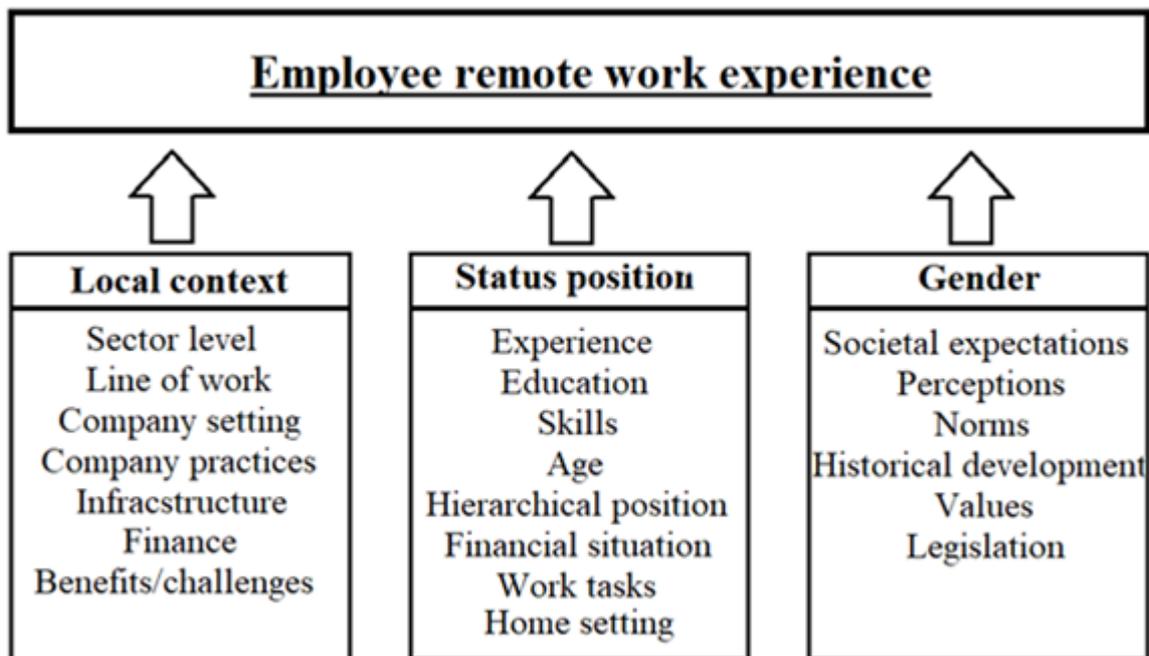
The study makes use of the grounded theory approach, which means that it aims to conduct analysis and theory based on the data collected (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). The grounded theory process is non-linear and allows for the analysis to take place in parallel with the data collection process.

The data is analysed with the help of coding- a process which involves identifying themes that are present in the transcripts. During this process, the data is organised into smaller units in order to make sense of it. The coding forms an analytic interpretation of the information

shared during the interviews. The first stage of the coding process is the initial coding. In initial coding, the researcher makes use of keywords to reflect the interviewees thoughts during the interview or note down an information or a theme they might find to be of interest. These are then further re-examined in order to identify which codes are relevant and also to identify, which appear more frequently, which can be used as a base for creating data category during the focused coding. For example, with the interviewees discussing what elements of remote work they find most appealing, a focus code labelled ‘remote work advantages’ can be created. In focused coding, the codes from initial coding are narrowed down and codes that are similar or closely related can be merged with each other.

While the initial goal behind the study was the explore the impact of gender on remote work, the data collected by the interviews and the frequency of specific themes had resulted in a change of trajectory towards the question of “how does gender influence remote work experience of employees?”. Similarly, the role of local context and hierarchical position was a common theme among the transcripts, which is reflected in the remaining two questions. In other words, the research questions have been modified alongside with the coding and analysis, in order to match the themes identified via these processes. The codes that have been identified in accordance with the three previously mentioned points of interest (local context, status position and gender) are illustrated in the graphic below.

Figure 2: Focused codes/code hierarchy



Source: Authors own development.

4.7. Ethical considerations

The study has been conducted with confidentiality and a degree of responsibility that ensures the participants do not face any repercussions as a result of their participation. The

participants' responses have been coded and interpreted with honesty and respect towards the actors involved. The interviews only took place and were recorded with consent from the side of the interviewee to do so through signing a consent form (Appendix C). Additionally, the interviewees have been informed about what the interview is about and how the data is handled prior to the interview taking place via a written document. The contact persons have also served as a source of information for the companies, communicating the purposes of the study and interviews in accordance with the communication between the contact person and the researcher, as well as the access request given to them (Appendix B). Furthermore, the interviewees have also been told that they do not need to answer a question if they cannot or do not want to do so. Similarly, the participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview if they decide to do so without having to provide a reason behind their decision. They were also informed how the data is used and that it is presented at the University of Gothenburg, as well as the fact that the interviews recorded are handled with confidentiality and that only the researcher has the access to them for the duration of the project and that the data is to be deleted afterwards.

