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Leadership in times of crisis

A qualitative study during the Covid-19 pandemic about emerging leadership strategies and practices

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Supervisor:	Gabriella Elgenius
Examiner:	Jing Wu

Abstract

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Purpose: The aim of this study is threefold. It aims to understand how leadership strategies and practices were challenged, adapted, and developed during the Covid-19 pandemic and to identify challenges and opportunities in connection with working from home and hybrid working conditions. Finally, the aim is to understand how the manager's role has developed in an increasingly virtual environment.

Theory: The study builds on the Situational Leadership Theory and Virtual Leadership Theory. These theories are combined as they provide perspectives on leadership in transformation. Valuable concepts highlight the importance of the context and emphasise that successful leadership styles must adapt to the situation and highlight the complexities of leadership in the virtual environment.

Method: The study uses a qualitative research design, and the data collection is based on 20 semi-structured interviews with line managers working in the automotive industry for a globalized company. The study will focus on managers' experiences of challenges, the need for adapting, and the development of leadership strategies and practices during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Result: The result suggests that managers were exposed to significant challenges and changes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, strategies were developed around the need to adapt to crises that contributed to forming new emerging practices. Additionally, the role as a manager developed. Managers experience both positive and negative effects of working in a virtual environment since the pandemic required significant developments related to working more from home and in hybrid conditions at home as well as in the office.

Foreword

Initially, we would like to take this opportunity to extend a thank you to all interviewees who took their time to participate in this study and wanted to share their experiences of being a manager and managing a team during the Covid-19 pandemic. Without your participation, this study would not be possible to complete. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our supervisor Gabriella Elgenius who has been helpful and contributed with support and guidance during this period. Finally, we want to thank our supervisor at the Case Study Organization; without your wise knowledge and guidance, this would not have been possible.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Palmér and Anna Tengelin

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1.0 Introduction	4
1.1. Aim and Research Question	4
Primary Research Question	5
Sub-research Questions	5
1.2 Case Study	5
1.3 Outline	6
2.0 Previous research	6
2.1. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic	8
2.2 What does it mean to be a Leader?	9
2.4 Leadership strategies	11
2.5 Leadership practices	12
2.6 The modified way of working	13
2.7 Leadership in times of crisis	14
3.0 Theoretical framework	16
3.1 The Situational Theory of Leadership (SLT)	16
3.2 Virtual Leadership Theory (VLT)	19
3.3 Combining theoretical frameworks	21
4.0 Method	22
4. 1 Research design	22
4. 2 Data collection and data analysis	23
4. 3 Sampling strategy	24
4. 4 Ethical considerations	25
4. 5 Limitations of the study	26
5.0 Results and Analysis	26
5.1 Challenges and Opportunities	28
5.2 The Changing Nature of the Role	38
5.3 Strategies and practices	44
6.0 Concluding remarks	50
7.0 Contributions	52

References	53
Appendix 1 - Interview Guide	61
Appendix 2 - Consent Form	64
Appendix 3 - Interview Request	66
Appendix 4 - Code List	68

1.0 Introduction

Managers can be seen as the link between the organization and the employees (Saltman, 2020). Saltman (2020) believes that effective virtual leadership and management will vastly improve the remote landscape, meaning working in a hybrid working model from home and in the office, and the connection between the organization and the employees. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, working from home was not a working method that many organizations used. However, it currently looks different for organizations whose strategies and practices have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, Saltman (2020) analyses the virtual environment that requires leaders to create new ways to stay connected with employees and manners that recognize the uniqueness of each individual. Few leaders are trained in the virtual context, and the Covid-19 pandemic adds another complexity due to the difficulties of being a manager in times of crisis. For instance, remote leadership must address some challenges: level of trust, decision-making, expressing opinions, managing conflicts, and making employees feel seen and heard (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). Many researchers point to different competencies, strategies, practices and leadership styles leading to effective leadership in crisis. James and Wooten (2005) believe that leaders have a significant impact on how far-reaching the consequences of an organization can have in a crisis. The culture and environment of the organization come from employee trust under normal circumstances. With digital development and hybrid work conditions, it is interesting to see how strategies and practices for managers have been affected during the Covid-19 crisis (James & Wooten, 2005).

Therefore, how leaders handle a crisis becomes vital for the organization to prevail and develop afterwards (Muffet-Willett & Kruse, 2009). Even though the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic have decreased, situations with other viruses, war situations and other cases that might limit or restrict organizations' business will continue to happen. Thus, circumstances will always limit organizations' operations, and therefore, this study can contribute valuable insights for future unforeseen situations. In addition, this thesis will contribute valuable strategies and practices leaders can use to strengthen connections with the team and develop their capabilities to lead in a virtual environment.

1.1. Aim and Research Question

This study aims to understand managers' experiences of being a leader during the Covid-19 pandemic and how leadership strategies and practices were challenged, adapted, and

developed during this pandemic and its aftermath. The goal is to understand how managers have experienced challenges and opportunities by adapting to a remote working model and later using a hybrid working model. The research questions are formulated to understand the nature of leadership, the challenges the managers may have faced, and the opportunities identified with new strategies and practices that developed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research questions addressed are the following;

Primary Research Question

How were leadership strategies and practices challenged, adapted and developed during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Sub-research Questions

What challenges did managers experience and what opportunities were identified with hybrid working conditions? How did the manager's role develop during the pandemic with reference to skills and strategies required for managing teams in virtual environments?

An organization's *strategy* is the strategic choices a company makes and how to reach its goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). In comparison, the *practice* is the manager's actions to provide directions for a group or organization (Nedelko & Potočan, 2016). In this case, *the hybrid working conditions* refer to working in the office and from home (Radonic et al., 2021). The *virtual environment* refers to the online working method (Saltman, 2020). During the writing of this study, the *Covid-19 pandemic* is still ongoing, and the period studied is March 11 2020 to March 31 2022.

1.2 Case Study

The study will demonstrate that the Covid-19 pandemic influenced leadership strategies and practices and how this affected leadership for managers. The study focuses on managers within the automotive industry. The case study takes place in a global organization in Sweden. A pseudonym known as the Case Study Organization (*herein* CSO) was used in agreement with the organization.

The CSO has a long experience in its industry and is operative worldwide. They have employees in many countries with different cultures, languages, and education. The CSO has various operations, and they are organized to deliver the most significant possible focus on their customers and needs. They operate in different business areas and focus on combining

the best of two worlds, the global organizations for product development, manufacturing, and purchasing and a significant focus on leadership, sustainability, and responsibility for customers and employees. The organization is divided into smaller organizations within the primary company. The study is made in one of the smaller organizations with approximately 2000 employees in various countries in Europe, Asia, and North America. The CSO is the global group function of a specific product industry and parts, including aftermarket; the organization also covers the indirect products and services. They have for a long time worked with Human Resource Management (HRM), which aligns organizations' culture, work environment, leadership, and staff development. They are responsible for involving and encouraging correct behaviour, managing risks, and building long-term relations with their suppliers, thus improving social, environmental, and business ethics (CSO, webpage, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the global production and supply chain system, which means the CSO has been affected. When the restrictions started worldwide and countries had lockdowns, transportation and distribution were affected between suppliers, production, facilities, customers, and the importation of raw materials. The largest economies were in lockdowns, and the demand for products and services was high, but the supply was slim (Kumar et al., 2020). As a result, the CSO was forced to make redundancies. As a result, all consultants lost their contracts, and even full-time employees had to leave.

1.3 Outline

The study is structured as follows; the aim and research questions are presented in chapter one after the introduction. Chapter two is about the previous research to understand the subject and the purpose. The third chapter introduces the theoretical framework with two different theories. Chapter four covers the method, working plan, and the study. Then, the data collection strategy, the sampling strategy, and the ethical considerations are explained. In chapter five, the results and empirical findings are described, followed by discussion and analysis of the study. In chapter six, the concluding remarks are presented, and finally, in chapter seven, the study's contributions are presented.

2.0 Previous research

Two research traditions will be brought together in the study: research on leadership and research on remote work. This is to explore previous research that will help us study how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted leadership in organizations where the employees have been

working from home for an extended period. This change in the work environment has led to changes that have raised questions regarding where the organization's responsibilities end and begin. Meaning that leadership had to challenge, adapt and develop during these past years.

In December of 2019, the first case of Covid-19 was reported. In January 2020, the virus spread across the world, infected almost 5 million people, and caused the death of over 300 000 people, and today it is even more (Ciotti et al., 2020). Due to the virus being highly contagious, countries had lockdowns meaning people had to stay in their homes not to risk getting infected. Organizations went bankrupt, restricted movements for citizens, and people lost their jobs and incomes. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected different parts of industries such as health care, economy, education, and transportation, and these industries are still affected (Shen et al., 2020). According to Sher (2020), social isolation, stress, economic difficulties, anxiety, and fear of contagion are some of the few consequences that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected. Despite these negative aspects of the virus, researchers have seen positive effects. Due to people being in lockdown, not using their cars, or travelling by plane, there is a decline in greenhouse gas emissions and pollution in the natural environment (Khan et al., 2021). Another positive aspect is that businesses had to adapt to the new working method to stay afloat. They are constantly trying to find innovative ways to develop, and the pandemic has forced businesses to do so. Working remotely from home allows both employers and employees to be more flexible. A study of the positive impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic shows that working remotely from home has reduced employee turnover, which increases job satisfaction (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Job satisfaction can be seen as an essential factor in leading a team. The team's stability is vital for the individual, the leader and the organization to create a good work environment (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). In conclusion, both negative and positive aspects of the pandemic have had different impacts on countries, organizations, and individuals.

Leadership is a frequently studied topic in management and social psychology. Studies have primarily been conducted in the so-called organizational and traditional settings, meaning that leaders such as managers work and communicate daily face-to-face in person. Due to the globalization and advancement of technology, the new way for organizations to work is more remote (Yoo & Alavi, 2004). Numerous organizations are forced to translate their work virtually and work remotely from home, not being able to work face-to-face in person (Salman, 2020).

2.1. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

During the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly influenced how people have worked, remote or in the office. The lockdowns have harmed people's well-being in several countries, and remote work challenges have occurred. Adverse effects and challenges include people being depressed, living in smaller areas confined to their families, working remotely from home, and not meeting any co-workers (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

People working remotely in a virtual environment is not a new phenomenon, but managers who lead a team remotely can influence and affect the team of an organization. Therefore, it is essential to address new considerations of remote work. Individuals are used to working in remote teams but working from home leads us to new challenges when adapting new working routines and leadership styles. The workplace of organizations has been impacted in different ways, such as having to change their way of working from one day to another. Working from home, managers are not present in people's daily work, around co-workers, and the balance between work and private life becomes diffuse since people's workplace is in their private homes. Previous studies on the topic are relatively narrow since it is a new phenomenon, and new studies are needed within leadership connected to working remotely. New modern working concepts have been implemented within organizations on how to work remotely and flexibly due to the ongoing pandemic (Radonić et al., 2021). A study by Radonic et al. (2021) provides an overview of modern workplace models regarding flexible working hours and teleworking as a large part of remote work as a new working concept. New aspects and theories regarding leadership have been studied during these past two years and how virtual leadership should become a priority after the era of Covid-19 (Saltman, 2020). Although people working from home is not something new, technological advancement has made it difficult for managers to lead a team. Difficulties such as the lack of face-to-face contact with the team have significantly influenced productivity or lack of motivation. The virtual environment requires a leader to establish new ways to stay connected with colleagues and etiquette that recognizes the uniqueness of each individual (Saltman, 2020).

Previous studies have shown that the work environment has affected people negatively, such as socio-psychological, physical, and technical implications when they adjust to new work environments. Although some of these challenges are unique and require new methods and theories, some of the issues employees face are daily work experiences (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has created challenging situations for HRM such as

organizations having to make fast decisions about the unknown when they adapt their workforce and cope with radical changes, such as remote work or employee stress (Aryatama, 2020). Carnevale & Hatak (2020) describe one significant challenge as the new current working method. Individuals were forced to work from home (herein WFH) with different working conditions. The team has worked apart and reduced daily contact with managers and colleagues, which may have affected creativity and cohesion. Organizations had to get rid of staff, had to adjust to the outside world, and try to solve problems day by day (Aryatama, 2020). As a result, well-being has decreased due to all uncertainties such as not knowing about the future and the development of Covid-19. Even though many positive things have developed during the pandemic, such as flexible working hours and working remotely from home, the negative aspects are also a fact. Researchers have seen that it is difficult for managers to enhance the team-building strategies within organizations and stay connected to the team (Lieke et al., 2008).

An effect of the Covid-19 pandemic was that organizations were forced to send their employees home for an unforeseeable future. Once the school closed, many working parents struggled with the balance of working and taking care of their families. According to previous research regarding gender inequalities, women continue to have most of the responsibilities regarding homework and childcare. Regardless of the increase in women participating in full-time paid employment, women tend to shoulder most at-home work (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021). According to Aldossari and Chaudhry (2021), women had a more challenging time balancing their professional and personal life due to the imbalance between household and childcare work.

2.2 What does it mean to be a Leader?

Leadership is complex and perhaps one of the most critical aspects of management (Wehrich et al., 2008). Leadership is one of the most studied topics in the behavioural sciences; it is still an exciting aspect of the concepts that could be explored (Day & Antonakis, 2012). According to Fred Fiedler (1971), there are many definitions of leadership. Even though leadership scholars are divided regarding leadership, some agree that leadership is an influencing process between managers and followers. It could influence the manager's behaviours, disposition, and characteristics. Also, the follower's perceptions and attributions of the manager combined with the context in which influence occurs (Day & Antonakis, 2012). The pandemic can be seen as an unpredictable process for leadership. Yukl (2006) has

defined this as "the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives." (p.8).

Within leadership and leadership styles, the theories for the different leadership styles focus on managers' activities rather than the manager's influence on the follower (Eriksson-Zetterquist et al., 2006). The definition of leadership styles focuses on managers' behaviour and their actions (Daft, 2008). According to some research, managers will choose a leadership style that will most effectively achieve the desired result. However, other researchers mean that managers are not necessarily choosing their leadership style. Instead, it results from external conditions (Eriksson-Zetterquist et al., 2006). Another aspect of leadership is whether a specific leadership style is more effective when leading people during the Covid-19 pandemic. The definition of a manager tends to primarily have a great deal with what kind of personality traits the manager has. According to a study on leadership styles, a manager must be able to change their leadership depending on the situation, environment, or goals of the organization (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). As a manager during the pandemic, it is essential to be flexible and adaptable to fast change to keep up with future developments.

Different theories point out various aspects of what is known as successful leadership. For example, some people say that it is about situations, some about effectiveness, and others about the relation to one another (Fiedler, 1971). Previous studies on leadership have shown a pattern where leadership styles significantly affect organizational culture, employee motivation, and retention (Rahbi et al., 2017). Motivation also affects teamwork, which can be linked to job satisfaction. Their leadership creates a sustainable workplace where the employees are motivated and work better, faster, and stay in the company longer (Rahbi et al., 2017).

An example of a leadership style is Emergent Leadership. Emergent Leadership occurs when a specific individual step up as the leader in a group; in other words, he or she is not elected or appointed as the leader (Carte et al., 2006). Usually, it happens over time in a team and empowers people to make decisions in no traditional way. Some people see this as thinking outside the box and leaving the traditional working structures (Carte et al., 2006). It is challenging to address which leadership style is best for every organization. It depends on the culture, structure, and size of the organization. The pandemic has affected working as a manager, and this generates new strategies and practices to use post-pandemic (Saltman, 2020).

2.4 Leadership strategies

Managers can use countless leadership strategies and practices to increase individual performance and efficiency, resulting in a greater collective output. The leadership strategies can be seen as the potential of how the manager can reach the organizational goals. Managers' practices are the actions they take to reach their collective goals and could divide into *task-oriented behaviours* and *relations-oriented behaviours*. Early leadership research connects these leader behaviours to leadership effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and performance. Within task-oriented behaviour, the activities are divided into the categories; (1) *short-term planning*, (2) *clarifying responsibilities and performance objectives*, and (3) *monitoring operations and performance* (Yukl et al., 2002). The first category is *short-time planning* which refers to the manager's decisions about what, when, and how a task will succeed. The second category is *clarifying responsibilities and performance objectives*, clarifying behaviours such as communicating plans, policies, and role expectations. These are the practices such as setting specific task objectives to drive performance and the execution of essential tasks. It could also be the search for increasing efficiency in working and benchmarking practices to evaluate employees' performance. The last category is the *monitoring of operations and performance*. These are the monetary actions which consist of observation of work operations, watching performance data, an inspection of the quality of the work, and progress review meetings. The relations-oriented strategies consist of; (1) *Supporting*, (2) *developing*, (3) *consulting*, (4) *recognizing*, and (5) *empowering* (Yukl et al., 2002). When managers use these strategies, they focus on the relationship aspects between themselves and their followers. The supporting category includes actions that show consideration, concern, and acceptance for the needs and feelings of their employees. Within the development, the manager is coaching their employees to develop their time management, increase efficiency, and the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. The consulting category is about consulting the followers and including them in decision-making. Then there is recognizing; this category is about the acknowledgement, appreciation, and recognition from others for significant achievements, effective performance, and important contributions to the organization. Lastly, empowering is delegation and providing subordinates with more independence and discretion. Within task-oriented behaviours and relations-oriented behaviour, there are multiple examples of what type of strategies managers can use (Yukl et al., 2002).

Besides these different types of strategies, there are multiple practices that managers can deploy to ensure the organization's continued success (Rowe, 2001). According to Rowe (2001), strategic leadership is the managers' ability to influence followers to make daily decisions to maintain short-term financial profitability while increasing the organization's long-term viability. In addition, strategic leadership means that the leader must understand the organization's emerging strategy processes while also sharing the organization's mission and vision. Managers and employees can then make daily decisions and practices that align with the organization's objectives. Finally, as previously mentioned, there are a variety of leadership styles that can be used depending on the manager's personality, organizational fit, or situational context (Rowe, 2001).

2.5 Leadership practices

In today's society, organizations worldwide strive to be the best of the best and make as much profit as possible while improving organizational strategies and practices to reach new goals. Therefore, developing and using new strategies that improve organizational processes and routines is essential. These processes and routines can be seen as practices for an organization (Goldman, 2012). According to Crevani et al. (2010), the definition of leadership practices is how leaders interact with their team and proceed with their strategies within the organization. Leadership can be exercised in different ways depending on the manager. In each leadership, the leadership is based on theory, and these theories are how leadership should be exercised. However, this is not how it works in real life. All managers have different knowledge and approaches to leadership, which affects how these leaders do in practice (Crevani et al., 2010). As previously mentioned, to build a strong team the need for a strong leader is essential. Leaders can manage a team, but the vital thing is how they manage the team. It is the "how" that is the practice in this case. For an organization to succeed, they need common goals and a leader who can reach them. In other words, leadership practices are the actions and strategies the leaders choose to use and implement to reach the organizational goals and help the team thrive and grow (Ozcelik et al., 2008). Within the broad concept of leadership, there are both good and less good leadership practices. Examples of good leadership practices can be giving feedback to the employees, recognition, and having one-on-ones and short team meetings to increase the communication within the group (McCarthy, 2005). Rowe (2010), shows the importance of the leader to use the right leadership practice that fits the situation. The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that leaders had to adapt to the situation and develop their

practices. In addition, leaders had to manage their teams at a distance during a crisis, which meant that the leadership practices had to address the uncertainties and emotions that the crisis produced. Therefore, it becomes even more critical for managers to adapt their leadership practices to show compassion and understanding (Diaz-Saenz, 2011).

2.6 The modified way of working

The continual development of information and communication with technology has enabled organizations to generate a flexible workplace. For example, virtual teams not being restricted by geographical borders, physical barriers, culture, or time zones (Purvanova & Kenda, 2018). Remote work is considered an inevitable development due to technological innovations, making it possible to collaborate globally while also delivering on unique customer demands. In addition, the pandemic has accelerated the evolution of virtual teams and the demand for virtual leadership (Saltman, 2020). There are multiple definitions of what a virtual team means. However, some of the commonalities in this concept are the inclusion of multiple individuals with varying degrees of interdependence while having mutual accountability when striving to accomplish a common goal. The individuals included in this team are usually scattered, relying on technological communication tools like emails, video meetings, and other virtual solutions to stay connected and communicate with the team (Liao, 2017).

Having virtual teams has been attributed to a thriving modern organization and is considered a necessary tool to compete globally. Through advanced communication technology, experts worldwide can collaborate in a virtual work environment where the employees can appreciate a level of flexibility and agility that is not possible in a traditional team (Liao, 2017). However, even though virtual teams can contribute to several advantages for organizations, some inherent challenges emerge from the use of virtual teams. Some examples of these challenges are the level of trust, decision-making, expressing opinions, and managing conflicts (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). Furthermore, virtual teams require a leader with specific skills to successfully and effectively manage a virtual team (Byrd, 2019). Much research indicates that a virtual context influences different types of leadership and team outcomes. However, some scholars question whether virtuality might change the concept of leadership as known today. Despite the increased demand for leaders able to handle the changes a virtual context implies, there is not much research about virtual leadership (Purvanova & Kenda,

2018). In addition to having traditional leadership skills, a virtual leader also needs sufficient technical skills to overcome the challenges that a virtual environment can entail (Byrd, 2019).

The virtual leader must be aware of the barriers caused by virtual interaction. Since this type of interaction is characterized by the lack of body language and physical cues, there are fewer informal opportunities to encounter colleagues. Also increased risk of isolation, virtual leaders need to understand better effective strategies and tools that can support them (Byrd, 2019). In managing these situations, virtual leadership and management require new ways of staying connected with their employees while also making allowances for individual uniqueness (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). The virtual leader must carefully balance the monitoring work output level while giving the employees sufficient room for autonomy (Saltman, 2020). They also have to create a sense of community with their team members while also being prepared to communicate effectively and coach their employees to increase their performance (Byrd, 2019). When the work is done virtually, it is also harder to manage employees' schedules, such as the work-life balance. Saltman (2020) questions if the employees should respond to work-related texts or emails outside of their regular working hours. Also, when employees are expected to be available and when they should set boundaries (Saltman, 2020).

2.7 Leadership in times of crisis

A crisis can be explained as a situation of change that affects the environment while being a suppressing occurrence that restricts the response time before the decision is transferred (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997). Being a leader during times of crisis can be a difficult task to handle. During a crisis such as the financial crisis, Ebola epidemic, natural disasters, or the Covid-19 pandemic. Leaders can use different styles of management. A known leadership style among researchers in crises is crisis management. Crisis management stands for prevention, preparedness, response, and reconstruction when a challenging task or crisis occurs (Boin & Hart, 2003). According to Nyenswah et al. (2016), leaders play a significant and critical part during a crisis, since leaders are links between the organizations and the employees. During a crisis, leadership plays an important role that goes through different phases that evolve. For example, different situations, behaviours, relations, and tasks evolved during the Ebola epidemic, which led to different leadership approaches (Nyenswah et al. 2016). Nyenswah et al. (2016) hypothesize that being a leader who can adopt different leadership approaches in other crises has a significant impact on how well the organization

can emerge from the crisis. Further on, this will help the organization be prepared for similar future crises by acknowledging the different stages of leadership. The four different stages are the initial phase of the crisis, the emergency phase, the declining phase, and lastly, the long tail of the crisis phase. Each phase has different challenges and opportunities, and the outcome depends on the leader making the decisions. The initial phase is the recognition of the crisis. In the early stage, the organization mobilizes and faces difficulties when a crisis occurs. The emergency phase is when someone must focus on managing overwhelmed and concerned people about the crisis. The third face of declining the crisis is when the caseload falls, focusing on effectively controlling and ending the crisis. The last phase is called the long tail of the crisis, meaning when minor recurrences focus and strengthen the organization, find positive effects of the crisis, and make it stronger than before (Nyenswah et al., 2016). A crisis that had significant implications for countries, organizations, and individuals was the financial crisis in 2008. This stopped the economic growth, and companies struggled to make a profit for years to come. A consequence was that people lost their jobs. All crises are unique, and it is not easy to predict, prevent and manoeuvre them. Similar to the financial crisis in 2008, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected organizations' ability to make a profit while also resulting in multiple people losing their jobs. In addition, people lost loved ones and their ability to move around freely while also dealing with the isolation that many countries inflicted on their citizens. There is a gap in research of post-pandemic, and organizations have a challenging time implementing new strategies to adapt and develop their business most effectively (Stoker et al. 2019).

Previous research shows that depending on the situation, leaders change their leadership style (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). For example, the financial crisis in 2008 impacted leaders to have a more direct leadership. An analysis of 20,000 managers in 980 organizations across 36 countries was made, and according to Stoker et al. (2019), a significant increase in direct leadership was found, especially within the manufacturing sector. This generated new leadership behaviours that significant events or crises affect a manager's leadership style. Another example comes from the events of the terror attack in New York City on September 11th, 2001. During this crisis, Transformational Leadership became a good leadership style due to its moral quality. Transformational Leadership provides the followers with a high focus on the needs of the follower's, making sure the leaders know their follower's goals and what needs to be done (Miller et al., 2010). When people are going through a tough time, the leader needs to show compassion and understand what people experience. Transformational

leadership is when a leader acts as a role model, inspires, and motivates, shows intellectual stimulation, and cares for the individuals and the team (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). This was shown during the terror attack in 2001 among many leaders (Miller et al., 2010).