As stated above, all the data collected during the interviews has been handled with care and utmost confidentiality for the purpose of this study only and all the information that could be used to trace respondent identity is anonymised, in line with Lewis (2003). Sources, such as company webpages have not been included in the bibliography, in order to preserve the anonymity as the organisations stated that they would like to remain anonymous. Similarly, names and locations have been anonymised in the same manner. Gender of the respondents is mentioned as it is one of the central elements of the study and it is vital to mention interviewee gender when exploring the gender-remote work experience relationship, however, other more sensitive personal data have been excluded, such as the exact age, ethnicity, tenure or the marital status of the interviewees.

4.8. Limitations, validity, and reliability

One of the elements that can be limiting is the fact that the interviews were not conducted in English due to interviewee preference. While the translation had been conducted with an attempt to resemble the original interviews as closely as possible, there is a chance that the meaning of some phrases might be lost in translation, as the meaning might not be fully conveyable (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg., 2010).

Similarly, the fact that some interviews were conducted online, while some took place in person can be considered as a limitation as it could be argued that it might be difficult to establish the same atmosphere online and lead conversation that one would lead normally in life. This might mean that the interviewees might be less talkative or feel pressured to not talk too much or too little, while in person the conversation can develop more naturally. Additionally, interacting in person might allow to better read the interviewee's responses and attitudes based on movements and posture, meaning that the fact some interviews have been conducted online might mean that some information became more difficult to access this way.

Moreover, it is important to note that the results hypothesized and uncovered in the context of this study might not be applicable to a different context. While the findings might be more consistent in a similar setting, e.g., workplaces with tertiary educated workers or workplaces situated in the post-socialist setting, it should not be taken for granted that the same phenomena will repeat themselves regardless of what the context is. The data may, however,

be valuable for analytical generalisation to similar (or different) contexts, for example for comparative reasons (Charmaz, 2006).

Finally, the study has been subject to a time limit, which might mean the range of observation might not be as wide and in-depth as it could possibly be in a more extensive, longer-lasting study. While this does not prevent the findings from still being highly interesting and relevant, it seems reasonable to mention the time and scope constraints.

4.9. Contacts and collaboration

Given the opportunity to do so, the sampling is somewhat purposive with the goal of interviewing individuals that are relevant to the research. This means that the study attempts to have a sample of both genders as well as different hierarchical standing as to get a wider perspective of things. The initial criteria for being given a participation request is for the worker to engage with remote work to a sufficient degree. Afterwards, when the sample is decided and the interviews have been conducted, sampling is employed. Some of the main distinctions likely to be made are the distinction between and among male and female employees. Moreover, a distinction between the two company-level contexts- “Company A” and “Company B” is likely to be identified, which serves to illustrate the role of the local context. Furthermore, collaboration with other students as well as any source relevant to the study is very welcome. Moreover, the study had been reviewed as a part of the Master thesis programme at the University of Gothenburg by fellow students as well as the course leader during the module seminars.

5. Findings

The findings listed in this section are based on remote work experiences and expectations of those that were interviewed. The interviews have been, for the most part, conducted via Zoom with an exclusion of four interviews in Company A, which were conducted in person.

5.1. Remote work satisfaction

The topic of satisfaction with remote work was usually the first discussed after some general introduction of the interviewee and their role within the organisation. The views towards remote work satisfaction were rather consistent among interviewees from both companies, men and women. When asked to rate their remote work experience and to compare it with working in person, majority of the of the interviewees (10) have stated that their experience has been mostly positive, while the one remaining interviewee has evaluated this experience as neutral.

The difference, however, has shown itself when the interviewees were asked whether they prefer remote work or work from the office. While the majority of interviewees from Company B (4) favoured remote work, with the remaining employee did not have a clear preference, all the interviewees from Company A have answered that even though they enjoy remote work, they still prefer working from the office for the most part. This inconsistency and the reasoning for it is going to be further explored in the ‘local context’ section of the findings.

An employee working at Company B had also put forward the idea that the preference towards working from home or office can be dependent on factors such as how the employee feels or what tasks he needs to focus on at the given moment. For example, when an employee is aware the task requires cooperation between the employee and a co-worker, working from the office can be desirable, while some tasks do not rely on cooperation with others, meaning the employees might prefer to be on their own in order to focus. Similarly, the worker’s mood can play a role resulting in a certain preference, some days they might feel like socializing and others they might want to avoid interaction with others at the workplace if it is not a necessity.