3.0 Theoretical framework

The focus of this study is to investigate how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected managers' work, strategies, and practices during the pandemic. By building on two different theoretical traditions about leadership, the Situational Leadership Theory (*herein* SLT) and the Virtual Leadership Theory (*herein* VLT), this study provides insights into the nature of leadership. These theories were selected to show working methods are adapted and modified, and the impact of the virtual context or environment on working lives. The focus is on leaders' experiences of managing the Covid-19 pandemic rather than the crisis itself.

3.1 The Situational Theory of Leadership (SLT)

SLT was developed by Hersey and Blanchard in the late 1960s (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). The theory introduced the "life cycle theory of leadership" in 1969 and was later renamed "Situational Leadership Theory." The theory is based on two variables: relationship behaviour and task behaviour. Relationship behaviour supports the employees, while task behaviour stands for guiding the team in the right direction (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). Situational Leadership is a type of Leadership in organizational theory, a leadership style, and model whose purpose for a leader is to adapt their way of leading depending on the situation. Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model is one of the most well-known approaches to Leadership, with both strengths and criticisms (Papworth et al., 2009). The leader's focus is to adapt the leadership style to different situations or phases that an organization may be in. A situation-adapted leader can swiftly and flexibly change the leadership style depending on the situation and the changes within the organization (Hersey & Blanchard, 1979). The SLT aims to adapt the leadership style to the situation rather than having a fixed leadership style. According to Hersey & Blanchard (1979), the leader who can adapt a leadership style to specific situations is the most effective one. For example, to see what support the team needs to get the work done or how the situation affects the team's well-being.

Hersey and Blanchard (1979) write about four primary leadership styles within Situational Theory called the quadrants, which are *telling* (S1), *selling* (S2), *participating* (S3), and *delegating* (S4). Each style has different focuses depending on the situation, the people, and the leader. The theory proposes that the leadership style changes depending on the maturity of the people and their development. The four primary styles are also combined with four levels of maturity. The leadership style of *telling* is when the leader uses a direct style and tells people what to do; in other words, something that can be compared with micro-management. The level of maturity is in this style when people do not have the full knowledge or the skills to complete their work. *Selling* is the style where the leader and the team go back and forth with ideas, including leadership, where the leader sells the ideas to the team. The maturity level is when the team is engaged in learning and is enthusiastic but cannot complete the tasks. *Participating* is the style where the leader has fewer directions for the team and makes the team more active, making their own decisions and coming up with ideas themselves. *Delegating* is the style where the team has the responsibility for what happens within the organization, being more self-propelled (Norris & Vecchio, 1992). The Situational Theory works in different ways; the style of *telling* might be a better approach at the beginning of a project or for a newly hired person. It is necessary to let the team or individual know what to do and give them less responsibility to work independently. Nevertheless, after a while, the leader can change the style to a more *delegating approach*, and the team can work more freely on their own. In other words, adapt the leadership to the situation or phase the organization is in (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996).

SLT is the foundation of several leadership styles that adapt to different situations, one of them is Path-goal Theory. The Path-goal Theory emphasises that managers require the right skills and tools to succeed in their leadership (House, 1971). According to House (1971), the Path-goal main idea is for the leader to define goals, clarify paths, remove obstacles, and provide support. An essential aspect of being a Path-goal leader is engaging in various leadership behaviours depending on the surroundings and circumstances. Leadership styles include directive leadership, supportive leadership, and participative leadership (House, 1971). Path-goal Theory is underlined by the relationship between the leader's leadership style and the employee's characteristics. The leader's focus is to be adaptive and use the leadership style that meets the employees' motivational goals; in other words, the leader needs to in a fast way be a chameleon and personalize the leadership style depending on the followers. According to Northouse (2021), the Path-goal Theory's purpose is to provide a

healthy and productive work environment that thrives employees to success. Leadership is an essential aspect of motivating the followers or employees in the right direction to develop and have a high degree of job satisfaction. This is by having a healthy relationship with the employees and guiding them through their development journey within their occupation (Northouse, 2021). Previous research on the Path-goal Theory indicates that having a leader who personalize their leadership style on communication and motivation impacts job satisfaction and the intent to leave. In other words, Path-goal Theory in terms of the leader's behaviour could increase employee engagement and motivation while also decreasing employee turnover (Northouse, 2021).

An essential aspect of Path-goal Theory is that there is not only one primary leadership behaviour or characteristic that is the right one but four ones. These leadership behaviours are essential pillars to understanding how Path-goal Theory works and how researchers use this theory when studying leadership approaches. The directive leadership behaviour involves letting the followers know what is expected of them and giving them clear and specific directions on how to proceed with their work and reach their goals (Dolatabadi & Safa, 2010). Supportive leadership behaviour is characterized by a manager who supports their followers by being involved in their work, well-being, and performance. A supportive leader focuses on creating trust, emotional support, and respect for the followers (Elsaied, 2019). The third leadership behaviour is participative leadership, which includes being inclusive to the followers and letting them be a part of the decision-making. For example, let them be part of setting goals, developing strategies, and developing procedures to achieve the goals (Akpoviro et al., 2018). The last central leadership behaviour is achievement-oriented leadership, characterized by a leader challenging the followers to perform better in their work. According to House & Mitchell (1974), the leader of this behaviour sets challenging goals and expects followers to perform at their highest level, always strive for improvement, and accomplish challenging goals of the individual and the organization (Polston-Murdoch, 2013). Path-goal Theory has several positive features, such as the behaviour of the leadership varies and can be experienced in different situations by the same leader. According to Alanazi et al. (2013), the strength of the Path-goal Theory is that the leader is informed about when to be directive, supportive, participative, or achievement-oriented. The theory is helpful when explaining to a leader when to adapt, for example, a direct leadership style when the organizational goals are complex for the followers. A supportive leadership style is when the organizational goals are unchallenging. However, this can be seen as a clear framework for a

leader but, on the other hand, leave room for the need for a broader scope when it comes to the development of leadership, for example, gender (Alanazi et al., 2013).

As mentioned, the Situational Theory has both strengths and weaknesses. It can be difficult for a leader to know the most appropriate leadership style for their team and what type of leadership they require. Even if leadership is a prominent phenomenon and leaders are aware of its importance, it has been demonstrated that it can be challenging to determine the team's needs in a specific leadership style. It is all about the situation, the team, and the leader (Thompson & Glasø, 2015). People within an organization have different goals, strategies, personalities, and learning abilities. Therefore, the Situational Theory avoids using the single-style approach because people are different, and problems need to be handled differently in various situations. Therefore, an essential aspect of Situational Theory is adapting the leadership styles to different situations. However, these situations do not refer to situations in crisis that are significant to have in mind. Therefore, the theory is of great importance but does not illuminate everything—for example, Situational Theory in times of crisis.

In conclusion, according to the Situational Theory, there is no best fit or best practice to be a successful leader. For a leader to be effective, it is essential to adapt the style to the context that is the most relevant to the situation. Those leaders who are able and willing to adapt their leadership style to suit the performance readiness of their teams are more likely to thrive and develop. It all comes down to the assignment, job, or function that needs development or completion (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). The Path-goal Theory gives general recommendations based on the characteristics of the followers and the tasks. This affects how the leaders act in different situations and how they should be as effective as possible. It informs the leaders on having clear goals, supporting their followers, and enhancing group decisions (Northhouse, 2019).

3.2 Virtual Leadership Theory (VLT)

As a result of increased globalization and technology, Virtual Leadership has become an essential factor for global organizations. The VLT can be described as a theory used when employees are spread over different parts of the world. Communication occurs mainly through digital tools, such as Teams or e-mail. Being a global organization working virtually can be an advantage in gathering the best people, not depending on their geographical

location (Caulat, 2012). Hence, the use of virtual teams has increased and are a large part of how people work today. Therefore, there is a significant need for Virtual Leadership within organizations that operate globally or work from home (*herein* WFH). A study from MCIWorld.com (2001) showed that 61% of employees in companies with over 500 employees have been or are in a virtual team. The managers leading a team partly or mainly virtually oversee teams online, helping them be productive and efficient. Managers have a significant impact on their team and the environment. There are three different vital traits in a virtual team context in Virtual Leadership. These three traits are *communication competency*, *environmental alertness*, and *the power of influence* (Zhang & Fjermestad, 2006). Positive aspects come with working virtually in an organization. For example, minimizing costs for people travelling across the world for short meetings, also thinking about the environment and the carbon footprint reduction. Also the employees' work-life balance is more flexible in their work choosing if they want to WFH or not (Caulat, 2012). According to Schmidt (2014), there are many positive aspects to working virtually for the employees, but the effects it has on the managers are uncertain. Often, managers are forced to lead their teams online. The Covid-19 pandemic was a great example of when managers were forced to lead their team virtually online without being taught how to do it and where the focus would be. Many managers do not know what is required and what skills are needed when leading a team online. Few organizations have understood the importance of managers needing endorsement and support (Schmidt, 2014).

The virtual working environment works best when the technology is advanced and straightforward (Caulat, 2012). An important factor for succeeding in the virtual context as a manager is, according to Caulat (2012), trust and intimacy. Other works of literature believe it is crucial to have met the manager and team face-to-face to create trust. However, Caulat's (2012) study shows that it is unnecessary. This study showed that people in a group experiencing anonymity from the outset could bring people closer to each other due to not knowing their baggage and accumulated perceptions. When working, an essential aspect of the virtual environment is socializing, and coffee breaks conversations, which is not a natural thing in a virtual context. Therefore, the manager must allow the team to interact and socialize between breaks and plan proper chat time for the team to feel connected. When holding an online meeting, something that disappears is the degree of spontaneity and informality the team easily creates when meeting face-to-face in a room. As a manager, it is essential to leave room for casual and vivified conversations that can help the team develop

and connect on a more profound level (Caulat, 2012). A way of doing this is to plan proper chat time before meetings or even before or after work begins or organize a virtual coffee break during the meeting. In return, they can leave the team with a stronger emotional bond with one another.

When working virtually with a team, there is a lot to think about as a manager. The manager needs to be aware of the team's cultural awareness, recognize each individual, put more effort into knowing their thoughts and feelings, and understand the uniqueness of each individual. Furthermore, having a vast and clear communication is what connects the organization and the employees. Besides the importance of this, trust is an essential factor. The most critical parameter of managing in a virtual context seems to be to lose the tensions and dilemmas that might happen when working online. Sometimes it can be challenging for a manager to solve the dilemmas. However, the literature shows that it acknowledges the tensions and dilemmas and makes people aware of them (Caulat, 2012).

Researchers have shown a need for specific leadership to develop a high-performing virtual leadership. First, a manager who wishes to be a successful leader in a virtual environment needs to build solid relationships within the team. It is also important to be a facilitator of social and different work processes, care for the team and the specific individuals and align group structure, technology, and task environment. Aspects that work in a face-to-face environment might not work in a virtual environment. Also, a leader needs to establish different ways of working and focus on trust. Independence is fundamental; employees need to feel trusted, empowered, and self-directed to develop the need for reliance and trust in technology for the employees to be efficient. Finally, managers focus on the relationship between the manager and the team and the people within the team. This type of leadership has only just started, and researchers believe this is just the beginning of how people today use technology to work more virtually. The skills of becoming a better leader are constantly developing with new skills and competencies (Caulat, 2012).

3.3 Combining theoretical frameworks

Leadership has a significant impact on the organization and the team, such as rapid change and development within technological innovation. That increases global market competition, growing demographic diversity in the labour market, and a move towards a flatter organizational structure (Galanti et al., 2021). We will utilize SLT and VLT to understand

leadership strategies and the emerging role of post-pandemic leadership. The SLT is the foundation of leadership that adapts to different organizational situations, especially individualizing the leadership to the team and its individuals (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). It is all about the individuals adapting to the environmental context within the organization. At the same time, Virtual Leadership is all about adapting to the environment and, as a result, adapting the leadership towards a more globalized and virtual context (Caulat, 2012). Path-goal Theory within the SLT can use leadership training as a tool, where communication and collaboration enable employees to be more involved, engaged, and motivated. In addition, Path-goal Theory is associated with Virtual Leadership, mentioned in previous research where a combination of these frameworks can be the outcome of a potential learning-design approach to a successful way to develop leaders who lead both virtually and face-to-face (Byrd, 2019). A few of the main components of the Path-goal Theory include the behaviour of leaders, the characteristics of the followers, the characteristics of tasks, and motivations among followers (Northouse, 2019).

By combining these theoretical frameworks, leadership needs to consider the context while adapting the leadership depending on the skills and resources of the employees. These theories make it apparent that leaders need to adapt and use the right tools and technology to lead a team efficiently and prosperously. The SLT and the VLT are being jeopardized in a virtual environment. During a crisis, the employees need present leadership. What is known when using these leadership frameworks under normal circumstances might not be known in the context of a crisis, in this case, the Covid-19 pandemic. It requires specific strategies, which in turn, can develop new practices.

4.0 Method

This chapter describes the methodological approach used in this qualitative research and explains the data selection and analysis process. Moreover, the limitations and ethical considerations are presented in this part.

4.1 Research design

This study aimed to investigate strategies and practices that were challenged, adapted, and developed during the Covid-19 pandemic and how this affected the leadership. According to Hakim (2000), the qualitative method enables the researcher to understand people's points of view while also understanding and capturing people's experiences, emotions, behaviours, and

opinions. Furthermore, it allows researchers to study a phenomenon within a specific context while also considering social interplay and networks (Bryman, 2011). Therefore, a qualitative interview method was used to gather data for the study. Using semi-structured interviews, the general structure was followed. The interview guide (Appendix 1) was used together with flexibility for follow-up questions and the possibility to concentrate on specific aspects of interest (Tracy, 2020). The study was done in a multinational corporation. The focus was on understanding the difficulties experienced during the pandemic regarding leadership within a specific part of the organization. Therefore, no more descriptors of the specific part of the organization will be enclosed in this study to ensure the company's anonymity.

The case study was done within one organization, and the results will therefore be within the context of the CSO. The company was chosen due to the organization's size and the company being multinational. The organization is large, and therefore, there are multiple managers within the organization with different views on leadership and its practices. Since the study is done from a leadership perspective, the CSO needed to have multiple managers who could be potential participants. In addition, an interesting aspect of being a multinational organization is the complexity and differences the CSO can provide to the study. Therefore, a case study provides an insight into a phenomenon within the specific context of the CSO (Yin, 2014).

4. 2 Data collection and data analysis

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be interesting to investigate how leadership had developed during this crisis. Therefore, it is interesting to see how leadership has developed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collection was achieved through 20 semi-structured interviews; in other words, this was the primary data. Since this study was conducted while the Covid-19 pandemic continued to develop and still was active, all interview requests asked whether they would like to have the interview virtually online or in-person. The interviews were conducted through the digital platform Teams and in-person. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated for analysis with the participant's permission. The first interview was a pilot interview to ensure that the interview guide was complete and some minor modifications were done. The transcription was equally divided among the authors, transcribing ten interviews each. The transcribing was done on each other's interviews to get to know the entire material. The secondary data was scientific articles, archives, statistics from previous research, and other relevant theories (Ritche et al., 2014). The data analysis used thematic analysis, a well-known method in qualitative research. Using a thematic

analysis allows the study to identify and recur themes or patterns in the data. The first step was to transcribe the interviews. After that, a summary of the data was done, and patterns in the results were presented. It was essential to get familiar with the data and identify patterns. Developing a framework was the next step, another word for coding or indexing. Through thematic coding and analysis (TA), it is possible to create a plausible and coherent mapping of the collected data (Clarke et al., 2015). In this study, an abductive process was used. When using that process, the purpose is not to contribute to theory development. Instead, it used the theoretical frameworks as a tool to understand the empirics of the study. The study followed the ethical principles of the consent requirement, participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Thus, the data material was only used in this study. The interviews were conducted through the digital platform Teams and in-person. The interviewees were also given the possibility to have the interviews in English or Swedish. All of the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated for analysis with the participant's consent. The material was then analysed using thematic coding to create a plausible and coherent mapping of the collected data (Clarke et al., 2015)

During the analysis, the researcher alternates between the theoretical and the empirical findings. As the process moves further on, it is essential to process, revise and rework the material through a reflection process (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). After the data is coded, it is time to identify patterns and connections on the above-mentioned topic (Ritche et al., 2014). A comparative approach to the study will be opportunities to compare the organization's difficulties and what challenges might be specific to the department. In this case, the organization's approach to leadership in pandemic times and future challenges. The data will, after the study, be deleted since everyone involved goes under a pseudonym (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Identification of three main themes was done during coding, these were *challenges and opportunities, the changing nature of the role and the development of leadership strategies and practices* (Appendix 4).

4. 3 Sampling strategy

The purpose of the study was to understand and analyze managers' experiences leading a team during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants in the study were selected among managers that had been in a leadership position during the Covid-19 pandemic. The managers being interviewed were first-line managers working in the first line of the operations and second-line managers managing a team of managers. The first- and second-line managers

work in global teams in Sweden, France, and the USA. Ten of them were in Sweden, eight in France and two in the US. The study's limitations were that all managers should have been in a leading position during the entirety of the Covid-19 pandemic while also being close to the organization's operations. The interviews had a strategic selection meaning that the sampling technique was chosen to create a conformation between the research question and the selection (Bryman, 2011). The information on the CSO was given from a contact person, also seen as a gatekeeper. The gatekeeper on the CSO gave the author's email addresses to several first- and second-line managers to have the possibility to contact them for the interviews. In addition, the gatekeeper gives access to information and documents to provide the possibility to complete the case study (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). In total, 20 interviews were conducted; seven were in person and the remaining 13 interviews through Teams. All interviews in-person were done on the company's premises. The interviews lasted for approximately 40 to 60 minutes.

All the potential participants got an e-mail (Appendix 2) sent from an internal e-mail address of the CSO. All interview requests were sent individually to the participants. The other participants' participation remained anonymous while personalising the interview request by adding their names to their e-mail. The request gave a short presentation of the purposes while also presenting the study's authors. The interviews were conducted in either English or Swedish, depending on what the interviewees preferred. The participant also had the opportunity to receive the interview guide (Appendix 1) prior to the interview. When the participants had given their consent, all interviewees got a consent form and an explanation of the study and the ethical considerations the study would follow. During the presentation of the results, all interviewees will be given a pseudonym to be referred to.

4. 4 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations of the study contained ethical principles such as the consent requirement. The respondent's anonymity protected the participants, and the data collected was only used for the study. The information was confidential, and the interview participants were voluntary. All participants received a consent form (Appendix 2) before the interview to ensure that the ethical principles were followed. The participants were reminded during the interview that they would receive a pseudonym and could at any time decide not to participate anymore. The transcribed material excluded all the information that could reveal the participants, and the material collected was stored on locked computers. All documents

and recordings were anonymously labelled with a code number for each participant, and only the gatekeeper and the authors knew who was contacted in connection to the study (McCrae & Murray, 2008). However, the gatekeeper only knew who was contacted but not which managers consented to participate in the study. Because of the nature of the research question, the realization was that the subject of leadership could be a sensitive subject. Therefore, the results from the study could reveal sensitive information that could shed a negative light on the managers and the organization. Necessary measures were therefore taken to create a comfortable environment for all the interviewees (Bryman, 2011). It is essential that the setting is a comfortable environment, and the interviewees need to feel safe and avoid harm to the participants. It was essential to ensure the informed consent of the participants and respect their privacy. The recorded interviews and transcriptions will be erased after completing the study. Due to the organization's information confidentiality, the organization will be anonymous to respect their request (Bryman, 2011). It was vital to use an ethical checklist during the research project to avoid ethical considerations. The checklist included privacy, promises, reciprocity, risk assessment, confidentiality, informed consent, data access and ownership, the effect of the researchers, and guidance through the research project (Chatterjee et al., 2021).

4. 5 Limitations of the study

The case study has potential limitations, and writing these limitations can reflect on showing transparency and honesty in the study. The first limitation shows that it can be a negative aspect of having a gatekeeper. This person can guide the authors in a particular direction and provide them with limited or specific information and documents (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). The second limitation is that the Covid-19 pandemic is not entirely over, so the study does not include the whole pandemic, only parts of it. An important aspect is that even though the Covid-19 pandemic is not over, the emerging strategies and practices developed at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic provide an insight into the CSO crisis management and how to handle other similar situations. The third limitation can be the information loss during the translation of the interviews. Since the interviews were held in Swedish and English, the interviews conducted in Swedish were translated into English. At the same time, it was essential to have the interviewee decide on the language to make them feel as comfortable as possible. Finally, the fourth limitation could be having the interviews face-to-face versus virtually through Teams. Answers could be misunderstood or not heard depending on the

connection of the technology. The interviews are done face-to-face and could be more engaging than those made on Teams.

5.0 Results and Analysis

The findings of the study will be presented and analysed by using the questions as a structuring principle. The overall research question reads *"How were leadership strategies and practices challenged, adapted and developed during the Covid-19 pandemic?"* To answer this, we turn to the sub-questions and answer these *"What challenges did managers experience and what opportunities were identified with hybrid working conditions?"* and *"How has the manager's role developed during the pandemic with reference to skills and strategies required for managing teams in virtual environments?"* will be answered. Thereafter we respond to the overall research question at the end of this chapter. Below each question, essential themes have been identified - or thematic codes - that developed during the analysis. Thus, first, the challenges and opportunities that managers experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic have been explored. After that, the question on the manager's role in their development as a leader and the skills and strategies will be analysed from the interview material. Then finally, the main research question will be answered.

Before we start, some orienting information about the pre-pandemic context. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the work was primarily conducted in the office space but working virtually with people in Sweden, France, Brazil, the USA, Russia, India, and China. This resulted in a "natural connection" between the managers and employees in an organizational context. Managers' relationship with their employees seems to have been continual, and they communicate regarding work-related topics. The managers within the CSO expressed that having a culture including employees with "development opportunities" is "high performing", and most of the interviewees were generally "satisfied" with their culture. This was evident when asking the managers how long they had worked within the organization. Most of them have been within the organization for several years, between six to twenty-four years, and stayed longer than expected. The respondents explained that they had multiple positions within the organization and could change departments. Due to the organization's size, the managers spoke about their opportunities to grow and develop within the company. According to Nagel (2020), technology development rose before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic was just a factor that increased the speed of the usage and development of working with the technology in organizations. The debate on how digital transformation impacts an

organization has recently become an important aspect, but the pandemic vastly increased its transformation. The meaning of increasing the transformation of technology is to make the organization work more efficiently and increase productivity (Nagel, 2020). Due to the advancement of technology, people can work from anywhere, which has resulted in flexible work life. Previous research shows that it was easier to set boundaries between work and home before the pandemic. The boundaries during the pandemic have dissolved and have become a difficulty for managers and employees (Vaziri et al., 2020).

5.1 Challenges and Opportunities

This first section will contribute towards answering the sub-question “*What challenges did managers experience and what opportunities were identified with hybrid working conditions?*”. The analytical themes being identified are central to responding to the first sub-question and include: (1) *adapting to continuous changes*, (2) *balancing professional and personal life*, (3) *connections between managers and employees* and (4) *managing employees' feelings virtually*. Each theme will be described and explained below. When using quotes to emphasize the analyses, the quotes are contextualized with the manager's position and the number of years within the organization. For example, the position and the number of years provide a better context of the manager's experience. In addition, interviewees are distinguished by different letters.

The first theme that emerged about how challenges and opportunities have been handled during the pandemic is *the managers' continued changes and how they adapted to new environments*. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, managers had to tackle many changes; they went from "business as usual to everything shutting down from one day to another". The Covid-19 pandemic meant that managers and employees had to adapt to new ways of working. In addition, each country has its restrictions and regulations for the pandemic. According to the Swedish Government and the temporary pandemic law, the CSO had to make staff redundant while also giving notice of dismissal to all consultants and short-term employees, permanently or temporarily. In addition, all organizations within Sweden needed to reduce labour costs to get economic support from the government (Regeringen, 2022a). These updates could happen over the day, so it was a difficult time being a manager. The CSO was boiled down to the essentials, and only the necessities for the organization's survival were prioritized. This decreased managers' availability since governmental support depended on the organization following the conditions for receiving

support. Depending on the organization's operations, employees and managers reduced working hours. The implication was a reduction in salary for the employees, and the government and the employer paid the remaining amount (Tillväxtverket, 2022). Sweden's national authority belonging to the ministry of trade and economic growth published a calculation (Table 1) of how the reduction of working hours would affect the employees and what percentage of the employee's salary would be covered by the employer and government (Regeringen, 2022b). The temporary pandemic law in Sweden enabled these economic support programs to save Swedish jobs and organizations (Regeringen, 2022c).

Level	Reduced working hours	Reduced salary	Employer	Government	Reduced expenses for employer
1	20%	4%	1%	15%	-19%
2	40%	6%	4%	30%	-36%
3	60%	7,5%	7,5%	45%	-53%
4*	80%	12%	8%	60%	-72%

Table 1: *Level 4, 80% reduced working hours, can only be applied for May, June and July 2020.