Both are fine for me... but I think it also depends on how I feel at that moment. You know- sometimes, it is good to be at the office and see those you work with, or you might want to sort something in person. Some days, though, you might just feel like staying in, which is when remote work feels really nice. (Office manager at company B, man)

Overall, both male and female interviewees had shown a high level of satisfaction with remote work. The interviewees have listed several elements of remote work that they find crucial and particularly enjoyable. Some of these were consistent among the interviewees, while some were not as much. The one benefit everyone seemed to agree upon was an increased degree of flexibility that remote work provides. Another benefit, often identified as important among female employees at both companies (two in Company A and two in Company B), is that it allows for better efficiency and time management as they do not have to commute to work anymore. Male interviewees have also touched upon this but alongside saving time by not having to commute, they have identified lower expenses while working remotely as a benefit they enjoy, talking about how one no longer needs to spend money on

fuel, parking, facilities or even rent. Five out of six male interviewees have spoken about the financial distinctions between remote work and working from office. An interviewee from Company B has also connected the need to commute of work with stress, saying that “If you travel to work you never know what might happen that day. Let’s say, you might get stuck in a traffic jam or your tram might be late, so you get to work and you are stressed out already... if you work from home, you do not need to have these kinds of concerns.” (Customer support manager, Company B, man). This suggests that the interviewee values predictability as a benefit that working from home can bring.

The remote work attitudes listed above show a rather surprising viewpoint considering the fact, that, remote work satisfaction is often portrayed as more polarised among genders. While some suggest that men are more satisfied with remote work than women, this study finds a high level of satisfaction with remote work among both genders.

5.2. Remote work challenges

While the interviewees have been fond of the option to manage their time by themselves, they have also identified this as a potential issue when it comes to remote work. While the interviewees themselves seem to enjoy this ability, when asked about challenges relating to remote work, the interviewees have listed several concerns related to working remotely.

In non-personal terms, the interviewees have suggested that it comes down to personal preference and that not everyone might enjoy or, is capable of, managing their time by themselves. Five interviewees in total, both men and women, have identified time management as a potential issue one might run into. When asked to develop upon this further, they said that some workers might prefer a set pattern given by their supervisor as managing your time can be seen as an additional layer of responsibility and not everyone might enjoy this. Time management and the ability to organise one’s schedule is a skill that seems more important when working from home than it is for office work that has a set time. The idea of having to organize one’s schedule around their work can be connected the previously mentioned concept of ‘universal worker’ and the notion that the universal worker should adapt elements of their life around their job. This ‘universal worker’ trait is commonly expected from male employees, while female employees can end up being antagonized due to a perceived inability to manage their time well. One interviewee had also listed lower skill workers as an example of when a set schedule can be desirable, stating they are likely to work better when they are told what exactly to do and how to do it, rather than letting them figure it out by themselves. He illustrates this thought, saying:

I think managing your time is not for everyone, some people might manage their time poorly and then end up always stressed as a result. Some people also just take it for granted that someone else does it for them, so if they have to do it themselves, they will be lost. Take for example a factory- if you go and tell all the line workers to manage themselves, it just won’t work, you know. (Consultant, Company A, man)

Another topic tied to remote work performance and satisfaction the interviewees have identified is the home setting one works from. Four out of eleven interviewees have described a quiet and calm household as a factor when it comes to remote work satisfaction and productivity. In a similar manner, excessive noise, stress, or being preoccupied with other tasks have been identified as a possibly detriment to one’s ability to focus on their work and,

subsequently, hinder their job performance and satisfaction by seven interviewees in total (three Company A, four Company B).

Additionally, several interviewees have also suggested that being around children while working can also be harmful to one's ability to focus as they have to keep an eye on the children and remain distracted while working.

Personally, I do not think I have any difficulties with working from home. I am home alone during my work hours, for the most part, so I can just sit down anywhere with my laptop and just work since the whole place is quiet. But I think if you live with other people, or children... it might be more difficult to focus since there is more noise and other things happening around you, you know. So, I think if you are someone that gets distracted easily, your home environment can matter a lot. (HR manager, Company A, woman)

Children were identified as a common source of distraction among both samples, which suggests that having to care for children and working simultaneously is likely to hinder one's focus and performance. Four interviewees from each company have suggested that having to watch over children while working would likely have a negative impact on their work performance. This evidence strengthens the notion of work/family conflict outlined earlier in the thesis. Three interviewees have listed having to watch over children while working as their biggest gripe with remote work, often saying that it is not so much the noise that is the issue, but rather the fact that they permanently need to keep an eye on the child and monitor what it is doing to ensure nothing bad happens. A consultant at Company A puts this issue in perspective, claiming

It is not about the noise for me- even when I'm at the office, there's a lot of talk around and it's generally busy, you get used to that..., but when you're working and there's children, it gets more difficult for me. Because you have to always watch them, what are they doing, so your attention gets split between different things if you have to do that. (Consultant, Company A, woman)