Because of the conditions linked to governmental support, the CSO took measures to reduce their labour cost, such as dismissing employees and making redundancies everywhere. Some managers explained that, even though the organization had dismissals and terminating programs, they knew that "from the moment the program would stop, they would have to hire people back". Moreover, even though the CSO received financial support, a part of the Swedish Covid-19 pandemic measures focused on saving the Swedish economy. Therefore, the government's conditions might have resulted in the opposite effect. At the end of the crisis, they were creating additional costs to re-employ the terminated personnel. However, on the other hand, the CSO might not have been able to manoeuvre the Covid-19 pandemic in the same way without the government's support. These limitations imposed on the CSO created a lot of turbulence and uncertainty that the managers had to manage.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a transition period where everyone had to adjust to the fast-changing working environment. The respondents explained that the changes happening when the Covid-19 pandemic started were very immediate. This change could be

considered the emerging phase in crisis management. The emerging phase is when the managers focus more on the employee's emotions; "stress", "anxiety", and "fear" that come from the uncertainty of the situation (Nyenswah et al., 2016). When this occurs, teams usually have a higher degree of maturity level, which means they are engaged and enthusiastic about their work. However, once the Covid-19 pandemic started, the employees still had the skills to complete their work, but the knowledge regarding the changing environment was not there. The managers explained that they constantly received new information that affected the employees' work. Sometimes this meant that the employees did not have the full picture of what they needed to complete their work. The restrictions and regulations affected the environment for the employees. Managers had to know what was going on in all countries where the team members were. As mentioned, changes happened weekly or even daily when it came to restrictions regarding the Covid-19 virus. For example, in France, people had to wear facemasks, were in total lockdown, not able to go out, and schools were closed. While face masks were only a recommendation in Sweden, schools remained open (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2022). As a result, this created significant differences for the managers and employees within the CSO. This could be unclear for managers, with much information and regulations required to follow. It could be more efficient for managers to use a telling approach toward the team when sharing essential information. Using a telling approach can enhance the communication among the team, which can be a good practice for the managers to use in an uncertain time like the Covid-19 pandemic. As one manager stated, they had to increase their "one-on-one meetings". A manager must guide the team with clear guidelines and structures when the working environment is uncertain. As a manager, telling the employees what to do and what to expect can help them focus on the work needed (Norris & Vecchio, 1992). It is also stated by McCarthy (2005) that a good leadership practice is when the employees get feedback and have one-on-one meetings. In a situation of uncertainties, managers received questions regarding what would happen next. When the financial crisis happened, managers used a more direct management style, which could have been beneficial in this crisis. An organization's strategy is the strategic choices a company makes and how to reach its goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). In comparison, the practice is the manager's actions to provide directions for a group or organization (Nedelko & Potočan, 2016). In this case, the hybrid working conditions refer to working in the office and from home (Radonic et al., 2021). The virtual environment refers to the online working method (Saltman, 2020). During the writing of this study, the Covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and

the period studied is March 11 2020 to March 31 2022. A direct management style could be similar to the telling approach. Clear and direct communication with the team while telling them what to do can decrease misunderstandings (Stoker et al., 2019). A telling and direct management style were not used since the managers expressed that they were reluctant to use micromanagement. A few managers mentioned the possibility of employees working too much during the pandemic. Also, some employees tend not to work their required hours. This means that the managers need to adjust their behaviour to ensure the employees' performance which can increase the leadership style of micro-management or a more telling and a monitoring leadership. According to the Path-goal Theory, managers must adapt their leadership style to their employees and the new working environment. For example, employees that are not working enough might need a more *direct approach*, meaning they need direct instructions regarding how and when the work should be done. However, depending on why the employee is not performing, another leadership behaviour might be more appropriate. For instance, *participative* leadership might be more appropriate if the employee is not performing due to lack of motivation or feeling of not making a difference (House, 1971). The *participative* leadership focuses on being present in the employees work. Giving them short- or long-term goals to feel connected in their work. According to Path-goal Theory, the managers need to get to know their employees to support them in the best way possible (Northous, 2019). In conclusion, adapting to continual change as a manager is crucial in a crisis. Not adapting to the environment can harm both employees and the organization negatively. For example, a manager's choice of leadership style will significantly impact the feelings and commitment to the organization.

The second theme is *balancing between the professional- and private- life* during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that managers and employees had to adapt to working from home. This challenged their ways of leading their team to manage their work-life balance for managers. The managers expressed this with words such as “not travelling as much”, “flexible working hours”, and “less commuting to the office”. By having the option of WFH, employees could be at home and spend more time with their families. One respondent explains that his “private- and work life were balanced”. His partner, also working from home, made them “improve their relationship”. The hybrid working conditions resulted in some employees having a better balance between personal and professional lives, meaning they felt more satisfied working from home. It was something that some of the managers attributed to the reduction of the commute weekly. Some managers also pointed out

that the efficiency level increased when working from home. New research shows that WFH positively influences productivity. It was easier to do it from home, especially when specific work assignments needed their concentrated focus. When working in the office, they might be disrupted by employees or colleagues. For some people, the family situation became complicated. It was harder to balance work with private life for some people. People with children indicated having more difficulties than those with no children, especially women (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). The parents had to multitask and finish their workload while helping the children with their homework. According to Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir (2021), women take more responsibility for the family and home. One manager explained in line with this.

Employees had a heavy workload. Especially women experienced difficulties working from home, which contributed towards high levels of uncertainty and the personal situation for the individuals in the team. One example was having to help the children with homework and, thus having to cope with even more work than usual. (First-line manager A, 15 years)

In terms of inequality, managers need to adapt their leadership to inequalities in the workplace. They must also address the circumstances that create these inequalities. The interviewees did not show any differences in their responses depending on the manager's gender. Both men and women expressed that some female employers struggled more than male employers. The managers said they had understanding for those individuals who needed to "work at night while their children were asleep". The knowledge of employees having to work through the night could be seen as a way of substantiating inequality. Previous research shows that women's mental health was worse than men's during the pandemic. Women tend to feel more anxious and emotionally stressed (Oreffice & Quintana-Domeque, 2021). Managers within the CSO, both women and men, expressed that they understood the importance of supporting those who felt more anxious and stressed than other team members. However, another study by Ogrodniczuk et al. (2021) showed that men's health was negatively affected by the pandemic, even though other studies have shown that women's health was affected to a larger extent. Women tend to be better at expressing their thoughts and feelings than men (Simon & Nath, 2004). Maybe during the pandemic, women have expressed to a larger extent how they have felt, and men have been quiet about their mental health.

As previously stated, some employees had a difficult time with the relocation of WFH. At the same time, several managers within the CSO expressed implementing a hybrid working model that the work-life balance improved for some employees. It is, therefore, difficult for managers to adapt to the hybrid working model. It all depends on the individuals and how their circumstances impact their ability to WFH. However, individuals with school-age children indicated that their efficiency level went down (Awada et al., 2021). Previous research also shows that globally, women are responsible for 75% of childcare and other domestic duties (Power, 2020). The respondents did not say that women felt more stressed during the pandemic. However, an interpretation of the material indicated that more women were facing difficulties when it came to balancing work and chores at home (Thébaud et al., 2021). In addition, the closing of schools has decreased women's participation in the labour market and paid work. This results in women working during late evenings and adapting their private lives to complete the work (Power, 2020). Another aspect is that all employees had different preconditions working from home. For example, depending on the living area and how many people lived and worked under the same roof (Botha et al., 2021). Of course, a person living with their spouse in a large house has no difficulties working from home. However, research shows that gender inequality for a woman has increased due to the responsibilities women feel the need to have when taking care of the family. Studies show that women have a higher increase in stress and anxiety (Carli, 2020). Many aspects affect how well people can handle working from home. Referring to the intersectional perspectives regarding gender inequality during the Covid-19 pandemic, statistics show that women have taken more responsibility at home and have, in a negative way, been more affected than men (Power, 2020).

The third theme is *the connection and collaboration* between the manager and the team when working in a virtual environment combined with a hybrid working model. The technology within the CSO is well established throughout the organization. For years managers have worked with digital tools to connect with the team spread out in different countries; “France”, “Sweden”, “Russia”, “India” and “USA”. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed the advancements within the technology and transformed the working environment. The technological tools in the organization developed and advanced throughout time. For example, this became easier to use, when the advancements and settings developed due to the increase in demand. In the beginning, the employees did not find the technical tools, such as Teams, helpful. However, the more people used it in their daily work, the more

comfortable they got. The respondents expressed that their participation was not high during online meetings initially. However, when people felt more comfortable using the tools, it became easier to stay connected to each other (Karl et al., 2021). When people started using their cameras during online meetings, their engagement increased. Managers explained that the "motivation" and "connectedness" grew, therefore, some managers made it mandatory to use the cameras. However, other managers were reluctant to make the camera mandatory despite knowing the benefits. When the camera and microphone are turned off, multitasking occurs during online meetings (Karl et al., 2021). After a while, the team started to talk more during online meetings, sharing thoughts and feelings. Managers felt that people understood that working from home would last for an extended period. People made the best out of the situation and started learning and working with the new technology. By working remotely from home with the advancement of technology, people's work become more efficient and effective (Galanti et al., 2021). Instead of emailing the team, it became easier to start a short online meeting. The communication became "clear" and "direct". Employees started to use the new technology with customers to make the work easier. One respondent explained;

First of all, the technology works pretty well for the majority of the team. For Teams-meetings, this is the most natural thing now, and you find more and more tools that work. Having a regular check-in meeting between two people can almost be as good as in person. (Second-line manager C, 19 years)

When people use new tools, it takes time to learn, but the more people use it, the better they get. As the respondent mentioned, "it can almost be as good as in-person." The respondent explained that he needed face-to-face contact occasionally. However, working in a hybrid working model is a flexible and easy way of working in a globalized organization. Through the technological development of communication platforms such as Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, or other digital meeting solutions, the need for an in-person meeting has decreased. According to Rimmel (2021), attending meetings anywhere is a benefit, but the lack of in-person meetings negatively affects the virtual working environment. Online meetings could be used instead of flying to meet suppliers, colleagues, and other stakeholders. The Covid-19 pandemic has proven that online meetings are an option and can complement in-person meetings. By having online meetings, the CO2 pollution has been reduced, and there has been a general environmental improvement (Khan et al., 2021). A hybrid-working model is a contributing factor to the positive environmental effects. The hybrid-working

conditions resulted in some employees having a better balance between personal and professional lives. It was something that some of the managers attributed to the reduction of the commute weekly. A concluding quote from one respondent;

The learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic is that things we thought were difficult or impossible are now possible. I will never think that something is impossible again. I think everything is possible if you have the right mindset. Even though we work in different countries, it is possible to work virtually and face-to-face. (First-line manager F, 14 years)

However, “informal conversations by the coffee machine” or “small talks” when having short breaks disappeared when working virtually from home (Byrd, 2019). The team connection and collaboration became challenging for the managers since the face-to-face connection disappeared (Saltman, 2020). Even now, when returning to the office in a hybrid working model, it is different. When returning to the office after two years of working online, it is up to the manager to decide how much the team should be in the office. However, a challenging aspect is when the team does not appear in the office on the same days. The managers had to adapt and make prompt adjustments for the team to feel connected to each other and collaborate. Managers need to have more check-ins with the team, both on a group level and individually. This is to notice if something does not work or if someone feels stressed or down. Many managers encourage the team to talk online in breaks about everything or anything. A fun quiz that was not about the job to improve the team spirit. One respondent mentioned;

I think it is the connections with the team members and the part where you connect and where you can have fun. Even though we face many challenges with the workload, we can still laugh together and have a good work environment. I think for me, that is the easiest part as a manager. (First-line manager A, 15 years)

Managers noticed the importance of getting to know the team personally. According to managers, this was the easiest and most fun part of the darkness of the pandemic. Managers shared "fun memes" or "photos" to improve the environment online or told "fun stories" in the chat, which resulted in human and emotional connections (Caulat, 2012). Nevertheless, unfortunately, people feel less engaged and motivated to participate in online meetings than in face-to-face meetings (Karl et al., 2021). Managers needed to be flexible and change online meetings to create more motivation, so people became present. Include everyone more during online meetings, so it is not only the manager who talks or the extroverted employees.

Working as a manager in a virtual environment has been to adapt the current tools and strategies to the new way of working (Saltman, 2020). The VLT becomes essential when working from home. To recognize everyone's thoughts and feelings and put more effort into getting to know them personally (Caulat, 2012). As mentioned before, communication is vital, and for the manager to be "transparent", "show empathy", "listen", and "be open" in each conversation. A key factor is to be aware of the strategies that must be developed or changed to build a fair online environment for the team.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, teams within the CSO created a more substantial connection because they were going through this challenging situation. It created a stronger bond with each other. One manager explained that they found new ways of connecting and communicating with their team. They had "lunches outside", "personal quizzes", "virtual coffee breaks", and other "virtual team activities". They found new and creative solutions for how to work in a virtual environment. Everyone within CSO working from home also created a more equalized work environment. Everyone had the same opportunity to talk to their manager in a virtual environment for the first time. On the contrary, there are limitations to what can be accomplished through digital platforms. As one manager expressed:

The pandemic has taught us that video-meeting works, but it does not work in developing a high performing team. My group performs the activities needed, they do the work. However, to use the whole team, like we did before, you need to meet live. I have noticed, otherwise, the team becomes shattered. (First-line manager F, 14 years).

The fourth theme is about *managing employees' feelings virtually*. During the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, all employees were laid off from the CSO, meaning no work. This resulted in various feelings and emotions from the employees that the managers had to address. Some employees seemed to think that it was "pleasant not to work and still get paid", while others were "worried", "scared", and "afraid" of what was happening. One respondent explained;

The pandemic definitely created anxiety for my team, all of us. I do not know if anyone escaped that fear. In the beginning, it was the fear of not knowing for your health or safety. (First-line manager J, 15 years.)

During the 9/11 terror attack, the transformational leadership style became prominent as a good style during a crisis. The Transformational Leadership style emphasizes that leaders

show compassion and understanding for the employees who might have a tough time (Miller et al., 2010). This was something that the managers of the CSO had to do. One manager explained that they needed to monitor themselves and have more “compassion” and “empathy” towards how people reacted to the situation. Like Transformational Leadership, the supportive leader within the Path-goal Theory focuses on the relationship between the leaders and the followers. The supportive leader creates trust, emotional support, and respect by showing empathy towards the employees. When people are going through tough times and are struggling, the bond between managers and employees makes all the difference (Northouse, 2019). If the employee feels the support and understanding from the leader, it might be easier for the employee to be open regarding hardships that they are going through. It was an isolating and lonely situation for some people working from home. This could result in other issues such as mental health issues, substance abuse, or a general feeling of loneliness (Sher, 2020). One respondent explained:

It is easy to feel very lonely when you WFH. It is important to see everyone in your team. It can be a problem, for example, that people are depressed or lonely or have problems with alcohol. This can be worse when you sit at home. (First-line manager K, 15 years)

Many managers thought it was harder to assess employees' well-being when working from home. According to the theory of Virtual Leadership, managers must know the employees they lead. When managers can understand the employee's thoughts and feelings, it is easier to notice if an employee is struggling (Schmidt, 2014). As some managers pointed out, it is possible to project the image people would like others to see when the person is in front of the computer's camera. It is not as easy to conceal things in person. Because of this, a manager needs to be perceptive and recognize if something is bothering someone or if they feel unhappy. An important characteristic is to show interest and care for their employees. The entire responsibility is, of course, not only on the manager. There are limitations to what a manager can do.

To answer the first sub-question “*What challenges did managers experience and what opportunities were identified with hybrid working conditions?*”; managers have faced challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenges experienced were new conditions to adapt to as managers—also the limiting working hours. To balance professional and private life when working from home could be seen as an opportunity depending on the individual and their working conditions. Another challenge has been the team connection.

Managers had to be more engaged since small talks by the coffee machine and conversations during breaks disappeared. Employees have, during the pandemic, experienced difficulties in their private and work life. It was a challenge for managers to support the employees and be more emotionally involved. Flexible working hours and working from home are now, after the pandemic, a more common and accepted practice. This can be seen as an opportunity for managers within the CSO. For example, this results in being more flexible over their schedule and time as managers. However, this could result in a challenging home life situation for others. Some managers expressed that women had difficulty WFH when it came to responsibilities and handling the situation of balancing work and private life. In conclusion, flexible working hours can positively and negatively affect the employees and their working situation, making it difficult for managers to know what type of leadership will be most effective.

5.2 The Changing Nature of the Role

This second section of the analysis will answer the sub-question, “*How has the manager’s role developed during the pandemic with reference to skills and strategies required for managing teams in virtual environments?*”. The thematic themes being identified in the second sub-question are (1) *leadership style influenced by people and environments*, (2) *creating a connecting and collaborating environment*, and (3) *from task-oriented towards relation-oriented leadership*.

The first theme on *leadership style influenced by people and environment* is connected to how managers' leadership styles are influenced by different people they encounter and how the environment has affected who they are as leaders today. The managers explained that since their organization is global, they are influenced to use "French leadership", "Swedish leadership", or "American leadership" styles. The leadership style tends to vary depending on which country or culture the manager operates in. The CSO is originally from Sweden in an organizational context, affecting how the organization operates in the business world. The organization is influenced by Swedish leadership, but due to the globalization of the CSO, other cultures affect and influence the manager's leadership style. According to Bhaduri (2019), leadership differs depending on the organization's culture. For the CSO, there are differences in leadership depending on where the managers come from. In France, managers tend to lean towards a leadership style connected to micro-management; for example, the manager is in charge when deciding for the team or the team's department. In Sweden,

managers tend to use consensus and include the team when making decisions. Since the CSO has a long experience operating in different countries with different cultures, the CSO is influenced by different leadership styles. Some managers pointed out that they believed the CSO needed more Swedish managers because the Swedish culture within the organization is no longer as pronounced. It was pointed out that the "Swedish culture" and the "Swedish leadership" are essential foundations of the CSO and an essential factor for the culture. The managers of the CSO further speculated that it is due to the "Swedish culture" many employees choose to work for the CSO and stay as long as they do. Swedish leadership is a style, according to Holmberg & Åkerblom (2006), and appears as participative, consensus, change-oriented and with a focus on interpersonal relations. This was something some managers explained they generally missed within the CSO. Another manager said, "it is more about personality than culture and country", connected to leadership. As previously stated, the organization is influenced by different cultures, and "diversity" is also an essential aspect of the organization's culture. Therefore, the CSO has to consider the aspects that influence leadership while also considering the effect of the leadership they have influenced the organization. According to Kargas and Varoutas (2015), the national market's central leadership style has a more significant impact on the organizational culture than the other way around. According to Kargas and Varoutas (2015), it is not the organization that controls the leadership styles; it is the people within the organization and the organizational culture that is essential. The example that the managers set for other managers and employees impacts the CSO's leadership style.

One manager explained that managers with leadership styles that are too contrasting compared to the general leadership style within the CSO tend to leave the organization after a couple of years. When the environment and the personal fit are not compatible, people tend to leave the organization (Edwards et al., 1998). Even though there are some differentiating opinions regarding which direction the organization's leadership should have, there are still some commonalities. Everyone emphasized their interest in people and how they care as a manager and try to influence their employees to reach their full potential. One manager explained, "If you have more bad days than good days, you are probably not in the best workplace for you". In these situations, some managers explained that they instead help their employees to find a new position somewhere else. As Edwards et al. (1998) explain, the person will leave the organization in an organizational culture that might contradict the general culture. Many managers within the CSO responded that their role models had

influenced them to lead a team. These role models could be people outside of the CSO, but mostly it was previous managers they have had. The respondents answered that they had similar role models where the focus was on "clear communication", "teamwork", and "openness". As a manager, it is also essential to recognize that leadership styles can be more efficient depending on the person (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). For example, one manager explained that it might be more efficient and better to "give clear directions" when leading employees from certain countries, for example Russia.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to balance the direct-leadership style while including the employees in the decision-making process. If the managers are too direct, the employees can feel detached and stressed, lower productivity and creativity, resulting in high turnover rates and an undesirable working environment (Akpoviro et al., 2018). As some managers implied, there are no strict directions given to the managers concerning how they should lead their teams. However, there is a non-verbalized understanding that managers within the CSO should fulfil the business requirement while also believing in the CSO's values. During the interviews it was not clear whether the organization had any preferences regarding the managers' leadership style. However, many of the managers had a similar view regarding what is required of a leader in the CSO. Some managers also mention that there are some "policies" about "how you should conduct yourself as a manager" and "how you should lead". Regardless, many decisions were handed over to the "manager's discretion". The CSO gives the managers a general framework for their management while also giving them some freedom to decide what is best for their team.

The second central strategy is creating a connecting and collaborating environment. The manager's role has included developing strategies to maintain the workforce and business during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced managers to adapt and develop new strategies and tools to manage the new working situation. The most noticeable change is in the manager's responsibilities. For example, managers would highlight the importance of "creating a positive work environment", "being the source of inspiration and motivation", and "being the emotional support". According to Caulat (2012), managers need to recognize individual differences and uniqueness to adapt to the individual's needs. During the pandemic, managers started to see the importance of their role and how their leadership affected the team. However, before the pandemic working in a virtual environment, managers did not think about its effect on the team. As Saltman (2020) stated, many managers are not

equipped to lead people in a virtual environment, especially during a crisis. That can be connected to Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the importance of providing people with the right tools to work towards the same goals (Eliyana & Ma'arif, 2019). During the interviews, the managers emphasized how they adapted to the situation. The managers argued they had to "stay connected", "show compassion", "make more check-ins", and "notice everyone in the team". What could be discerned from the manager's answers was that teams were more satisfied by managers showing what was described as a genuine "honest" and "open" approach. Transformational Leadership theory highlights the importance of compassion when the team and workplace go through something complex like a pandemic. The important role of managers is that they show and understand what colleagues are going through (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Again, the Situational Theory shows how crucial it is for a team to feel that their manager is adaptable and supportive depending on the situation (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). With all these complexities that this pandemic has caused, it is difficult to say how they would adapt their leadership style. Even if the theory says it is essential for managers to adapt, it is even more difficult for them to discern which parts of management they should adapt in times of a crisis. One manager mentioned the importance of creating a good environment, and the factor of doing so is to have clear communication with the team.

One manager explained that their responsibilities differed from before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, since there were different restrictions for every country, for example, some countries did not have the same governmental support offered in Sweden and other European countries. That meant that the organization became more dependent on the employees that were not located in a country with strict regulations regarding governmental support (Regeringen, 2022a). Because of these regulations, managers in France and Sweden could not work to the same extent as other managers located elsewhere. As a result, an uneven workload distribution for managers in different countries appeared. "There were completely new issues we were facing". Since managers and employees in Europe were not working their regular hours, it could be challenging to reach people. The managers available had to solve the problems that arose the best they could. Having the level of working hours limited meant that it was harder for the managers to keep in contact with their employees. This was especially problematic when it came to the continued communication with their team. As a result, managers found new ways to stay connected with their team, such as creating whats-app groups. However, since the working hours were strictly regulated,

managers could only communicate with the team regarding what they were doing during their “free time”. Many managers showed an interest in keeping up with the communication with their team, but since they were no longer working the same hours, they had to do this in their spare time. According to George (2000), a manager needs to show emotional support and intelligence toward the team. Also, to create stronger connections to one another, this by communication outside of work and talking about other things than work-related topics. Managers within the CSO could, in some countries, not communicate work-related topics when they were laid off. During this time, many meetings were about the pandemic and private conversations. During this period, the managers and the team had to become more personal, resulting in a “stronger connection between the team enhancing the team spirit”.

The third theme, also seen as a strategy, is *developing leadership, task-oriented towards relation-oriented*. There are preferable leadership styles within the CSO, such as emergent and transparent leadership that can adapt to different environments and situations. Through "Emergent Leadership Training," the CSO produces individuals they believe in and want as managers through "emergent leadership training". In almost every interview, the managers were against leadership styles connected to micro-management, where the manager controls the employees with a more direct approach (Norris & Vecchio, 1992). However, to maintain good communication and work as a team, the managers had to tell people what to do in order for the communication to be precise. Because the organization shaped its managers, no one wanted to use micro-management and used the opposite, even if that would have been the best strategy to increase the clarity of the organization's communication. During the pandemic, other managers used micro-management to create "clarity in communication". Even if the managers were against micro-management, they forced themselves to use this style as a last resort. Studies have shown that direct leadership is needed in times of crisis when everything else is unclear and scary (Stoker et al., 2019). However, it is well known within CSO that they do not use that type of leadership. Different managers mentioned several times that they have to be flexible in their leadership styles. Nevertheless, not using a leadership style most suited for the situation due to them not liking it shows the opposite; it becomes a contradiction to themselves. In other words, they did not use micro-management even if, in this case, it would be the better choice.

Even though all managers mentioned the importance of team performance and having a "high performing team", only one manager mentioned that they keep track of the team performance

through "key performance indicators" (KPIs). Many managers explained that their role is to drive performance and achieve results. However, during the pandemic, the managers emphasized building relationships with their employees rather than focusing on the KPIs. One interesting aspect was that the manager with fewer years of experience being a manager was the one that was the most focused on achieving results and having high KPIs. According to Pini (2005), young people as leaders tend to feel the need to present themselves as powerful, have everything under control and have the knowledge to research the results and the correct numbers. However, numbers are still essential to indicate and show the performance's direction. Other managers did not emphasize the importance of reaching their target numbers, which could result from leaders with less experience having to assert themselves and trying to figure out what leader they want to be. During the Covid-19 pandemic, employees within the CSO have had to handle negative and positive emotions. Managers had to handle the employees' different emotions. For example, some employees "felt lonely", "stressed" or "anxious" WFH, while others worked better at home but, when returning to the office, experienced difficult emotions. These emotions were a large part of how the managers had to meet and greet their employees. Managers implied the complexity of handling these different emotions from the team through digital tools. When the managers have check-ins through Teams, it becomes difficult to see how the team feels emotionally. It is easier to hide feelings behind the camera than face-to-face in the office (Byrd, 2019). So, in a combination of not working to the same extent as previously, the relationship the managers had with the team had to adapt and change, from a more organizational context to a more private and personal connection. Many of the managers had experience regarding the responsibilities of a manager. One respondent explained;

Leadership is a broad topic, but if I were to summarize, leadership is the way you get engagement from people, doing what they are supposed to do and trying to get them to do things in a better way than what they would have done on their own. Leadership is about getting the best out of people and to make it easier and more efficient for the team. (First-line manager G, 24 years)

What it means to be a manager is closely related to scholars' definitions of leadership. The Covid-19 pandemic and the hybrid working conditions resulted in a fine line between professional and private life. It has resulted in a broader responsibility for managers. Being a manager is not only about producing results; it is about being there "emotionally, supporting and understanding the employees". One manager explained that they need to be there more

for their employees regarding personal issues, addressing uncertainties, and being there as support through complex feelings. The manager's responsibilities have increased, and they have felt a higher responsibility for their employee's well-being. As the previous research states, managers need to understand and empathize with what the employees are going through (Miller et al., 2010). However, it is also essential to recognize that this has been difficult for the managers. They have had to face the uncertainties and stress of having a heavy workload while there for their team. The managers have to consider the situation and the people they lead while also having the added complexity of leading in a crisis. Combining these things made it extremely difficult to be a manager during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The summary and answer to the second sub-question, “*How has the manager’s role developed during the pandemic with reference to skills and strategies required for managing teams in virtual environments?*” is that the role has developed during the pandemic towards a more emotional leadership. The managers’ responsibilities within the CSO have developed, and their responsibilities have become more comprehensive. It now includes creating a positive work environment, showing emotional support, and being inspirational and motivating towards the team. The Covid-19 pandemic has shifted from task-oriented leadership to a more relation-oriented leadership. The roles have also changed depending on which country the manager operates in and which preferred leadership style.