Another potential issue the interviewees have identified also relates to one's work environment. The interviewees point out that when working remotely, one needs to set up his/her "own workplace at home". This involves the need to have the devices needed for the job, such as printers, laptops or scanners at home. Accessing such equipment from home might be an obstacle for some, particularly those not so well-off, if the company does not cover these costs. Similarly, an interviewee has brought up the idea that not everyone might have the possibility of turning a part of their home into an office or a workstation. This leads to the previously mentioned idea that some workers that are unable to do this might have to work from a noisy or otherwise distracting environment, which can affect their performance and, subsequently, career development negatively. In total, five interviewees have raised concerns related to home environment or "home office" a potential challenge when working remotely. These issues identified by the interviewees suggest that remote work tends to advantage certain groups over others, in this particular case the advantaged group would be those that are more financially stable, while those not so well-off might find themselves at a disadvantage due to the increasing pressure to work remotely. This suggests that one's social class can be a source of advantage, or a disadvantage, when it comes to remote working according to the interviewees.

5.3. Local context and remote work experience

The interviews have also shown that the local context, especially company and sector-level, influences the remote work experience of employees. This can, perhaps, be most clearly observed in how one of the samples preferred remote work, while the other was in favour of work from the office, even though they both had positive attitudes towards remote work in general. While the recruitment agency interviewees preferred office work, the automotive tech company interviewees identified remote work as the more desirable of the two. There are several reasons that can be used to explain this difference. Firstly, the way these workplaces function is a different when it comes to the level of interaction between the employees. While in the automotive tech company the interviewees work more independently for the most part, the recruitment agency workers cooperate with each other more. All Company A interviewees except one have stated that an important reason why they prefer office work is that it allows them for better efficiency. Remote work, on the other hand was seen as a trade-off between convenience and efficiency among the employees. The interviewees at Company A often stated that their job often involves communication between colleagues and that their tasks are closely connected. An example provided was that during the recruitment process, the applicant is first in contact with a junior consultant, which gives them basic information and registers them. Afterwards the applicant is given to a more senior employee, which then takes care of the application in greater detail, arranging all the paperwork, establishing contact between the job provider and the applicant. In other words, the tasks different employees have build upon each other. The interviewees stated that it is easier for them to transfer information between each other in person than having to do it online.

Similarly, the interviewees at the recruitment agency have stated that it is easier to transfer clients between each other in this way based on who is best suited for the task. A junior consultant explains this process, saying “Sometimes you get applicants calling, but they call the wrong person, for example I focus on the Netherlands but someone might call and ask about Germany, so I can just forward them to a colleague that does Germany recruitment right away if we are all here in the office.”, and also adding that, “...sometimes you might not be able to help them yourself, so you can get someone that can help right away if you are in the office, but if you are home, it can take more time since you are making extra calls or sending e-mails, so it can take you a lot longer to get the same job done.” (Junior consultant, Company A, man). This information suggests that for the recruitment agency workers, communication with their colleagues is a crucial part of the job and being in arm’s reach of your co-workers makes them able to work more efficiently making office work more desirable.

The interviews conducted in Company B suggest that the workers work more independently when compared to Company A. The interviewees have stated that they do the majority of their tasks by themselves and that they often have designated time frames, with their work tasks also often being divided based on if they are working from home or from office. At home they focus on more independent aspects of their job, while in the office they focus on tasks that demand more intensive interaction between the employees. An office manager explains this split between office and remote work in greater detail:

I, for example, have three days home and two days from office. Every Monday I have to go to the office to meet with my manager, the other days are flexible usually, so it is Monday always office and then it depends. (Office manager, Company B, woman).

Thus, co-operation is not as fundamental in Company B as it is in Company A, with Company B employees having a designated schedule for the tasks they need to do in person. It could be argued the fact that co-operation between employees is significantly less fundamental has resulted in a setting where office work does not bring the same benefits as it does in Company and, thus, is also less desirable than it is in Company A.

Similarly, one could argue that the age and experience of employees can play a role as Company B sample, in general, was older and more experienced. While the interviewees were not explicitly asked for their own age, due to the fact they might see age as a sensitive topic, they were asked to describe the company workforce with age being one of the points of inquiry. The answers to this question suggest that the Company A workforce consisted of younger professionals, often less experienced in this line of work, while the Company B workers had more experience and were portrayed as older on average.

The fact that Company B workers were more seasoned and did not perceive co-operation as crucial suggests a lower degree of reliance on co-operation and getting help in order to fulfil their tasks within Company B workforce. The younger and less experienced Company A workforce, on the other hand, might be more reliant on these tools. A consultant at Company B illustrates this greater degree of independence, stating:

For the most part, I am fine on my own. I think once you get used to what you need to do and how to do it, you can easily manage by yourself. From time to time, you might be uncertain or want help with something, but that's only every once in a while and even then you can just get in touch with someone and get help easily. (Consultant, Company B, woman)

This statement illustrates the interviewee's perception of how more experience leads, at least in her case, to a greater degree of independence. One could expand this thought to a larger scale and argue that the overall experience of Company B workers makes them less reliant on elements of co-operation, making office work less desirable as suggested above.