5.3 Strategies and practices

In this section the primary research question “*How were leadership strategies and practices challenged, adapted and developed during the Covid-19 pandemic?*” will be analyzed. A problematic situation from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic was that managers needed to manage the employees' expectations. For example, some people had a new project starting up, and others expected to change positions. This was put on hold due to the layoffs and uncertainties. In contrast, others seemed to think this would be a short-term situation, which meant that the managers needed to communicate the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic and how this would affect the employees. A respondent:

There were some decisions that I needed to take for my team about promoting people and changing positions that were on hold. Everyone within the organization had to unite and make some sacrifices for the company to survive the initial period. (First-line manager A, 15 years)

One manager explained that everyone within the company had a temporary salary decrease. It was challenging for the organizations, resulting in “layoffs”, “consultant contract termination”, and “cancelled trips”. The CSO had the opportunity to get economic support from the government, which they did. All these actions meant that the company no longer had these expenses. However, everyone within the company was still expected to make personal sacrifices for the company. One manager explained that the culture of the CSO could be why the managers and employees connected and felt like they had to make these sacrifices. These short-time changes might be a natural and obvious development during a crisis (Muffet-Willett & Kruse, 2009). As some managers explained, they still had a heavy workload. The reduction in the number of people employed meant that employees still had more to do without additional benefits. Making these changes can be considered a short-term strategy to handle the Covid-19 pandemic financially. However, this may have long-term effects on the CSO. Actions like these might have a damaging impact on the long-term relationship between the employer and employees.

We value your work-life balance. If I seem stressed or work too many hours, my managers always check up on me. Just as I look for my people in my team, you get the sense that you are really cared for and that the company would not just dismiss you tomorrow for no reason. there is a larger sense of community. (First-line manager J, 15 years)

The respondents explained that the CSO had a company culture they appreciated. The managers described it as "trusting", "open", "transparent" and "respected". Having a company culture where the employees feel a connection and where the values align with the employee's values creates a strong bond. By giving employees "freedom with responsibility", the organization trusts that the employees will do the necessary work. For the organization, this can be seen as a long-term strategy that, during the pandemic, was effective. This long-term strategy regarding culture helped the organization to make quick decisions. Since there was already an established relationship built on trust, the managers had a mandate to apply the most appropriate practices. Managers within the CSO explained the difficulties of implementing long-term strategies during a pandemic due to everything being uncertain. The effect the Covid-19 pandemic had on the long-term strategies was the uncertainties of the organization and the employees. Therefore, it became essential to focus on short-term strategies for the organization to handle the pandemic better. The organizational strategies were changed during the pandemic, and the managers had to change leadership practices to

handle these changes. An example of new practices was "more one-on-ones" with the employees to create a more "trusting, "open" and transparent" environment to follow the long-term strategy on organizational culture. As McCarthy (2005) stated, a manager needs to use one-on-one meetings to increase communication within the team to have a stable group environment and a strong team connection. Rowe (2010) also mentioned the importance of using a leadership style that fits the situation. In this case, the Covid-19 pandemic, to adapt and develop their practices as a manager in a crisis.

Having this type of company culture could be a long-term strategy. To create a good environment where employees can thrive and stay for a longer time. This environment can decrease employee turnover and minimize the cost of recruiting and onboarding new employees (Spreitzer et al., 2012). As some managers pointed out, onboardings and recruitments were on hold during the pandemic. An example was that they needed to hire new employees and onboard people, but these were things that had to wait. When the pandemic started, they needed to get rid of people even though they knew they would have to hire them back once the Covid-19 pandemic was over. There was also a "lower standard on the onboarding than usual", "workload was high", and the CSO did not have the time to onboard people correctly. Another manager also pointed out that "in-person meetings where they discuss the company's culture and values have been postponed". This could be a short-time strategy for the organization to manage the difficulties that the Covid-19 pandemic has meant for them. These changes can be seen as strategies implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. These temporary strategies were not something the managers could decide on, and it was strategies that came from the organization. However, how the managers handled these strategies became their practices. Even though the organization decided on which temporary goals to follow during the pandemic, it was the manager's way of dealing with the information that became essential and how they practised their leadership. For example, one manager explained that they scheduled short time slots with their employees to create the "informal" communication they no longer had when working virtually. While other managers seemed to tackle the situation as it developed and were more "laid" back when scheduling their communication. Therefore, the practices that the managers deploy can vary depending on the situation, the strategies do not change, but the way the managers choose to implement them can differ. This is also supported by Rowe (2010), who mentioned that leadership should be adapted to different situations and individuals, which also affects the manager's practices during the pandemic.

The CSO went out with internal documents to support the managers during a crisis. Documents and regulations were country-specific such as restrictions that continued to change to keep the information updated. In some countries, there was a matter of interpretation of distributed governmental information due to ambiguity and changes in restrictions, regulations, and recommendations on managing the spread of the virus. Some general information regarding CSO's response was to the Covid-19 pandemic (CSO Internal document, 2022). Some guidelines were provided concerning how the CSO standpoint was regarding the pandemic. Ultimately, the managers decided what they should do and how the CSO's policies and documentation should be realised. Since there was a heavy workload due to the redundancies, some tasks had to be prioritised over others.

We were short on staff, and it was a massive effort for everyone to onboard new people. I think some people that were onboarded were a bit shocked because it was “learning by doing” and not having an organized introduction. After all, we had a heavy workload, fewer people, and learning on the go. (First-line manager A, 15 years)

As previously stated, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a challenging time for managers. An interesting aspect is to see what managers have done to balance the difficulties during this period. 19 of 20 managers had been in the CSO for over a decade, meaning they have a broad knowledge of the organization. The Covid-19 restrictions were a challenging part of WFH. To balance WFH and still feel connected to the team, all managers did something to improve the working environment from home. Some practices the managers deployed were to create a stronger connection with their employees and “meet up before or after work to work out together outside”. Alternatively, “take the car to one person in the team and take a walk together”. One respondent even mentioned that they “made lunch together virtually through Teams”. These were only a few examples of what managers did to improve the remote WFH to feel connected to the team. When talking to the managers, it was apparent that they have spent more time getting to know their employees. This has also been affecting the way they lead their teams. They have gone from a more task-oriented leadership to a more relation-oriented leadership (Yukl et al., 2002).

In general, the managers realized that the Covid-19 pandemic was a challenging period for many people, and they adapted their leadership accordingly. Previous research indicates that managers need to be role models and inspire and motivate their teams. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the managers to show that they care, empathize and support the employees

through a crisis (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Many managers have already emphasized the importance of human relations and their connection with the team. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the managers and employees seemed to create a stronger connection. This response is similar to the 9/11 terror attack, where the managers preferred the transformational leadership style as a practice (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). The Covid-19 pandemic and the 9/11 attack were similar due to the emotions that arose during these crises. However, how the managers decided to respond to the crisis in practice was not something the organization stated. Instead, it was something every manager decided for their team. One practice the managers could utilize further is the direct approach emerging as a way to lead during the financial crisis (Stoker et al., 2019). Another aspect the managers could have benefited from is that the organization could have equipped their leaders with necessary tools and practices which could be used in a virtual working environment. Since the organization already was conducting a lot of its business virtually, it would not have been helpful to educate the managers on how to be virtual managers. Some managers did not recognize the difference between leading in-person and leading in a virtual environment. When this is the case, the managers do not have the right skills and tools to manage a team online. The organization, in turn, has not understood the importance of supporting and endorsing the managers in their work as virtual managers (Schmidt, 2014). Therefore the managers have not received any specific training in virtual leadership, and formal training could have equipped the organization to handle the covid-19 pandemic even better.

To summarize the primary research question, *“How were leadership strategies and practices challenged, adapted and developed during the Covid-19 pandemic?”*, the conclusion is that leadership has been challenged, adapted and developed to some extent. Due to all uncertainties, the leadership strategies challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic have been the organizational structure. All long-term strategies were postponed, and the focus was on implementing new short-term strategies for the organization to follow. How the managers of the CSO followed these short-term strategies could vary depending on the manager's leadership style. Therefore, the managers' practices could differ depending on what view they had on the Covid-19 pandemic, how the team was affected by the pandemic, and what support the managers felt they were given. The CSO is a large global organization where decisions often take time. This is due to the decisions going through many managers and directors. During the Covid-19, the CSO had to make agile decisions to make it work. Managers had to make fast decisions before; for example, HR had given directives. As a

result, the challenges of the practices varied, and managers had to change and adapt how they practised their leadership towards the team. As mentioned previously, the leadership styles within the CSO have gone towards a more dynamic and individualized leadership which has developed the leadership throughout the organization. The managers of the CSO have gone towards a more relationship-oriented leadership where communication is crucial and as a manager, giving emotional support to the teams is important. The adaptations being made for the managers have varied as well.

The strategies used by the managers were to prioritize their work and focus on work tasks such as supporting the team and employees during this challenging time on another level than previous. The strategies coming from higher up within the organization were about economic survival, saving expenditures and postponing, for example, onboarding and recruitment. This was difficult for the managers to handle since the workload was very high. As a result, the organization made the managers lay off and dismiss employees despite the high workload. Another strategy was the deduction of salary for the managers and the employees, a confusing time for everyone since the workload was higher than ever before. However, this was what the organization wanted the managers to use when implementing new strategies during the pandemic. Some were more followed than others. The practices looked different from manager to manager, but we could learn from the interviews that all managers were more emotionally engaged than before the pandemic. The managers supported the team utterly different from before. They used their creative side to find quick solutions to new problems, for example, higher stress levels among employees and worries within the team connected to the Covid-19 pandemic. The managers expressed that they realized what is important in their work and what matters for the employees.

It is interesting to see what strategies and practices the managers have used during the pandemic. Unfortunately, the strategies they said they would use were not how they turned out in practice. The managers expressed that they felt pressured by the layoffs and few employees for all the work that needed to be done. A result was that this created unnecessary stress for both managers and employees within the CSO. A vital aspect, in this case, would be for the organization to change their strategy so the managers could be more emotionally connected to the team and focus on what is the most important for the managers and the employees. However, the managers expressed that the largest change during the pandemic was that they had to be more emotionally engaged and involved with the employees. It is

understandable for an organization to choose a strategy which focuses on the economic aspects and the expenses for the organization. However, according to the managers, the economic aspects were not a problem for the CSO; the workload was high, the economy rolled on at full speed, and the result looked better than expected. Then, it would be good for the organization to change strategy and focus more on a sustainable working environment where the employees and the managers do not have a high workload, which affects their health. This could have been seen as a fast way to act as an organization from the outside looking in. However, the CSO pressures them to make agile decisions due to the organization having a significant effect on society and people. The CSO also had many eyes on them to make the “right” decisions to be role models for other smaller organizations within Sweden. On the contrary, it would have been good if the CSO had been more apparent in their guidelines and how they as an organization would get through the pandemic to increase their communication. Decisions were left to managers, and their leadership became very scattered and different from each other without the right tools.

During a crisis, it can be challenging for managers to know what is the best practice to use, especially when rules, regulations and restrictions have been changing from time to time. The managers within the CSO have been, as mentioned, more emotionally engaged during the pandemic. We believe that being emotionally engaged and caring for the team is essential for handling a crisis. One important aspect we could see during the pandemic among the managers was that they needed tools and education to handle a crisis and manage a team in a virtual environment. Of course, it was impossible to predict the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. However, since the CSO has worked in a virtual environment for many years, it would have been a good path to follow to optimize and improve the virtual working environment. This might have resulted in managers handling their team better during the pandemic, with the right tools to create better practices. The differences between strategies and practices give us the dissonance between strategy and the intended or unintended consequences, which is practice. Therefore, it is essential to know what is going on within their organization and their team as a manager. It has undoubtedly been challenging during the pandemic since the managers have not known how the pandemic would evolve. As a manager, these challenges can be difficult to talk about. However, our interpretation is that managers have had to adapt and change to solve the pandemic's problems.