Lastly, local context can also play a role from the financial standpoint. Company A is located in a smaller city, while Company B has its' office in a bigger, more expensive city. This means that the expenses for Company B employees are higher than for Company A workers. More pricy rent or facilities can be a reason why Company B workers are leaning more towards remote work, as opposed to working from office as it can help to lower these expenses and lead to a better standard of living for the employees. Four interviewees in Company B (three men, one woman) have raised this concern, while only two male employees did so in Company A. A Customer Support manager at the company further elaborates this argument, explaining:

Often, things are more expensive here, if you are renting it can be a lot, depending on where you rent, or even if you go out to eat you can actually end up spending a more than you would expect. Then it's the same thing if you live further away to save on rent, you spend more money traveling then. If you look at it, it does not look too bad but it adds up over time... so you end up saving some money when you work from home... (Customer Support manager, Company B, man)

The above quote, as well as the previously mentioned elements of local context, such as the firm setting and practices, show that local context does, indeed, influence the remote work experiences of the employees within the explored companies.

5.4 Employee status and remote work experience

Overall, it would seem, that, the older, more experienced high-status employees tend to have a better remote work experience than their counterpart, which is, once again, in line with the notion that social class can impact the remote work experience of an individual.

The findings indicate that it is often the older, more seasoned, workforce that enjoys remote work the most as Company B respondents preferred remote work, while Company A did not. As stated earlier, the company B sample, on average, was about 10 years older than Company A. The Company B sample was also more experienced, while for the Company A interviewees, it was often their first job in this line of work specifically.

Newer, less experienced employees were more enthusiastic about office work as it allowed them to learn skills faster and get help easier, which was mentioned by three interviewees at Company A, while only one Company B interviewee had touched upon this topic. A front office worker at Company A, which has been employed there for about 3 months demonstrates the importance of office work in regard to faster learning, stating that “Everything feels more relaxed and under control, when there are more experienced people around me and they are willing to help. It’s also faster to learn like this since you get to see them work and you can just ask them if you need something or if you have a problem.” (Front office worker, Company A, woman). Since the Company B sample is more experienced and self-sustainable, it takes away the need to learn and rely on others, which might make this benefit of office work less attractive to them.

The interviews suggest that an abundance of tasks, which involve sharing information and working together have a positive relationship with the desirability of office work as it allows for a more effective performance of these actions, which is why the recruitment agency workers value office work so highly. The lack of such tasks might lower the incentive for office work as the employees might feel like they are self-sufficient and they not missing out on anything. It is a possibility that the automotive tech company employees have identified this to be the case and thus they do not feel like working from the office can increase the efficiency of their work, as opposed to working from home so they have less incentive to work from the office, other than the times where it is necessary. Thus, the employees of the recruitment company have found benefits that the automotive tech company employees did not, which can be used to explain, why they value office work more. On the other hand, a similar argument can be put forward about Company B employees valuing the financial aspect of remote work more than Company A, making it more desirable for them.

6. Discussion

In the following section, a discussion of the above findings is going to be presented. The discussion section aims to rationalize and provide a possible explanation for the phenomena identified during the course of the research.

6.1 Local context

Relating the findings to the research questions the study has set to answer, the analyses have shown that both the local context, as well as the position of the employees within the company and tasks given to them affect their experience of remote work.

The local context reflected in 5.3. can play a role on a company, sector, as well as a financial level. The company level plays a role as it could be argued that every company has its' own ecosystem where different norms and practices apply and take priority (Purcell, 1999). An example of this would be the recruitment agency, where cooperation between the employees has been identified as the "best practice" within the company. In comparison, the automotive tech company seems to value independent work more than their counterpart. These attitudes influence how the employees within the company experience remote work and the distinction between remote work and work from office. Since the recruitment agency find office work as more consistent with what they deem to be the best fit for the company/their employer, they value office work more highly than remote work. The automotive tech company employees, on the other hand, has found remote work to be more fitting for them and thus more desirable.

Expanding on this notion of local context when it comes to employee experience, one could also try to apply this line of thought at the sector level. Some sectors might be more or less inclined towards remote work based on what exactly work in this sector entails. Sectors where human interaction and cooperation is vital might, in general, be more enthusiastic about working in person as opposed to sectors where work in person is deemed as less beneficial.

Lastly, the sample shows that the local context can also be important from a financial aspect. Workers and companies in some areas, such as big and expensive cities, might be more welcoming towards remote work in order to lower their expenses than their counterpart in a less expensive environment. The fact that financial concerns were more prevalent among Company B sample than they were within Company A helps illustrate this notion.

6.2. Position and social standing

Position and status of the employee within the company has also been shown to play a role in regard to their remote work experience. The interviews suggest that the more well-off, more experienced and higher status an employee has, the better his experience of remote work is going to be. In other words, status and remote work experience seem to positively impact remote work experience of an employee. In other words, an employee of higher status might be more inclined to exhibit positive attitudes towards remote work than an employee of lower standing is. This is in line with Bonacini et al.'s (2020) argument that one's ability to benefit from remote work is connected to the individual's social class. Within the sample, the older, more experienced workforce in Company B was more enthusiastic about the onset of remote work than their younger counterpart at Company A, which, on the other hand, spoke more highly about the benefits of working from the office. Based on this distinction, one could argue that the Company A workforce is not able to access the benefits of remote work to the

same extent Company B is, be it due to the age, inexperience, or the social status of the workers.

6.3. Gender

Gender also seems to impact the remote work experience of the employees as male and female employees within the sample tend to value different elements of remote work more or less highly than their counterpart. While both genders have shown a similar level of satisfaction with remote work, which contrast the work of Feng and Savani (2020), female interviewees often valued the ability to be more efficient and manage time better, men were more concerned with the financial aspects of remote work. Women being more concerned with time, while men care more about finances could be explained by Dobrotic and Stropnik (2020) and their depiction of post-socialist countries. Dobrotic and Stropnik discuss the breadwinner/caretaker model and how it still possesses relevance in many post-socialist countries. Based on this notion, it could be argued that the gender norms, which identify the woman as a primary carer, while the man is traditionally the bread winner are still persistent to a degree. This would mean that women value time management highly in order to be able to split their time between their professional and private life, while men are more concerned with the financial aspects with the goal of being able to provide for the family.

While one could also apply Acker's (1990) notion that men and women face different expectations and are treated differently based on these expectations, in this case, these expectations seem to have more to do with the society and societal norms, rather than being at the workplace level. These expectations being different can be connected to how men and women, themselves, are perceived differently on the labour market. Acker's concept of "universal worker" can be used as an example of this gender bias. This is a model that exhibits traits often considered masculine, which enforces the perception of men as ideal employees, often leading to a negative bias towards women in the labour market. While it is possible that the men and women within the sample are subject to different norms and expectations and shape their behaviour accordingly, the interviews suggest that this distinction, in this particular case, does not take place at the workplace level as Acker argues but it is, rather, rooted in the societal norms and perceptions related to gender.

6.4. Legislation

Lastly, the findings have also shed some light on the topic of legislation when it comes to remote work experience. More specifically, the data brings forward the topic of legislation in relation to the local and societal norms. While a considerable amount of literature, such as Orr and Savage (2021) or Partridge (2021) emphasize the importance of legislation in regard to remote work, the topic of legislation had surprisingly little prevalence during the interviews. Even though the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (2021) has outlined concerns with gender equality legislations in Slovakia specifically, the interviewees did not have much to say about the topic of legislation, which is an interesting contrast. While ordinary workers might have little interest in legislation as they might deem it outside of their influence, it also begs the question if legislation is as crucial as some of the literature suggests.

The data provided by the interviewees suggests that it is more so the norms and expectations that have an impact on one's remote work experience, rather than the legislative side of things. While the legislation is present, it does not seem to dictate the specifics of remote work experience. While it could be argued that this is due to the fact, that, the legislation is not developed or enforced sufficiently, it still seems to be just a guideline or a framework,

while the norms are what impacts the experiences in practice. In other words, the employees seemed to be more concerned with the fact that something is expected of them, rather than thinking about legislative practices, or a lack thereof. Hochschild's (1979) concept of "emotion work" can also be applicable here as the interviewees have demonstrated a desire to behave in a manner consistent with what is expected of them. An example of this would be male interviewees being more concerned with financial matters (breadwinner), while the women often prioritised time management highly (caretaker). This information shows the importance of local and societal norms, as well as their reproduction, which could also be linked to Friedman's (2016) class ceiling and the slow rate at which the changes are currently taking place.

6.5. Critique to the study

There is a possibility that the interviewees might have prepared for the interviews, either by looking up information related to remote work or by thinking about what they would or would not say prior to the interviews taking place. While the interviewees did not have access to the interview guide, nor did they know the questions prior to the interview, they were aware what the general topic is going to be so they might have prepared their answers beforehand.

While this might mean that the interviews were not fully spontaneous, one could argue that the answers provided were consistent with the interviewee's perceptions and experiences, regardless of whether they have structured these answers beforehand.