6.0 Concluding remarks

To respond to the research questions, we state that the managers experienced both positive and negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Managers faced challenges and had to adapt and change their strategies and practices within their leadership. It was difficult for everyone, not only for the CSO. The challenge managers faced was the uncertainty of the situation, in this case, the Covid-19 pandemic. An effect was how to balance private and work-life and support their employees on a more emotional level. During the pandemic, individuals had to work and live under the same roof and this can be a challenging adaptation for managers and employees. On the other hand, the positive effect was the new flexible way of working virtually from home and in the office. Therefore, balancing private and work-life can be seen as a positive effect for some employees and an adverse effect depending on the living conditions for other employees, which may differ from individual to individual. Also, technological developments have improved the working conditions for the CSO. The role as a manager has changed to a more supportive leadership style and adapted to the employees needing support on a more emotional level. To handle the pandemic situation, the managers had to adapt quickly and make decisions based on their thoughts and feelings. For example, to use new strategies and change their practices as managers. One example is the managers being more present and emotionally connected to their team. This can be seen as an essential practice for a manager. The long-term strategies used were not explicitly developed for the Covid-19 pandemic and had to change and focus on short-term strategies to "survive" the pandemic. It is more of a general strategy for employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and retention of their employees. The specific strategies for handling the Covid-19 pandemic are short-term strategies such as reducing salaries, laying off people, stopping recruitment, and onboarding new employees. The organization established new strategies related to the pandemic; one strategy was for example to lay off people although the workload was high. The organization made new strategies, while the managers had to follow them. For the CSO, it is essential to protect and be aware of the organizational culture and the employees. However, why the managers, later on, had to fire employees they knew they needed is a critical aspect. The managers made a difficult decision when they had to fire people they knew they needed. An effect of this was that the managers became pressured and stressed, resulting in questioning the organization's values and focus during a difficult time. The new practice became the managers' awareness of how they wanted to operate. There is a dissonance when the organization emphasizes the importance of taking care of their

employees, while during the covid 19-pandemic the CSO's economic interests were prioritized over the employee's and manager's overall health. Even though the CSO's interests have focused on the economic aspects during the Covid-19, the culture and leadership are strong and permeated the organization. The pandemic has challenged, changed, and adapted the organization, and for the managers, this has been not easy. An interesting aspect is how managers will handle everything when the pandemic is over, to overcome these challenges, changes and adaptations and develop even further. The managers within the CSO focus on transparency, respect and trust. They are loyal to the organization and have lined up for them during this challenging time. This might be why the CSO has handled the pandemic adequately, or not the organization but the managers within it. Since the pandemic is not yet over, only time will tell how the organizations' trade-offs will impact the CSO in the future.

7.0 Contributions

Previous research on leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic is slim since it is a new crisis from 2019. On the other hand, previous research on leadership in times of crisis is a well-studied topic, but on the Covid-19 pandemic, it is small. Therefore, the study aimed to contribute to the topic of the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, contribute to leadership in times of crisis within HRM. The study's findings apply to organizations and managers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The result can help future researchers, organizations, managers and practitioners in leadership development within a crisis and how to adapt and develop within the topic of leadership. Also, to know how to use new strategies and practices in leadership. The business world is constantly developing; as a leader, it is essential to know how to adapt and develop in times of crisis due to technology and innovations. Furthermore, pandemics, natural disasters, and wars worldwide will continue. Therefore, organizations and managers need to understand how essential it is to keep up with challenges and how to adapt and develop in times of crisis. This thesis indicates the lack of research on leadership during the Covid 19- pandemic. Since the pandemic is still ongoing during the completion of this master thesis, the study focuses on how managers' leadership were challenged, adapted, and developed during the pandemic. The study aimed to contribute further knowledge about the Covid-19 pandemic and contribute to leadership in times of crisis. Since this study is about how managers implement and practise the organization's strategies, this study provides crucial information on how a company handles these situations. It is easy to be a good employer when everything goes according to plan when push comes to shove. However, within HRM, it is all about how corporations manage their employees, and this thesis provides insight into how the CSO managed the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Appendix 1 - Interview Guide

Hello,

My name is Jennifer/Anna, and I am a Master's Student at Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations at Gothenburg university. I am currently writing my master's thesis with Jennifer Palmér/Anna Tengelin about leadership during the Covid-19 crisis and the difficulties and opportunities managers have had when it comes to teams working remotely from home. This interview will be conducted to develop an understanding of leaders' experiences of managing a team working remotely from home.

The interview will be recorded, transcribed, and translated for further analysis with your permission. The material collected in this interview will be anonymous and only used for this study. When the thesis has been approved, the recording will be deleted. The transcription will only be available to us, the study's authors, and our supervisor.

Thanks for taking the time to answer these questions and participating in this interview. The interview will approximately be around 40-60 minutes. This interview is voluntary, so if you, for any reason, would like to stop the interview or opt-out of answering one or several of the questions, that is entirely up to you. Thanks again for participating in this interview; it is greatly appreciated.

Origin questions

Before we start, do you have any questions for me?

Background on the interviewee

- Position/role (how long?)
- Education (years of education?)

1. Leadership

- What is leadership to you?
- What are the responsibilities of a manager?
- How many are you a manager of?
 - Where are your employees stationed?
- How did you become a manager of X?
 - More specifically, what made you apply for becoming a manager?

- Do you have the possibility to practice the type of leadership that you would like at X?
- How would you describe your overall experiences of the job as a manager/the workload/the organization?

2. **Organizational context**

- When you became a manager, did you know what was expected of you as a manager?
 - If yes, what? If not, what?
- During your time as a manager at organization X have you received any training or competence development as a leader?
 - If yes, what kind of training? Was it mandatory?
 - If not, what would you like to develop in training/competens development as a leader at X?
- Does the organization have any preference regarding leadership styles?
- What does the recruitment process look like for managers?
- What does your promotion scheme look like?
- What is your relation to your manager?
- How does a typical day/week look like for you as a manager?
 - Daily/weekly tasks (is the interviewee part of the strategies/policies on X?)

3. **Motivation and Self-reflection**

- How would you describe yourself as a manager?
- What motivates you as a manager?
- How do you motivate your team?
- What would you say is the most challenging part of being a manager?
- What would you say is an easy part of being a manager?
- Do you have a role model or someone you look up to? Why?

4. **Covid-19 Pandemic (before, during and after)**

- What is your view on digitalization?
- How would you say organization X works with digitalization?
- Are there any specific things you have to consider when you are a manager in a virtual environment?

Before:

- How did the Covid-19 pandemic start for you?

- How did you work before the pandemic?
- How much did you work in a hybrid work model?
- Were there any specific challenges that you faced in the beginning of the pandemic?
- What did the organization do to support you in the beginning of the pandemic?
- How did the people in your team react to the covid-19 pandemic?

During:

- During the pandemic, how did you stay connected to your team-members?
 - How often?
- How have you experienced the engagement of your team during online meetings?
- What challenges regarding leadership as a manager did you have during the pandemic?
- Have you seen any positive outcomes from the pandemic/working remotely in your job as a manager?

After:

- How have you chosen to work post pandemic?
- How have the team chosen to work post pandemic? A choice by themselves or an organizational one?
- Which future factors would you think will be identified as difficulties after the pandemic managing a team partly from home?
- What learnings will you take with you from this period, is there something that you will not take with you?
- Has your leadership changed in any ways, the beginning of the pandemic/after the pandemic?

5. Concluding questions

- Is there anything you would like to add, something I have forgotten to ask you about leadership?
- Can we contact you if any other questions connected to this study arise or if any clarifications are needed?

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me!

Appendix 2 - Consent Form

Information to Participants and Consent form

The study aims to understand the changing nature of leadership, the experiences of being a leader during the pandemic crises, and the difficulties and opportunities when leading teams working remotely from home. The study is intended to give an insight into leadership during and after the covid-19 pandemic and its further development. The responsible writers are Jennifer Palmér & Anna Tengelin. They are students in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations at the Department of Sociology and Work Science at the University of Gothenburg. Information for participants in the project follows below.

Data Collection

The data collection consists of qualitative interviews and will be recorded with the participant's allowance.

Participation

The participants in this study are voluntary and will remain anonymous to the Swedish secrecy act. Everyone involved in this study is covered by professional secrecy. Participants' names will be removed, and they will receive a pseudonym during the transcription of the interviews. Other specifications that could risk the anonymity of the interviewees will also be scrambled. The interviewee will determine the terms of participation. The participant can thereby choose to change the terms of their involvement or decline to participate without any reason.

Handling of collected material

Recordings and notes from the interviews will replace the participants' names with pseudonyms, and the data material is only available to authorized researchers. All interviews will be transcribed to the computer and locked away. The transcribed documents are named and sorted by the given numbers. The collected material and transcription of interviews will not be used for any purpose other than the master thesis. The interview file will be deleted after the thesis has been completed.

Results and publication

The results of the study will be published on the database GUPA and DIVA.

For questions and further information, please contact:

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CONSENT FORM - consent to participate

I have read and fully understood the scope and implications of participating in this study. Any questions I had were answered satisfactorily. I agree that the interview can be digitally recorded. Therefore, I agree to participate in this project.

- I agree to participate

- I agree to my personal details being handled as described above.

Date and place	Name and Signature (participant)
Date and place	Name and Signature (student)

Appendix 3 - Interview Request

Hi XXX!

Our names are Jennifer Palmér and Anna Tengelin. We are two students in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations at the Sociology and Work Science Department at Gothenburg University. We both did our internships at CSO in the fall of 2021 (Jennifer at X and Anna at X). We received your contact details from our contact person, who thought you would be an interesting person to interview. We know that you have a lot on your plate right now, but we would be so grateful if you could spare us 40 to 60 minutes of your time for our qualitative study on leadership. This study aims to understand the changing nature of leadership, the experiences of being a manager during the pandemic crisis, and the difficulties and opportunities when leading teams working remotely from home. The study is intended to give an insight into leadership during and after the Covid-19 pandemic and its further development. The questions could also be sent to you beforehand upon request.

You as a participant will, of course, be anonymous, and the interview material will be deleted afterwards and only be used for the purpose of this study. The interview can be held in either English or Swedish, depending on your preference. We would like the interview to be in-person, but we can arrange it digitally through Teams if this is not possible. Therefore, we would appreciate it if you would participate in this study, but let us know as soon as possible if you are able or not. We would like to conduct the interviews sometime during the weeks of 10, 11 and 12.

If you have any questions regarding the study do not hesitate to contact us!

Best regards,

Anna Tengelin & Jennifer Palmér

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Appendix 4 - Code List

Challenges and Opportunities

Adopting to continuous changes

- Government financial support programs
- Working from home (WFH)
- Country specific restrictions
 - Face masks
 - Corantine

Balancing professional and personal life

- Flexible working hours
- No business travels
- More time with loved ones
- Family obligations
 - Taking care of kids
 - Cooking and cleaning
 - Help with homework

Connections between managers and employees

- Decrease in informal conversations
- Sharing feelings and emotions
- Reduction of CO2 pollution
- Advancement of technology
- Technological tools
 - Teams
 - Camera
 - Microphone

Managing employees' feelings virtually

- Emotions
 - Worried
 - Afraid
 - Scarred
- Stress factors
 - Unemployment
 - Stressful family situation
 - Deadly pandemic
 - Uncertainties

The changing nature of the role

Leadership styles influenced by people and environments

- Leadership styles
 - Swedish leadership
 - French leadership
 - American leadership
- Swedish organization
- Swedish culture
- Role models
 - Clear communication
 - Teamwork
 - Openness

Creating a connecting and collaborating environment

- Source of inspiration
- Provide motivation
- Emotional support
- Team spirit
- Stay connected
 - Daily check-ins
 - Weekly team meetings
 - Notice everyone in the team

Task-oriented towards relation-oriented leadership

- High performing
- Key performance indicators
- Employees health and wellbeing
- Employee's emotions
 - Feeling lonely
 - Feeling anxious
 - Feeling stressed

The development of leadership strategies and practices

Short-term strategies

- Activities were postponed
 - Recruitment
 - On-boarding
 - Discussion meetings
- Heavy workload with no additional benefits
- Employees personal sacrifices
- Minimizing labour costs
 - Layoffs
 - Terminating consultants contracts
 - Cancelled trips

Long-term strategies

- Difficult to create long-term strategies during uncertainties
- Good working environment
- Employer and employee relationship
- Company culture
 - Transparency
 - Respect
 - Trust

Practices

- Prioritising tasks
- Manage employees expectations
- Communicating practices
 - One-on-ones
 - Scheduling communication
 - Available if needed
 - Continuous communication