In a similar manner, the interviewees might have decided to not discuss specific topics too extensively, as well as exaggerate or downplay specific elements, which could mean that the information collected by the study might not be fully representative of the reality. In order to provide explanation for this claim, one could argue that the interviewees might have manipulated the information to an extent due to fear of the possible consequences or due to being uncomfortable with sharing the information as it truly is.

While this might affect the reliability of the findings in a negative manner, the scope of the study, as well as the limitations the study was subject to, such as the time limit, the study is not able to fully confirm whether the study findings are fully representative of the real practices.

7. Conclusion

The study had been conducted with the aim of exploring how employee remote work experience may vary based on local context, employee status and gender of the employees. In order to explore this phenomenon, the study formulated three research questions which will be responded and reflected upon in the following concluding section.

When addressing the first research question, i.e., “How do tertiary educated employees in a Slovakian company setting experience remote work?”, the information uncovered during the study suggests that remote work experience and the local context are largely intertwined in the explored setting. The collected data seems to suggest that the local context holds a significant level of influence when it comes to remote work experience in the setting explored by the study. This can, perhaps, be most clearly seen at the company-level as Company A employees have demonstrated a preference towards office work, while Company B employees were more in favor of working remotely. This can be related to the fact that work in Company A is more dependent on co-operation and inter-personal communication than it is in Company B. Since a significant amount of interaction with others is needed, office work has been identified as “best fit” in order to accommodate for this requirement (Purcell, 1999). It has commonly been stated by the interviewees that being in the office makes work more efficient and easier, which can serve as a rationale for the preference of office work among Company A employees. As for Company B employees, office work did not seem to have such clear-cut advantages as it had for Company A. It could be said that that within Company B, office work did not provide advantages significant enough to offset the benefits of remote work, such as convenience or reduced financial expenses, which is why remote work was the preferable way of working among Company B employees.

Moving onto the second research question, i.e., “How are their experiences connected to their status position and work tasks?”, the findings suggest that a linkage between employee status and their remote work experience is also present within the explored sample. The status position data uncovered by the study possesses a degree of similarity with Bonacini et al. (2020), which arrives at the conclusion that an individual’s belonging to a specific social class directly impacts their ability to access the benefits of remote work. Bonacini et al. believe that remote work advantages men, educated workers, as well as older and more experienced workers. This study seems consistent with these claims when it comes to employee age and experience. This can be demonstrated by the fact that Company B workers, being older and more experienced than Company A workers overall, have demonstrated a preference towards remote work, which was not present among Company A. This suggests that Company B workers might be able to enjoy the benefits of remote work to a greater extent than their counterpart at Company A. The study was not able to evaluate these claims from the point of education, as all the workers possess the same education level. Similarly, the claim that men tend to benefit from remote work had not been confirmed as the remote work attitudes remained relatively the same regardless of gender.

While trying to address the third research question, “How does gender influence the employees’ experiences of remote work?”, the study did not identify major differences between genders when it comes to remote work satisfaction. This comes as a contrast to some of the literature suggesting that there is a gap between genders and that men demonstrate a higher satisfaction level, such as Feng and Savani (2020). What the study did, however, find is that men and women have identified as different aspects of remote work as important to them. While men were more interested in financial matters, women gave more importance to

the time management aspect of remote work. One could argue that this is due to fact that both genders are trying to accommodate for different norms and expectations they are subject to, as presented by Acker (1990). Dobrotic and Stropnik's (2020) breadwinner and caretaker distinction applied to the post-socialist context can be used to further illustrate this notion. Due to the norms portraying the man as the breadwinner, one could argue that it comes as a natural reaction that men are concerned with finances as they are expected to support the family. Similarly, if women are expected to be the caretakers, they accommodate for this expectation by attempting to divide their time between the professional and personal sphere, which is why they value the time management aspect of remote work highly.

The desire to behave in a manner consistent with the expectations can also be linked to Hochschild's concept of "emotion work", as it could be said that both men and women adapt their behaviour and values to make them compatible with the societal norms, that they are subject to. This type of behaviour can also be related to Friedman (2016) as adapting to societal norms serves to strengthen and reproduce the said norms, enforcing the reproduction of sameness and a class ceiling. It is, however, important to note that, while men and women might be facing different expectations, the data analysed suggests that this does not come from the workplace level as argued by Acker (1990), but rather the societal norms and perceptions relating to gender.

In a similar manner, while legislation had been portrayed as crucial when it comes to gender and remote work experience, the topic of legislation had not been very common when discussing employee remote work experiences. While legislation is present to an extent, the data seems to suggest that it is just a framework, while the norms are what impacts employee experiences in practice. While one could attribute this to the legislation not being developed/implemented sufficiently, as argued by Orr and Savage (2021) and Partridge (2021), the data suggests that the employees are more concerned with what is expected of them, rather than thinking about the legislation.

In conclusion, the study has shown that remote work experience of employees within the two explored Slovak firms may differ as a result of the local context, status position, as well as gender. Different local context as well as different employee status might lead to varying remote work experiences and attitudes as a reflection of these settings. The impact of gender on remote work experience of employees is closely related to the societal norms and expectations men and women are subject to. Furthermore, it had been argued that varying expectations that men and women are subject to are rooted in the legislation or at the workplace level as argued by Acker, but rather the societal norms and practices. Lastly, the desire behave in a consistent manner with the expectations can involve emotion work from both men and women in order to manage their behaviour in a way that is seen as desirable by the society. Adapting one's behaviour to societal norms leads to reproduction of sameness and helps strengthening these norms, making changes more difficult to implement. This difficulty can be demonstrated by the slow rate of changes in the field of gender equality as outlined by EIGE (2021). In summary, the study suggests if one seeks to address gender equality concerns, it should be done via addressing the societal norms and practices.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guide

Introduction to the interview and formalities

- Presentation of project
- Purpose of the interviews
- Interview length, use of the data, confidentiality
- Before we start the interview, is there anything else that you would like to ask?
- Is it okay if I start the recording now?
-

Introducing questions

- Would you like to introduce yourself briefly? (background, education, previous positions)
- What is your position within the organization?
- How long have you been working for this organization?
- How long have you been working at your current role?
- How would you evaluate your familiarity with remote work?
 - first remote work job/ previous experiences?

Organizational structure

- Could you, briefly, describe your company (size; area of expertise; demographic-education, gender, age)?
- Could you tell me a bit about the organizational hierarchy? (what kind of positions are there within the company/ distribution of workers)
- Could you describe your role within the organization?

Remote work attitudes/ remote work within the organization

- What does remote work mean to you?
- Could you describe to what extent does your organization employ remote work practices?
- How would you evaluate your experience in working remotely in comparison to working in person?
 - remote work benefits/negatives
 - satisfaction with remote work
- Are there any areas where you feel like remote work is particularly useful in your organization? If so describe.
- Are there any areas where you think the remote work infrastructure/ skills are not satisfactory or sufficiently developed as of now? If so, explain.
- Can you think of any remote work-related changes that you would like to see implemented within the organization?

Local context

- Are there any remote work advantages/challenges specific to the Slovak labour market?
- In what way do you think remote work practices are being influenced by local norms and perceptions?
- Do you feel like the local remote work infrastructure and legislation is sufficient?

Workplace equality

- What do you think about gender equality in the Slovakian context? What do you think about gender equality at your workplace particularly?
- Are there any elements of remote working that you think are particularly good or bad for workplace equality?
- Do you believe remote work tend to advantage specific groups over others?
- In what way has the increased use of remote work influenced the workplace dynamics at your workplace?
- Would you say that your organization is male/female dominated? Does the gender split influence workplace equality in your opinion?
- Could you tell me a bit more about the leadership of the company?
- What role does the leadership play in regards to workplace gender equality in your opinion?

Future development and concluding remarks

- How do you think remote work will affect your situation at your current employer in the nearest future?
- Are there any changes you would like to make if you had the option to?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Would it be okay for me to contact you again for clarification regarding the responses in case I am unsure about something?

Appendix B: Access request translated from Slovak

Greetings,

My name is Adam Hanko and I am a student at the University of Gothenburg studying Strategic HR Management and Labour Relations. I am contacting you because I am currently working on a master's thesis on the topic of remote work. I am trying to investigate the perceptions towards remote work and remote work practices in the Slovak labour market. I am contacting you due to the fact that your firm seemed like a good setting for this research based on the information provided by your company website. Furthermore, the research aims to explore remote work experience in two firms situated in Slovakia in order to see how remote practices and perceptions may differ based on the local context.

If I was given the chance, I would like to conduct a few short interviews within your company regarding the topics mentioned. These would, of course, be voluntary, anonymized

and the participants would only have to answer the question they want to answer as well as the ability to withdraw from the interview without the need to provide a reason. The interviews would, ideally, be conducted either in person or online via Zoom, but I would try to adjust to what is preferred. Duration of the interviews are between 30-60 min.

Once again, I would be very grateful if I was given the opportunity to get in contact with your firm and your employees. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor (see contact info below).

I would, once again, like to thank you for your consideration and I wish you a nice day.

Kind regards,
Adam Hanko

Contact info:
Phone: xxxxx
e-mail: xxxxx

Contact supervisor:
Ylva Wallinder, PhD Sociology, Göteborgs universitet
Phone: xxxxx
e-mail: xxxxxx

Appendix C: Consent form translated from Slovak

I confirm that I have been informed about the purposes and content of the upcoming interview and the study as a whole. I have also been provided with further information relating to the interview itself as well as information explaining the collection and handling of the data from the interview.

I confirm that I understand this information and I agree with the interview data being used for the purpose of the study in a manner which had been presented to me.

Signature:

Date: