



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND WORK
SCIENCE

THE EFFECTS OF LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP

A Qualitative Study on How Remote Work Affects
the Relationship Between HR and Line Managers

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| Essay/Thesis: | 30 credits |
| Programme and/or Course: | Master's Programme in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations PV2500 Master Thesis in Strategic HRM and Labour Relations |
| Level: | Advanced |
| Semester/year: | Spring 2022 |
| Supervisor: | Freddy Hällstén |

Abstract

Master Thesis: 30 credits
Programme / Course: Master Thesis in Strategic HRM and Labour Relations
Level: Advanced
Semester/year: Spring 2022
Supervisor: Freddy Hällstén
Examiner: Petra Adolfsson
Keywords: Remote work, Relation, Sensemaking, HR and Line Manager, Digitalization

Aim: The public sector in Sweden has a complex municipal structure responsible for services such as public education, social services, waste disposal, child and elderly care. The last decades, the public sector in Sweden has been characterized by extensive reorganizations and New Public Management has also been introduced and changed the responsibilities for line managers. In this complex system, the line managers have a more vulnerable position where they have high demands from the organization and not enough resources to carry out their work. The line manager must receive the support they need, hence the importance of the relationship between HR and line managers. In addition, we live in a time where remote work has become common in the working life. That is why we have chosen to investigate how remote work affects the relationship. The purpose of the study is to investigate how remote work affects the relationship between HR and Line Managers.

Theory: This study applied the Sensemaking and Job Demand, Control and Support model to understand the empirical findings.

Method: The study uses a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews as a tool. Eight respondents that work in the public sector have been interviewed and the data has been collected, transcribed, analyzed and thematized by using a thematic analysis approach.

Results: The empirical findings indicate challenges as a result of remote work regarding the work situation for HR and Line Managers. Three main factors have also been identified affecting the relationship between HR and Line Managers; support, communication, and changed work situation.

Forewords

This has been a tough process, with both ups and downs. In the end it turned out to be more than just a master thesis, but a great experience of collaboration, communication, and personal development.

We would like to thank our supervisor, Freddy Hällstén. With good feedback and implications, he was a vital support for us during this semester. Also, our humblest gratitude to our contact person at Göteborgs Stad for helping us access relevant background information and informants for our study. We would also thank Bertil Rolandsson for a clear structure of the course and well communicated information about the course, seminars, and draft hand-ins.

Finally, this study is dedicated to our families who are very proud and supported us from day one through the fire and flames. We have both been told by our parents that no one cannot ever take your knowledge and education away from you.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Investigation

Today's generation has unquestionably both witnessed and experienced dramatic changes all over the globe, such as the emergence of mutations of diseases forcing countries, societies and communities to lockdown and rethink the concept work. In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, shattered our economy, and shook our social balances. This introduced new dimensions in personal and societal behavioral patterns paving the road for both new political and economic initiatives (Barragan-Quintero et al., 2020). As a result of the pandemic, many workers and companies were forced to convert to remote work for the first time, with little to no preparedness (Yang et al., 2022). According to early estimates from Eurofound (Ahrendt, et. al., 2020), over 50% of Europeans worked from home, at least partially, in comparison to 12% percent to the emergency. These figures are now similar, with many employees and organizations likely to choose working from home (WFH) even after the pandemic (Ceurstemont, 2021). For example, many tech companies such as Facebook, Twitter, WSquare, Box, Slack and Quora, anticipated the events and announced remote work as a long-term strategy and in some cases this policy would be relevant even after the pandemic (Benveniste, 2020; McLean, 2020). Others believe that COVID-19 acted as a springboard accelerating the transition from the traditional, shared office to remote work arrangements (Lund et al., 2020).

The public sector in Sweden has a complex municipality structure that is responsible for services such as public education, social services, waste disposal and child and elderly care (Cregård & Corin, 2018). During the last decades, the public sector in Sweden has been characterized by extensive reorganizations and New Public Management (NPM) has also been introduced and changed the responsibilities for line managers. Cregård and Corin argue that operations managers in the NPM era are no longer merely a supervisor with focus on core services such as expenses and staff schedules. Instead, the role has moved towards a professional manager with broad duties, responsibilities that demand substantial training, experience and expert knowledge to develop for example, core services, planning and controlling budgets or resolve personnel issues (Cregård & Corin, 2018; Chen et al., 2011). In the Swedish municipal sector, this increase of responsibilities has had a detrimental impact on managers' working conditions, performance and health (Björk et al., 2013; Corin, 2016).

In this complex system, the line managers have a vulnerable position where they have high demands from the organization and not enough resources to carry out their work (Antonsson et al., 2012). According to previous studies, operations managers in the public sector receive insufficient administrative support (Cregård & Corin, 2019; Höckertin, 2007; Wikström & Dellve, 2009). Others who studied administrative support in the public sector advocate a system that strengthens organizational structures (Dellve et al., 2006). Furthermore, Thilander (2013) has focused on problems regarding Human Resource Management and Human Resource Development which results when operations managers have insufficient support regarding personnel and administrative responsibilities.

As mentioned above the relationship between HR and line managers has become more intertwined as it now includes both strategic and operational matters (Boglund et al., 2021). On an operational level, the purpose for HR is to support line managers' daily work in matters such as personnel issues, recruitment and work environment (Shipton et al., 2016). Furthermore, this strategic relationship works through Line Managers implementation of HR strategies (Shipton et al., 2016; Trullen et al., 2016). To investigate how line managers and HR-relations are affected by remote work, we will therefore study an organization that works remotely. In addition to this, Göteborg's Stad has gone through an extensive reorganization during 2021 introducing new structures aiming towards a centralized management. These extensive reorganizations have affected our study organization in a way that seems to give HR the options to work remotely. However, Line Managers claim to not have this option.

2. Relevant Concepts

This chapter aims to provide the reader with relevant and recurrent concepts. First, there will be an explanation of the relationship between HR and Line Managers. Second, we will explain the notion of boundaryless work.

2.1 HR and Line Manager Relation

The relationship between HR and line managers includes different roles, where both roles are equally important for the relationship to work as effectively as possible. Thilander (2013) explains that HR has a role where they have the overall responsibility for all personnel issues, where they are responsible for ensuring that all HR-related tasks are performed correctly. The line managers' role includes more personnel responsibilities, they work more toward the employees and ensure that the work is done in the right way. Thilander (2013) believes that it is important for the relationship that HR can use their skills, they are those who have knowledge and experience of relationships, human behavior, conflict management, supportive conversations, labor law, skills development and handling difficult conversations. It is therefore important for HR to be able to utilize their experience, knowledge, and competence (Thilander, 2013). Line managers have a different role as they are responsible for ensuring that all HR measures are implemented with the employees. It is therefore important that the line managers have knowledge of implementations and that they receive the support from HR to implement the HR measures with the employees. It is therefore important that HR and line managers interact so that the relationship works as efficiently as possible.

The relationship between HR and Line manager is an interplay between two different roles that play a significant role in the performance of tasks. As we have explained above, these two roles are different but equally important strategic collaboration where HR functions work as a support function for the line managers. It is the line managers who have the personnel responsibility and it is they who implement the personnel work, while HR has a more supportive role and must provide line managers the support and resources they need for the execution of tasks. With that being said, the relationship involves an important interplay between two different roles.

2.2 Boundaryless Work

Our contemporary working life has seen dramatic changes in recent decades as global competition has intensified, and so has the need for quick adaptations to a rapidly shifting market. The fast growth of boundary-crossing information and communication technologies (ICTs) has resulted in more flexible work arrangements. This has resulted in employees being increasingly empowered of their autonomy and responsibility for structuring their work thus, *Boundaryless work*, is a way of describing this phenomenon (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson, & Lundberg, 2011) and *New Working Conditions*, is another (Peters, Den Dulk, & Lippe, 2009). As a result of expanding use of ICTs and flexible work arrangements, employees can, to a higher degree than before, complete their daily tasks without being bound by location and time, and this simply mean that job can be carried our anytime and anywhere (Allvin et al., 2013; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Fenner & Renn, 2010; Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013; Madden & Jones, 2008; Major & Germano, 2006). This also gives employees the ability to stay connected to colleagues or customers to a larger extent and basically be available 24 hours a day (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Wajcman et al., 2008), and this results in expectations of constant availability (Major & Germano, 2006; Middleton & Cukier, 2006).

2.3 Reorganization 2021

The reorganization has affected approximately 23 000 employees, where around 2 000 had to switch work placement with the purpose of reducing the number of district administrations from 11 to 6 organizing them after function instead of city district (Dikanda, 2021). The aims of the reorganization is to 1) provide equal service to all receivers all over Gothenburg, 2) efficiency at a lower cost, and 3) reeducation of leaders in the organization (ibid). In addition to the reorganization, HR and line managers have been working remotely since the outbreak of the Covid-19. Thus, the conversion process has been conducted remotely as well. During the reorganization that have occured digitally, HR have been working from home and the first line manager at the office. The reason why is that the line managers did not have the opportunity to choose because the work task demands them to be at the office.

3. Outline, Aim and Research Question

3.1 Outline of the Study

This study contains 8 chapters that touch on different parts that are relevant to our study. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study where we give an overview of the study. Chapter 2 consists of an explanation of concepts and background of the organization that are relevant for the reader to grasp during the reading. Chapter 3 contains an outline of the study and explaining of the study's focus and research questions. Chapter 4 contains previous research where we describe relevant studies and a summary of previous research. In Chapter 5, you will find our theories / models that the study will contain and discuss how these theories will be used in the study. Chapter 6 describes the method we have used in our study, here we explain the approach to the chosen method, gathering of informants, ethical considerations and challenges that have arisen. In chapter 7 we will go through the results that we have collected and analyzed based on thematic analysis. Chapter 8 contains a discussion of our findings based on our chosen theories / models and previous research. Finally, Chapter 9 is where we present our conclusion, theoretical contributions and suggestions for further studies.

3.2 Aim and Research Questions

The last couple of years has resulted in a transition to remote work and these changes have affected people's way of working. We therefore want to understand how the relationship between HR and line managers has been affected by this phenomenon. This is done by examining how HR and line managers understand the effect remote work has on them and what challenges it has resulted in. We will focus on getting a deeper understanding of the impact remote work has on the relationship in a public organization.

- 1.** How has the relationship between HR and Line Managers been affected by remote work?
- 2.** Are there any challenges with working remotely?

4. Previous Research

4.1 Complexity of the Public Sector

Organizational change has been a popular topic within strategic management literature (e.g., Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Burnes, 2004), however, the public sector where extensive reorganizations have taken place and new reforms have been introduced during the last decades, it seems to be less attractive to study organizational change and change management than in the private sector (Vann, 2004; Kuipers et al., 2014). Also, consultants have often played key roles in change processes in the public sector (e.g., Pollitt & Bouckaert 2000; Lapsley, et al., 2013), however their point of view is rarely taken in consideration during evaluation and follow ups on the intervention (Fattore et al., 2017). Most of the research on the public sector has focused on the circumstances in which reforms and interventions are implemented (e.g., Berman & Wang, 2000; Hood & Lodge, 2004; Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011).

Past research says that government authorities stand up to four main principal limitations typical to the public sector compared to the private. (1) a more unstable and complicated environment, (2) additional formal and legal restrictions, (3) more inflexible strategies and rigid procedures, and (4) a greater diversity in objectives and products (Gelderset et al., 2007). Others (e.g., Boyne, 2002) claim there are little to no empirical studies of the public sector being exposed to more uncertainty and instability, still it is widely acknowledged that the public sector's environment is more difficult and unstable. However, the turbulent environment is made up of complex networks of societal actors who decide on the legitimacy of the organization and its goals through political policy making processes (Alford, 2001). According to Boyne's (2002) meta-analysis of empirical studies comparing the public and private sector, public organizations are no more affected by the environment than private businesses. Public organizations, on the other hand, are more directly and permanently exposed to pressure from significant stakeholder groups, according to Ring and James (1985).

4.2 Friendship or Rivalry?

Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) describe middle or line managers as mediators and negotiators within the organization. They are also said to be critical when putting organizational policies

and practices into action and bring policies and practices to life because of their proximity to the operational level (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Furthermore, they are essential in implementation of the organizational strategy (DeChurch et al., 2010). In the field of human resource management, researchers have focused on how line managers perceive and interpret organizational policies, practices and strategies (e.g., Musson & Duberly, 2007) and how they influence both failure and success of HR practice implementation (e.g., Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Past research has shown the strategic importance of HR-practises when it comes to performance (Paauwe & Richardson, 1997; Huselid & Becker, 2000; Combs et al., 2006; Paauwe, 2009), and if HR-practices should have an impact on firm performance they need to be accepted, and enacted by line managers. However, there is often a gap between the requirements by HR-policy and the delivery by line managers (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), and Chen et al., (2011) means that one reason could be differences in perceptions of each other's role in the firm. As indicated by recent intra-organizational social capital literature (e.g., Youndt & Snell, 2004), social interaction and shared cognition within the firm is important to see improvements in organization effectiveness (Kase et al ., 2009).

According to Yang and Arthur (2019), the strategic human resource management literature is replete with findings of beneficial connections between a set of well-configured commitment human resource practices and organizational performance results. However, a lack of congruence between organizationally intended and employee-perceived HR-practices has been found in several recent studies on HR-management (eg., Aryee, et al., 2012; Den Hartog et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2009).

4.3 New Way(s) of Working

Working from home (WFH) was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and seems to have become a new style of working for millions of people around the world (Ceurstemont, 2021; Galanti et. al., 2021). However, WFH has, like all organizational changes, shown both benefits and disadvantages (Konradt & Hertel, 2003). Adopting this flexible method of working is typically presented as a deliberate decision that necessitates a period of planning, preparations, and adaptation for employees to effectively support employee's productivity and provide them

with a better work-life balance (Allen & Golden, 2015; Gejendran et al., 2007). However, most firms have been compelled to embrace this mode of working because of the COVID-19 pandemic, frequently without providing staff with the requisite skills for remote work (Malino et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017; Vander Elst et al., 2020). A study from Galanti et al., (2001) investigated the impact of family-work conflict, social isolation, distracting environment, job autonomy, and self-leadership on employee productivity, work engagement, and stress while WFH during the pandemic. The study showed that employee's family-work conflict and social isolation were negatively connected to WFH productivity and engagement, while self-leadership and autonomy were favorably related. WFH stress was negatively connected to family-work conflict and social isolation, whereas autonomy and self-leadership had no effect. This concluded that personal and work-related factors both hampered and aided WFH (ibid).

The advantages of working from home are debatable. Enhanced flexibility and autonomy, reduced or removed commuting time, increased productivity, higher morale, and job satisfaction, are all benefits of remote work (Tavares, 2017). According to a meta-analysis, remote work has a small positive relationship with organizational outcomes like increased productivity, employee retention, and organizational commitment (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). However, remote work can lead to social isolation and marginalization, which can raise the level of stress (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990) and a literature review found no evidence that remote work improves job satisfaction and productivity (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Furthermore, a European research group found that working from home was linked to lost productivity due to illness (Steindelmüller et al, 2020), commonly known as presenteeism (Aronsson et al., 2000).

Before the pandemic, remote work/working from home was an option offered by some companies due to the advantages that were previously mentioned and was a free choice (Lapierre et al., 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work quickly grew because of policies and laws aiming for social/physical distancing and has been linked to decremental impacts on stress levels, mental health, and health behaviors (Czeisler et al., 2020) such as drug use (Pfefferbaum & Noth, 2020).

4.4 Remote Work and Relational Communication

According to Jämsen et al., (2022) remote work has been studied for several decades. Main interest has been remote workers' perceived isolation (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden et al., 2008), satisfaction (Fonner & Rolf, 2010), and remote workers' identification with their organization (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a global emergency and created extensive restrictions all over the world (Jämsen, et al., 2020). Prior studies have been predicated on the assumption that remote work is an optional choice for the employee negotiated with the employer, and typically this has been studied as part of regular office work or in contrast to work performed on the employer's premises (ibid). In Gajendran and Harrison's (2007) literature review of telecommuting it was considered as high intensity work if an employee worked remotely two and a half days a week on remote. Therefore Jämsen et al., (2022) means that a setting where the entire organization works remotely most of the time, or full time, is exceptional and creates a new setting to research the experiences of remote workers. A study by Oksanen et al., (2021), studied remote work in the context of COVID-19, and the study showed an increased technostress primarily for those not accustomed to remote work. Others (Hodder, 2020, p. 265), argued that the context of COVID-19 created a "surreal" work environment in which employees were pressured to stay connected while still being socially distant. This led to increased freedom of structure however, also an increased work intensity and stress (ibid). Jämsen et al., (2022) argues that a rapid shift to remote work introduces new practices into the organizations and it is crucial to analyze and understand the effects of remote work and use of communication technical aids on work relationships and relational communication.

4.5 Communication

Scholars of public sector change management investigate the link between certain communication strategies and employee psychological discomfort and uncertainty, as well as their acceptance of suggested changes (Allen et al., 2007; Frahm & Brown, 2007; Hameed et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2008). Other researchers have instead focused on how leadership and structure affects communication and employee preparedness for change (Battilana et al., 2010; van der Voet, 2014; van der Voet et al., 2016; Zorn et al., 2000). Pandey (2010) says that government-funded organizations have less authority in deciding what and when important

information is communicated with employees and leaders. Others (Aggerholm & Thomsen, 2016; Leitch & Davenport, 2003; Liu & Horsley, 2007; van der Voet, 2014; van der Voet et al., 2016; Waterhouse & Lewis, 2004) say that leaders of public organizations employ novel approaches to dealing with the restrictions of publicness in communicating and managing, for example, change. Furthermore, employees' reaction and reactions to suggested plans and processes are said to be highly important for the effectiveness of organizational change implementation (Bartunek et al., 2006; Herold et al., 2007; Kuipers et al., 2014). Bordia et al., (2004) also connects the absence of crucial knowledge (e.g., a motivated change process) when difficulties envision the future structure, direction and sustainability of the organization as well as organization function of different departments and hierarchy. Bordia et al., (2004) explain that employees often feel uncertainty about their employment and future career within the organization. The reason for this is employees' reduced ability to anticipate and control their circumstances. In the long run, this could lead to mental illness and other negative psychological consequences (ibid).

4.6 Summary of Previous Research

4.6.1 Brief Overview of Public Sector

Organizational change has been a popular topic in the strategic management literature (e.g., Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Armenakis & Bedeian, 2004), but even though the public sector has seen extensive reorganizations in the last decades there are less studies on reorganizations than in the private sector (Vann, 2004; Kuipers et al., 2014). Others claim that consultants often play vital roles in change processes in the public sector, yet their point of view is seldom taken into consideration in evaluations and follow-ups on interventions (Pollit & Bouckaert, 2000; Lapsley et al., 2013). Instead, many previous studies focus on the circumstances in which the reforms and interventions are implemented (Bergman & Wang, 2000; Hood & Lodge, 2004; Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011).

According to Gelders et al., (2007) said that government authorities are exposed to four main challenges typical to the private sector. (1) more unstable and complicated environment, (2) additional formal and legal restrictions, (3) more rigid processed and inflexible strategies, and

(4) a greater diversity in objectives and products. Boyne (2002) claims there are little to no empirical studies of the public sector being exposed to more uncertainty and instability; however, it is widely acknowledged that the public sector's environment is more difficult and unstable. Furthermore, Boyne (2002) also means that the public sector is no more affected by the environment than private businesses, but they are more permanently exposed to significant stakeholder groups (Ring & James, 1985).

4.6.2 HR and Line Managers

Previous research on the roles of HR and Line Managers indicate that whether it could be seen as friendship or rivalry is a fine line. Floyds and Wooldridge (1997) describes Middle or Line Managers as organizational mediators or negotiators, and are vital to execute policies and practices. The reason is the Line Managers proximity to the operational level (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Also, they are said to be essential for implementing strategy (DeChurch et al., 2010) and previous research have indicated that Line Managers influence both failure and success of HR practice implementation (e.g., Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007).

The strategic importance of HR practises linked to performance, has also been studied (Paauwe & Richardson, 1997; Huselid & Becker, 2000; Combs et al., 2006; Paauwe, 2009) however, HR practices need to be accepted and enacted by Line Managers to have an effect on the organization. Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) claim there is a gap between the requirements by HR-policy and the delivery by Line Managers. Chen et al., says that one reason could be different perceptions of each other's roles in the organization. Intra-organizational social capital literature (e.g., Youndt & Snell, 2004) suggest that shared cognition within the organization is important if improvement in organizational effectiveness is desired (Kase et al., 2009). The strategic human resource management literature has many findings on positive connections between well-configured human resource practices and organizational performance (Yang & Arthur, 2019), but a lack of congruence between organizationally intended and employee-perceived HR practices has been found in several studies (e.g., Ayree et al., 2012; Den Hartog et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2009).

5. Selection of Theory and Concepts

The theoretical framework will include sensemaking and the job demand, control, and support model that will be the basis of our study. This is to get an understanding of how remote work affects the relationship between HR and line managers. Furthermore, we will also explain what the relationship between HR and line managers means and provide an overview of boundaryless work that we consider significant to include in our analysis work.

5.1 Sensemaking

Weick (1995) emphasizes that the sensemaking process makes it easier for individuals and employees to more easily understand the organizational changes that take place. By using sensemaking, it helps to answer why the change is happening, what is happening and in what way the change is happening. The consequences of this are that you can improve the organization by managing the organizational change in a successful way.

As we have previously developed in the study, the consequences of Covid-19 have led to employees being forced to work from home by using remote work, which is a major change that affects the employees. With that said, we believe that sensemaking is a relevant theory to use in this study. We all humans are different and how we interpret and perceive situations differently regardless of whether we experience the same situation or event. Sensemaking is about how we humans create meaning in a situation, change or event. The theory focuses on how we create an understanding of the event and what the event means for the individual (Weick, 2005; Weick, 1995). To better understand sensemaking, we are going to describe the seven characteristics that the theory has. The characteristics are;

Identity and Social: Weick (1995) explains that identity and social are important aspects of the person in the process. This is something that is constantly changing as identity and social are dependent on the interaction with other individuals. People learn by interacting with each other and through this it can help the individual to be able to understand how to react during different situations that occur in the organization. When you understand your identity, you can act in a way that is good for the organization.

Retrospective: Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking is retrospective. When you think back in time during a process, that process is affected during the time that the flashback takes place. This then affects what happens in the change at this time. He believes that sensemaking is something that is constantly going on during the change and that there are several factors that affect how the person then creates meaning in the situation.

Ongoing: This category means that sensemaking is a process that is constantly ongoing where it never has an end. There are always new events and interactions for the employees in the organization. By creating meaning constantly all the time, you become better at creating meaning in the future. Weick (1995) believes that this helps the organization in the future as it is easier to create meaning in changes that will take place in the future when you have experience of sensemaking.

Clues and Plausibility: Weick (1995) emphasizes that this part of the process means that people tend to look for and find clues in new situations that arise in the organization. These clues refer to previous experiences such as how to react during the previous change. You use previous events and experiences to be able to make sense of the new change or situation. These clues must be reasonable for the person, the individual needs a reasonable explanation for why the change is happening. Weick (1995) believes that it is not important to provide all information to employees, but rather to focus on providing enough information for employees to understand the situation and the change.

Enactment in Social Environments: In order for an employee to create meaning in a change, it is necessary to act in the change. Acting is then affected by the environment. How you perceive a situation affects how you then act in that situation. How one then acts in that situation affects how one then perceives it (Weick, 1995).

5.2 Job Demand, Control and Support Model

A sense of control over one's work situation is an important part of the employee's well-being in the physical and mental work environment. To be able to understand the work situation that HR and line managers are in, requirements, control and the support model can be used. The model is an overview of the balance and the relationship between perceived demands, control

over one's situation, such as how much influence a person has over their work situation and how much support that person has in their work (Karasek & Theorell, 1999). The model believes that it is important for all employees to share the same goal image, because the same goal results in it being easier for those employees to support each other. Support in their work makes it easier for employees to influence their work situation and the decisions made in their work. The model shows that a combination of high demands and high control is preferable for the employee. This means that the person in question is part of an organization where they use their knowledge and skills and get more motivation in their work. High demands, low control and support in their work is the absolute toughest situation for the employee and results in stress in their work. The model is defined in four different categories that explains the individual's work situation. The categories are High strain, Active, Passive and Low strain.

High strain

Here it means that the individual is in a situation where he is faced with high demands in his daily work and has low control over his work situation. The individual also feels that he does not have the support or resources he needs to perform his tasks. The consequences of high strain are serious and it can lead to mental illness, stress, and overexertion.

Active

This situation is preferred by the majority. This means that the individual has high demands, is efficient in his work, has control over his work situation, and has support and resources at his disposal. Active is good for the organization and the individual's well-being as he enjoys his work, wants to develop, and reaches his goals.

Passive

The individual is faced with a passive situation, the person experiences low demands in their work and has little control over their work situation. The work is therefore under-stimulated and therefore has no opportunity to change its work situation as it has no control. The person, therefore, feels no meaning in their work and it can lead to mental illness and stress.

Low strain

Here the individual is in a stable situation. The person has high control over their work situation but at the same time very low demands on their work. The person thrives in their situation and masters their work where they can make their own decisions regarding their work.

5.3 Theory discussion

The theories mentioned above Sensemaking and Work demand, Control and support model will be useful frameworks for our study. Sensemaking, which turns circumstances into situations that could be understood, could help explain why actions are taken and what might be the underlying factors. Sensemaking also emphasized the importance of social interactions. It has been beneficial in our analysis as it has helped us understand the empirical data and explain possible reasons of how remote work has affected the relationship between HR and Line Managers. The job demand, control and support model complement sensemaking by giving an overview of the balance between different aspects that are important. Karasek and Theorell's (1999) model help us understand how the three factors correlate and affect each other and give us an understanding of the informant's current situations. The framework has been used in the discussion to explain different factors' affect and relevance to each other. It has helped us understand the informants' work situation.

6. Method

Our study will be based primarily on data from the Administration of Services for Inhabitants with Functional disabilities. To gain an understanding of how the relationship has been affected, HR employees and Line Managers will be interviewed and included in our study.

6.1 Method of Choice

To understand organizational behavior and behavior in organizations Jonsen et al., (2018) means that qualitative research is critical. To carry out our study, we had to focus on getting in depth material from the informants who work within the City of Gothenburg's administration for disability. The focus of this study is to understand how the relationship between HR and line managers has been affected by remote work. This is done by examining how HR and line managers understand the effect remote work has on their daily work and what challenges it has resulted in. To understand this, we have captured and analyzed the respondents' experiences and interpretations. To get answers to our research questions, we have used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research focuses on examining and capturing how the informants interpret or understand different phenomena or meanings (Flick, 2014). Bell et al., (2019) believes that your research design and tools should always relate to your purpose and research question, it is for this reason that we believe that the qualitative research method is the design that is best suited to investigate our purpose and research question. Our data will contain the informants' experiences, and interpretations, so it is important to use a tool that is more in-depth and can capture these aspects. In order to capture these aspects and understand the whole, we have chosen to use a semi-structured interview as a tool (Lewis & Nichollas, 2014).

6.2 Data Sampling & Selection

In this study, we have focused on finding informants who work with Human Resources and as Line manager in Gothenburg municipality. The selection has focused on finding informants where there is a relationship to investigate. Each Line Manager in this selection has an assigned HR-generalist, and every HR-generalist has an assigned number of managers to support in general questions regarding personnel and work related questions. In this selection, we use

purposive sampling where we especially focus on expert sampling. We have therefore chosen respondents based on specific requirements needed to conduct our study (Bell et al., 2019). Important criteria in this selection have been that it must be personnel within HR who work closely with managers, have a job position as line manager and have been or are currently working remotely.

6.3 Process

To get in touch with informants, we have enlisted the help of the HR manager in the organization who has been a "gatekeeper" for us in this procedure. A gatekeeper is a person who is used in the context to get help to reach informants/respondents to their study (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Semi-structured interviews have been our primary approach where we have interviewed eight respondents. The choice of the number of informants was determined based on how many informants had the opportunity to participate. The interviews were conducted with an interview guide as a framework, this interview guide was presented based on questions that we considered relevant to our research question. In addition to these questions, follow-up questions and clarifications were asked during each interview, this was done to reach the respondents' personal and own experience and interpretations. As a complement to our primary data we received sub-reports from our contact person based on evaluation alternatives for a future organization of Göteborg's Stad. These sub-reports have only been used to see the organizational structure and how the organization that we have studied works. Since the sub-reports have only been used for background information of the organization that we have done our study in, they will not be included in the results and discussion. However, the sub-reports combined with dialogues with our contact person have contributed in shaping the purpose of our study and our research questions. Also, the end of section 1.1 and the section about reorganization under heading 2.3 are written based on information from the sub-reports and dialogues with our contact person. Furthermore, the sub-reports and dialogues with our contact person have helped us understand how both HR and Line Managers work.

The first contact with the respondents was by phone to tell them a little bit about us, the focus of the study and whether they want to participate. When we received a "Yes" from all the respondents, we sent out an information letter with a little more information about the study

and the procedure. The next step in the process was to book interviews with all informants. The interview took place in a neutral zone, by video call with Teams/Zoom. The interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes and were recorded with the respondent's approvals. The recording was transcribed and anonymized, and we have also informed the respondents about this.

6.4 Analysis of Data

When conducting qualitative research, the purpose is to find an indication of a direction within the studies phenomenon rather than measure values which can be applied as a general indication for a large group or population. Hence, the concept of validity becomes less relevant and more important is instead to attack the area of research with the most suitable method, which could provide better reliability.

Due to its versatility, grounded theory (GT) has become a frequently used method that may be applied in both qualitative and quantitative studies (Roberts, 2008). Furthermore, GT develops a theory through an inductive process that may then be generalized and applied. As the theory emerges from the evidence, the emerging theories are said to be grounded (Schneider & Whitehead, 2013). Braun and Clarke also argue that thematic analysis should be a foundation in qualitative research methods because it provides and teaches key abilities and core skills, which could be used in many other types of qualitative research. Scholars (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004; Leininger, 1992; Thorne 2000) have also argued that thematic analysis should be treated as a separate method.

The analysis process is an important part of the study because it determines how rewarding and relevant the results are in what you study. It is for this reason that we have spent a lot of time on the analysis part. We have chosen to use thematic analysis as an analysis method, this is used to identify, analyze, and produce themes in the collected data (Braun & Clark, 2006). The procedure for thematic analysis includes six steps. The first step was to transcribe the interviews, then we read through the transcribed material to get an overview of the data. The next step is to find recurring and repetitions in the transcribed material that we then identified and coded. Coding means that you describe the statements or repetitions that you consider important and give them a name. The next step in the analysis process is to bring the different codes together and create subthemes. Finally, we sorted these sub themes into main themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Below you will find a fictive table that is an example of coding on the

coded material. The table is not from our coding, it's an explanation of how we did our coding. The text in the table is not from our informants, it's just a fictive text to illustrate how we did thematic coding.

Table 1

Fictive Coding Example

| Meaningful entities | Text reduction | Code | Subthemes | Themes |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| <i>I was on my way home from the hairdresser and was on the phone with one of my co-workers and it was a less fun conversation. When we hung up, I mostly felt angry and frustrated with that co-worker. After that I didn't want to be part of this organization.</i> | I was on my way home and was on the phone with one of my co-workers and it was a less fun conversation. When we hung up, I felt angry and frustrated. | Work Calls on private time | Reachable | Borderless work |
| <i>Before I started to work here, I was often contacted after working hours and was expected to reply instead of dealing with it the next day.</i> | I was often contacted after working hours and was expected to reply whenever someone contacted me. | Working around the clock | No boundaries | |

Not. The text in the table is not from our thematic analysis.

6.4.1 Disadvantages with Thematic Analysis

When compared to other qualitative research methods, the shortcomings of thematic analysis become more obvious (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The reason is, according to the authors, that there is not as much literature on thematic analysis as there is on grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. Thus, inexperienced researchers could be unsure of how to perform a thorough thematic analysis (ibid). Also, a simple thematic analysis, when compared to other methods, does not allow the researcher to make claims about language use, which could be a disadvantage. Furthermore, a thematic analysis is considered adaptable; however, it might result in inconsistencies and a lack of coherence when constructing themes based on study findings (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

6.5 Ethical Principles in Humanistic and Social Science Research

When conducting a qualitative study, it is important to adhere to ethical principles. The ethical principles consist of four main requirements, each requirement has rules that must be followed during the study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The first requirement is to inform the study purpose of the study to the individuals concerned; this is called the information requirement. We fulfilled this through the information letter. It is important to inform the participants that their participation is voluntary and that they can cancel their participation without giving any reason. It is important that the informants have full freedom to choose whether they want to participate in the study or not, this is called the consent requirement. The requirement of confidentiality is of great importance when a study is carried out, which means that the information of the informants concerned is stored so that unauthorized individuals do not have access to it. We have anonymized all informants so that they cannot reveal their identities. As a student or researcher, it is important to respect that the information collected may only be used for the purpose of the study and nothing else, this is called the use requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

We have been careful to consider the prevailing ethical principles and rules that the Vetenskapsrådet (2017) has developed in Research Ethics Principles, in humanities-social science research. We have offered anonymity to each informant; they have been given access to this information in the information letter. The informants were informed that if they agreed, we would record the interviews, after the interview, the content would be transcribed. They were also informed that the material would be treated with great care. The only ones who would have access to the transcripts and recordings were the examiner, supervisor, and the authors of the study. Furthermore, we informed that when the work is examined and ready, it may be published in its entirety on the database DIVA.

6.6 Contacts and Collaborations in This Study

For us to be able to get relevant data for our study, we need contact with respondents within The Administration of Services for Inhabitants with Functional Disabilities and the respondents need to have managerial positions but also regular employees. We will get access to the respondents through collaboration with our contact person in the administration for functional

support. Our contact person is an HR - Manager, he will therefore give us access to relevant respondents. We will also have access to a supervisor who will help and support us throughout the project. The supervisor is an employee at the University of Gothenburg in the Department of Sociology and Work Science.

6.7 Limitations

First of all the reader should be informed about troubles of getting access to respondents. As mentioned above, we were promised to get access to as many informants as we wanted that worked as HR employees and Line Managers, however we were only given contacts to eight respondents. The small sample would most certainly affect the outcome of the study.

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher seeks a direction indicator within the studies phenomenon rather than measuring values that later would later be applied as a general result for a large group or population. Thus, validity is less relevant and treating using the best suited method is more important, and this could provide better or worse reliability. (Bryman, 2018). When compared to other qualitative research methods there is a shortcoming of literature on thematic analysis in comparison to, for example, grounded theory. This could result in uncertainty among inexperienced researchers on how to properly conduct a thematic analysis. As an example, it does not allow the researcher to make claims about the use of language.

As mentioned before, getting access to informants relevant to this study has been a great challenge and being dependent on a gatekeeper also has its advantages and disadvantages. Due to missed answers to email, no shows to agreed interview dates and times the number of informants was much lower than expected, which could affect the outcome making it rather questionable. Also, the interviews were conducted via video call, which was more flexible from an interviewee point of view and ensured the possibility to choose a comfortable, safe environment. However, it is more difficult to take non spoken communication such as body language into consideration (Bryman, 2018). According to Bryman, this could also give the interview person more room to avoid certain questions.

7. Results

The findings of this study will be presented after treating the data, as mentioned in the method section. The results are presented through three developed themes based on the data we have collected from the respondents.

Our developed themes that we have categorized from the data are.

- Support
- Communication
- Changes Work Situation

In addition to this, the Line Managers that we interviewed have been on site full time, even during the pandemic. They simply explained that the organization that they manage restricts them from working remotely. However HR-informants have been working remotely during all of the pandemic, and are now operating a hybrid form where they sit at their office some days, and work remotely some days.

7.1 Support

The relationship in this study could be specified as HR giving support in personnel matters, and introducing HR-practices and Line Managers being on the receiving end implementing this, since their role is supposed to be more business adapted. The role of HR in this relationship is rule-governed and general, and Line Managers' is business adapted. The majority of our HR informants explained that they had around 12 Line Managers to support on a daily basis and their daily work consists of a wide diversity within a certain area.

“We are divided within HR, which gives us the possibility to separate different processes. For example, my working group deals first and foremost with work environment issues, labor law issues and payroll processes”. - **HR**

Informants said that Line Managers within Göteborgs Stad are generally supposed to have a more business adapted role. First and foremost Line Managers have personnel responsibilities, but in practical terms, it could contain economy, work environment responsibilities, keep track of premises, any remodeling needs, knowing who to contact should there be a water leak, talk

to people responsible premises, possessing knowledge about disease states and have a collaboration with health and medical care and finally adapt all the into practices suitable for the organization.

“You are supposed to adapt all this to your specific organization, and this was just a small part of my job, but I think that is enough to tell for now...”. - **LM**

Many informants testified that a lack of support is a consequence from both remote work and the reorganization. Line Manager says the close support they used to have before the reorganization, has become rather complicated when working remotely.

“It seems like our support functions have become independent processes where instead of asking us what type of support we would like to have in our organization, they say ‘Here’s in a little box of what we can deliver and you cannot ask for more’. Then, you’ll have to do it yourselves’, and that is usually how it goes.” - **LM**

Furthermore, Line Managers describe this as problematic, since they become more burdened with additional tasks. The organization receives money that only covers the targeted actions towards the client, and no extra money for the personnel to do administrative work or purchases. The Line Managers experience that one of the problems with increased effectiveness within the administrative units or HR is that those with proximity business performing tasks/activities receive additional tasks and have less time with their clients. Also, all Line Managers explained that quick access to HR is important, since they are specialized in their area. Line Managers argue that long response times of up to two weeks is problematic, since feedback in a specific case could play a key role and many other processes might have to stop temporarily. Furthermore, the Line Manager explains that when they receive an answer, it is usually short and not much of a help. They argue that if both functions were located at the same office, it would be easier to answer questions quickly, but when working remotely an email must be sent and results in longer feedback. The Line Manager also explains that, for example, proactive planning might be suffering until HR answers. These delayed processes was, according to the line manager, something new and did not happen to the same extent before remote work.

“In my experience, this close support that we had before the reorganization (and it is due to both the reorganization and covid, I think). Our HR-specialist that I believe is working from home full time and we NEVER see her physically, whatsoever...It is very unfortunate! I have been working on this site now for a year, and I have never seen her, physically (laughter)”- LM

(...)now, many cases are just waiting. This waits for an answer, and that waits for an answer, this I don't really know yet and so on”- LM

The results also indicate that it is difficult to carry out and provide the support that Line Managers consider important as their work requirements are high and you have too much work to complete. The informants highlight that HR has too many managers to coach and provide support at the same time.

“yes, we are an extremely large organization and our HR is completely overloaded. My unit alone has many rehab cases at the moment” - LM

In this context, we interpret the result as support has suffered partly because of remote work. The Line Managers believe that it is difficult to provide support and receive support when you are not working close to each other physically, they believe that in the past it has been easier to receive support. Support is an important part of the relationship between HR and line managers and therefore this theme is an important part in our study.

7.2 Communication

All informants believe that communication has become lacking during the conversion to remote work that has taken place in the world. They believe that in some cases it is easy to use different digital channels to perform their tasks, but in some cases it becomes problematic. This means that they cannot cooperate as effectively as before. The conversations via Teams are not as

personal and on certain occasions it is required that the conversation is personal, such as rehabilitation meetings.

“(...) you lose a lot even though many have become better at being able to see the people as if they were sitting next to you, but it is invaluable when it comes to personnel matters like rehab meetings” - HR

In the daily work between HR and line managers, the informal conversations are as important as the mandatory meetings. All informants believe that you lose the short conversations that you used to have between your meetings, such as at the coffee machine or when you walked past someone's office and could open the door and ask a question. These occasions were important as you had the opportunity to ask quick questions regarding certain processes that you worked with. Both Line Managers and HR believe that these meetings were crucial in the communication, instead it takes several days or weeks for them to get an answer to a question that could previously be answered during a coffee break. One person believes that it is easier to turn away and/or prioritize certain matters while responding to emails.

“(...)before you solved a lot of that in the corridor or you just opened the door and asked the question and closed the door and so on so that it is clear that you lost that bit then.”

- LM

Being able to have a good collaboration between HR and line managers is an important part of the relationship. In order to have a good collaboration, you need to be able to be reachable and have good communication where you give feedback as quickly as possible. All informants believe that work processes in daily work have been affected due to poor cooperation and communication. Line Managers and HR believe that some processes require cooperation and when the other party works from home and is not reachable, they believe that the work suffers as the processes are delayed and feedback is delayed.

“The processes are a bit delayed I still experience and it is not so used to from before but you usually got answers. May

*not be the same day but a few days later and so on and so
you could always go on” -LM*

Furthermore, one HR informant argues that building a relationship via Teams and other digital platform is difficult. This particular HR informant claims that it is more challenging to build trust via Teams, however other HR informants do not see this as an equally big challenge or problem. The HR informant explains that other HR colleagues use video call for most of their meetings, which works fine.

*“I have had meetings via teams and it worked well, however
it is a slightly different feeling, I think”. -HR*

To be able to interact with each other based on their two different roles as HR and line manager, the results show the importance of communication in the relationship. All informants describe that the communication between the roles has been negatively affected when working remotely. Everyone agreed that you lose control of your work situation when you do not have the same communication as you had before you started working remotely. This is because the interaction between the parties was essential for control over their work situation.

7.3 Changed Work Situation

The changed work situation seems to have more dimensions than just remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple informants explain that all of the organizations of Göteborgs Stad had an extensive reorganization during 2020, which resulted in reducing 11 administrations to 6 and many employees were relocated and had new colleagues. One HR-informant argues that it is difficult to tell how much of the new working styles are due to COVID-19 and how much is due to the reorganization. The reason is that COVID-19 struck simultaneously as the reorganization was implemented. Furthermore, the HR informant claims that even though the reorganization might be implemented, there are many bits and pieces in order to lay the puzzle.

*“The biggest change connected to the reorganization is the
policy document, routines and everything that used to be in
order. It is not there anymore. Then you might think ‘well,*

just bring the old ones', but it is not possible, since we came from 11 different administrations with different routines and policy documents. I believe that is a lesson and hopefully they learn from that". -HR

All of the informants talk about COVID-19 arguing that this was their starting point of working remotely. However, Line Managers in our study claim that they had to be on site during COVID-19, since their specific organizations offer housing with special services for inhabitants with functional disabilities and require them to be on site. Furthermore, some experienced that processes involving several actors got more complicated as a result of remote work.

"We were not allowed to work from home to the same extent as HR. Almost all administrative personnel have worked from home, including business managers." -LM

Furthermore, the Line Manager argues that it is more difficult to read a person when you talk via video call. They argue that some tasks require all parties to be on site to get the best results, such as rehab meetings, where Line Managers emphasize the importance of reading the room and capture non-spoken communication.

The result shows that the informants who worked remotely experienced more efficiency in one's own work, since e.g., reduced travel time could be used somewhere else. HR claimed to have more time finishing their daily tasks when working from home. Also, the Teams meetings were claimed to be formal and quick, the lunch took less time when eating at home, the breaks were shortened and the days longer because it is hard to turn off the computer.

"(...) for example, you tend to not take a full hour for lunch and you do not use breaks to the same extent as if you were at the office" - HR

"Actually, you work far too much as it is difficult to turn off the computer" - HR

To handle and relate to the conversion to remote work, the informants believe that it is important to be close to each other on a physical level. As the majority work from home, this means that each person themselves needs to change their way of working in the digital change. All

informants believe that it will be a challenge to be able to perform their tasks as they will not be of the same quality. This means that you work very close to people and if you are going to have rehabilitation meetings, etc. via screen, it will not be as deep and human. Line Managers and HR believe that the job will be more efficient, but the results would not be as good as it would be to have a physical meeting with everyone. One informant claimed that it may be easier to distance yourself from stressful matters if you look at a screen instead of attending meetings on site. Furthermore, informants have testified of rehabilitation meetings where everyone attended physically except HR, who claimed that commuting takes up too much time of their day. More so, one line manager means remote work gives more incentives not to show interest in and getting to know your assigned department better. In return, some HR-personnel claim it is not their assigned tasks to be on site and know what everyone is doing from the bottom up to the Line Managers.

*“(...) but I think ** lost a lot in terms of relationships with the employees and it is not possible to keep track of things around when you sit on a computer”. - HR*

“It is very demanding to have physical meetings with someone who is sad and angry, but if you have a screen then you will not be affected as much, but there is no quality when you are not in place”. - LM

The line managers experienced that it becomes problematic to have meetings digitally. They experience that it does not work that some people are physically present, and others are connected via Teams. During these meetings, several distractions prevent or affect the purpose of the meeting negatively. These distractions vary, but it is everything from children, washing machines, partners, and postal agents. The results also show that line managers find it odd to have people that are connected via Teams and are not in place. Some argue those who do not attend, for example, rehabilitation meetings on site but work remotely miss out on important aspects such as body language and other non-spoken communication.

“I get quite provoked because you need to see what is happening in the room you need as well as sit there and feel

things that are not always said verbally like body language". - **LM**

The empirical findings are based on analysis of the data presented above from what we could extract indications for three main conclusions based on the three identified themes. The results show that no matter what role you have in the organization, you need support. The informants believe that remote work has significantly affected the support where the consequences are longer feedback and response to the message, unavailability, and distancing during team meetings. This has therefore impacted the relationship between HR and Line manager.

The results show that communication is an important part for the relationship and the data shows that communication has been negatively affected by remote work. The reason why is that remote work and digital meetings are not as personal as on-site meetings and certain occasions could be difficult to grasp without attending physically.

Finally, the results show that the changed work situation has affected the relationship badly between HR and Line manager. By working remotely, you have more time and flexibility to be done with your task but your work will be more boundaryless and a more demanding situation to control and therefore affect the work and your work situation.

8. Discussion

In this chapter we will discuss and analyze the results, link to previous research and use the theoretical framework. We have categorized our empirical findings into three themes that we will further elaborate on. The three themes, support, communication and changing work situations, can be found below.

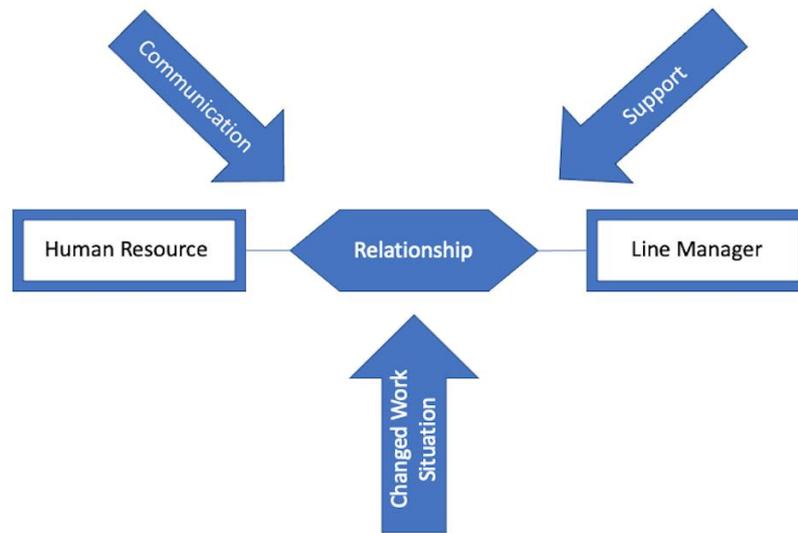
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Table 2 is an illustration of the three main factors affecting the relationship between HR and Line Managers. Exactly what happens inside the “blue box”, is difficult to say for sure, but we will use our theoretical framework to understand the process in a better way.

Table 2
The Three Factor Model



Not. Own table

As mentioned earlier in this study, working remotely seems to have become a new way of working for many individuals all over the world (Ceurstemont, 2021; Galanti et. al., 2021). Even though the conversion to remote work means flexibility for some individuals, it still has an impact on the whole organization. When we are going through organizational changes, we will need to adopt our way of working and accept the changes. To keep up with the changes and situation, the individuals will need to make sense of their situation. Since we are all different, we interpret and perceive situations in different ways (Weick, 2005; Weick, 1995). For this reason, the line manager and HR employee need to create an understanding of how to work with the changes, and make sense of their situation. Thilander (2013) means that HR and Line manager have different roles, but both are equally important for the organization, and for this reason it is important that all the employees understand and act accordingly to the organizational changes.

8.1 Support

Boyne (2002) claims little to no empirical evidence from studies of the public sector indicating greater exposure to uncertainty and instability, even though it is commonly said that the public

sector's environment is more difficult and unstable. The turbulent environment is made of a complex network of societal actors who decide on the legitimacy of the organization and its goals through political policy making processes (Alford, 2001). However, previous research indicates that Line Managers and HR-personnel are exposed to heavy workloads with high demands in the Swedish public Sector (Gelders et al., 2007). Simultaneously, their tasks demand close collaboration with other organizational functions. For example, Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) says that the impact of HR practices are dependent on Line Managers accepting them. Others have also shown that HR practices are linked to organizational performance (Paauwe & Richardson, 1997; Huselid & Becker, 2000; Combs et al., 2006; Paauwe, 2009).

Let us refer to Line Managers and their cooperation with HR. To handle high demands and expectations, control of their own work situation is a must, and to make this possible HR and Line Managers need to have the right resources at their disposal. If decision making is an important quality for a leader, finding the "correct" answer without jumping to conclusions too fast demands for example comprehensive data, experience, and conversation, which could be an important piece of a puzzle. Since the results indicate that remote work affects the support they need in this case and thereby the relationship. The line managers believe that it is essential for them to receive daily support from HR as certain occasions require their knowledge and skills. The job demand, control and support model show that if you have control over your work situation and receive the support you need, you can meet the job demands. The model serves as a tool for organizations to map out how important it is to see the big picture in order to manage their work situation (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The results indicate that HR and Line Managers balance between high strain and active, which means both HR and Line Managers have high demands. What decides is the amount whether their work could be classified as high strain or active is the amount of control of their daily work. In this case, the amount of control is dependent on receiving support. As previously mentioned in the results, Line Managers are dependent on feedback and support from HR to progress and HR also need the right resources to give support. In this case, the right resources for HR could be the right conditions or freedom to choose where to work from. HR informants enjoy working from home and explain that they could for example do laundry, walk the dog and save time and money on commuting. Karasek and Theorell (1990) explains that an active work situation where employees have high demands, high control, and the right support and resources is the most

efficient and best situation for all parties. For line managers to feel in control of their work situation, they need support from HR. The results indicate that the support has been negatively affected by remote work as the informants believe that HR becomes more distant as they do not get access to them when needed.

8.2 Communication

Previous research shows that good communication between different functions is beneficial for a relationship to work as intended. Being available to each other is an important part of the collaboration and helps each other achieve their goals. This means that you must be clear in your communication, be able to be reachable, and give quick feedback to each other when it's needed. As we have previously mentioned in our study, HR and line managers have a challenging work situation where the demands are high and the workload is heavy (Antonsson et al., 2012). A functioning relationship between each other has been essential for managing the workload and requirements (Thilander, 2013). An important factor in the relationship is communication where it is central to be reachable, give quick feedback to each other and be clear in their communication. Bordia et al., (2004) highlights that dysfunctional communication could lead to negative psychological effects, especially during organizational change. The reason for absence of crucial knowledge, such as clear motivation for organizational change, leading to mental instability is connected to levels of control. An uncertainty for the organizational future could have negative psychological effects, which could explain why those who are able to work remotely prefer to do so. Balance between demands, control and support has proved to be important for well-being at work (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and our results indicate just that. The results show that communication is an important aspect to consider as the informants believe that remote work has affected it. The informants believe that it is important for them to be able to communicate as effectively as possible and as well as possible, they believe that some situations in their daily work require that the communication is more personal. The results show that the personal communication has disappeared, as HR works from home and communicates remotely. Good communication is important for the informants to have control over their work situation and meet the requirements they are faced with. Based on the demand, control and the support model, this means that it is crucial for the informants to have an active work situation for their well-being and work results (Theorell, 1999). It is

important for them to get resources and support in the form of a functioning relationship to control the high demands they are faced with. Various tasks have resulted in positive benefits by working remotely, these tasks are individual and it is not necessary to have good communication or to be in place physically. Remote work streamlines the individual tasks as it is considered that they can perform certain tasks from home and do not need to be on-site in the office but can attend meetings via Teams or use other digital means (Tavares, 2017; Martin & Macdonell, 2012). However, our results show that in addition to the individual tasks, it is important for HR and line managers to interact with each other for their well-being and other important tasks. To be able to interact with each other, it is necessary to have effective and good communication and this in turn leads to a good relationship. The informants believe that the digital platforms they use are not as good as being physically in place. They believe that you can not collaborate as effectively as you did before remote work became the new way of working. At the same time, they believe that certain tasks need to be done on-site physically, these tasks are rehabilitation meetings and other sensitive conversations and meetings. These meetings require that you are more personal in the execution, if you attend the meeting via digital means you are a bit absent and it is in turn not as valuable. All the informants believe that these meetings require HR and Line Managers to work together to get quality in their work tasks. Our results therefore show that even if there are individual benefits to working remotely, it has negative consequences on communication and this in turn the relationship.

8.3 Changed Work Situation

Remote Work is not a completely new phenomenon, as it has been studied for several decades (Jämsen et al., 2022). Previous research has mainly studied remote workers' perceived isolation (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden et al., 2008) satisfaction (Fonner & Rolf, 2010), and remote worker's identification with their organization (Weisenfeld et al., 2001). The main assumptions from previous studies is that remote work is optional (Jämsen et al., 2022) however, due to COVID-19 more or less forcing whole organizations to work remotely gives us a new setting (ibid). For example, Hodder (2020, p. 265) argues that remote work created a "surreal" work environment where employees felt demands of constant availability while still being socially distant. With that being said, the COVID-19 pandemic meant organizational changes that required quick actions, such as remote work to prevent the virus from spreading. However this

organizational change had both positively and negatively consequences, which affected the relationship between HR and Line Managers. Our results indicate that the informants believe that the work becomes more efficient when working from home because they have more time and opportunities to handle situations in their private lives. Remote workers say that it is good for them to avoid the trip to the office which usually takes 1-2 hours of their time. This means that they can instead focus that time on work and other activities in the home such as laundry, children, and dishes. The consequences of this, however, are that their work becomes boundaryless, informants forget to take a break/lunch, miss the informal conversations with colleagues during the coffee breaks and constant availability. Previous research shows that the flexibility of working remotely results in more time to complete your work tasks because you are not tied to any location or time. In other words, the job can be completed anytime and anywhere (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Wajcman, Brittan & Brown, 2008; Major & Germano, 2006; Middleton & Cukier, 2006). Although working from home results in advantages regarding their work tasks, the results show that it results in disadvantages regarding the relationship between HR and Line Managers. All informants believe that the changed work situation means that they lose important aspects that are important for the relationship, such as physical lunches with colleagues, coffee breaks, and corridor talk. Both Line Manager and HR believe that these aspects were important because it was an opportunity for them to discuss work-related issues and tasks in a more casual way. Now when HR work from home, they miss these opportunities to discuss and instead must send an email that takes 1-2 weeks to get an answer to and this in turn affects the relationship regarding unavailability and bad communication. Sensemaking can be a beneficial framework to facilitate organizational change for individuals within the organization (Weick, 1995), and in this case the quick conversion to remote work. To better understand and make sense of the organizational changes and how they affect the relationship between HR and Line Manager we will use Weick's (1995) sensemaking process. Two important factors that could be connected to the results are *identity and social*, which highlights the importance of involved actors to interact and communicate to create an understanding of each other's situation and create an identity in this new setting. Our results show that HR and Line Managers have not interacted with each other in this changed work situation, they cannot fully grasp each other's new situations and therefore lack identity. Another important aspect to understand in the sensemaking process is what Weick describes as (1995) *Enactment and Social Environments*, which emphasizes the necessity to act in a change

to create an understanding and act from it. The reaction itself will affect how others perceive and understand you. Our results show that HR and Line Managers act differently in these changed work situations and are separated, and therefore cannot get a complete perception of each other, which affects their relationship. Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking is an *ongoing* process, since interactions happen all the time for most people. By creating a constant meaning, one will be better at creating meaning in the future. Therefore it would be beneficial to act quickly and interact with colleagues. Our results indicate that HR and Line Manager have not interacted enough and created a perception of their work situations, and handle the changed work situation. It is therefore important for HR and Line managers to understand the situation from their perspective and create a meaning that works for them and try to do a change where they can have the coffee talks with colleagues remotely and take breaks by using Teams to talk with colleagues. By interacting and acting constantly they can create meaning in their situation, they can handle the change in a way that works for everyone personally (Weick, 2005).

9. Conclusions

Our study highlights that a functioning and open relationship between HR and Line Managers is important for them to work with their daily tasks. We have repeatedly emphasized the importance of a functioning relationship and explained the importance of their different roles in the relationship. In addition, previous research indicates that HR and line managers already have a tough work situation and how important it is for these two roles to interact with each other to handle the work situation. Our results confirm the importance of the relationship that previous research highlights, but the results also show what consequences a change like remote work has on the relationship and what challenges it has led to. We have highlighted in our study that communication, support, and the changed work situation are central parts of the relationship and that it is these categories that have been affected by remote work. Remote work has also led to new benefits for the individual such as control, work-life balance and enhanced flexibility. However, our study indicates challenges and questions regarding remote work and how to deal with their daily work. The challenges means, not only constant availability, but family-work interference and new dynamics where HR and Line Managers may not see each other in person for over a year. Also, the results indicate that social interaction does not exist to the same extent as before the transition to remote work. The informants all believe that it will be difficult to handle these challenges that have appeared during the last couple of years.

How has the relationship between HR and Line Managers been affected by remote work?

Our study indicates that remote work clearly affects the relationship between HR and Line Managers. First, all of the informants seem to have different possibilities to work remotely depending on their position. For example, the Line Managers claim to have no choice but to be at the office due to demands of their business. HR informants claimed to have more freedom to decide whether they want to work from home or not, since their tasks could be executed from anywhere at any time. In our study we have identified three main categories that can describe the effects remote work has in the relationship between HR and Line Managers; ; *support*, *communication* and a *changed work situation*.

In our study, we have emphasized the importance of support in their work. However, our results show that remote work has affected the relationship between HR and Line Manager in the sense that you do not get the support you need in your daily work. The close support is important for

the employees to have control over their work situation and is not so close anymore due to remote work and it is more transcendent than before. This results in up to two weeks in response time on emails and an increased possibility to repel responsibility in certain questions. Line Managers claim to be dependent on HR responding quickly, and if they do not, everything else will have to wait, since much of their tasks are interconnected.

Communication is proved to be an important aspect in a well-functioning relationship, and our study indicates that a balanced communication is deficient when working remotely, and this has consequences on the relationship between HR and Line Managers. Our study also shows that certain tasks need to be done on-site, such as rehabilitation meetings. The collaboration is suffering due to imbalances in control, and the results indicate that HR have more control than Line Managers who are dependent on HR and their expertise. Also, informants mean that important details and dimensions of social interactions disappear, which could affect the decision making. More than one informant testified that all parts except HR are usually present on site during rehabilitation meetings with the argument that commuting takes too much time. All of the informants believe that these meetings require HR and Line Managers to work together to get the best results.

Our study indicates that remote work has positive effects for those who can choose to do so. However, this mainly applies to individual work-life balance since many spoke about being able to, for example, do laundry, empty the dishwasher or open the door for craftsmen, but it has a negative effect on the relationship between HR and Line Managers. Both Line Managers and HR consider that the changed work situation contributes to important social interactions disappearing such as eating lunch together or talking in between meetings. These used to be forums for work-related discussions, and friendly small talks and conversations. The changed work situation has a clear effect on the relationship, since the result indicated that some errands demand all parts to be on site, physically. When every person except one is at the office, this creates a special feeling and a certain friction on the whole team. Finally, these three factors are an important base for the relationship, they interact with each other, but still differ. Our empirical findings indicate that these three factors define much of the relationship.

Are there any challenges with working remotely?

As mentioned in the results, the changed work situation seems to have more dimensions than just remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple informants highlight Göteborgs Stand's reorganization in 2020, which resulted in 11 administrations being reduced to 6 and many employees were relocated and got new colleagues. It might be difficult to say exactly how much of the new working styles are due to COVID and how much is due to the reorganization. That might be an area for future research. Furthermore, even though the reorganization might be implemented, there are many bits and pieces missing in order to lay the puzzle.

The remote workers emphasized many advantages, mostly regarding individual work-life balance and the ability to for example do laundry, walk the dog or the same time and money on commuting. However, Line Managers tended to see more disadvantages with family life interrupting the daily work. The results indicate that boundaries for those who work from home reduces significantly if not disappears completely. Remote workers tend to skip breaks, shorten lunch and are constantly available. Also, there were indications of family life often interrupted by job meetings such as children asking questions or craftsmen coming and going.

Regarding challenges, it seems like little to no parts of the organization are adapted to remote work due to the imbalances in control mentioned above. The results clearly indicated decreased insight and understanding of other positions and departments within the organization. During the interviews some informants said that it may be easier to keep a distance from everything, especially stressful matters such as rehabilitation meetings. Some also claimed that they have never ever had a physical meeting, and that they know little to nothing about the daily work of their HR-support. They also claimed that HR shows little interest in getting to know the organization they are supporting better. In conclusion the results indicated that everyone who did not work from home were forced to adapt to those who did, which as far as we understood, created friction and irritation.

9.1 Contribution to Research

Writing this essay has provided an understanding of how the relationship between HR and Line Manager has been affected by remote work and what challenges it has presented. This study has focused on understanding the relationship and how it has been affected by the new way of

working. Remote work is not a completely new phenomenon however, the pandemic seems to have rushed the transition making it less well thought out in terms of converting all businesses compatible with working remotely. HR and Line Managers are supposed to work in symbiosis, but different possibilities to remote work seem to have shaken the balance between support and communication due to a changed work situation. Our study indicates that even though HR and Line Managers have different roles, both are equally important if the entirety shall operate smoothly. Our thesis contributes with an explanation that remote work has a clear impact on the relationship between HR and line managers, the study also shows that there have been challenges of working remotely. Our study also shows that demand, control, the support model, and the sensemaking process are essential tools for organizations to use to perceive and manage these new changes. They give an overview of the situation and what the challenges of working remotely mean for the individuals. Remote work is a new area to study and our study shows that this is an important focus area to study further in. We would also suggest future studies should focus more on the relationship, since it seems to be very important for the organization. Future studies could elaborate on this topic conducting a much deeper study, since the results clearly indicate that remote work has effects on the relationship and challenges have occurred. Also, researchers could focus on long term effects of working remotely and how reduced social interaction outside family life have an impact on the individual and work-relations. Furthermore, we have little research on the long term effects of extensive screen time and the sharply increased remote worker may result in new work-environmental issues. In accordance with previous research, the relationship between HR and Line Managers is vital for the organizational performance and implementation of HR practices. Thus, future studies could also investigate if the management knows what everyone is doing and what their thoughts and implications are on this new way of working.

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Appendix 1: Information Letter



Hi

We are two master students from Gothenburg University in the field of Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations. We are now working on our master thesis. The purpose of the study is to investigate how remote work affects the relationship between HR and Line Managers. The study will focus on how the relationship is affected when the employees work from home and what challenges there are when working remotely.

We wish we could contact you by phone or Zoom/Teams for an digital interview that touches on these issues, we estimate that the interview will take about 30-40 minutes. If you agree, we will record the interviews, after the interview, the content will be transcribed. We will treat the material with great care, the only people that will have access to the transcripts and recordings are the examiner, supervisor, and the two of us who are behind the study. After the thesis has been examined and completed, it will be published in its entirety on the DIVA database. Your participation is voluntary, and you also have the opportunity to cancel an ongoing interview at any time without stating the reason. The interviews and the material we have collected will only be used for the purpose we stated above.

We will contact you during week XX to determine the time for an interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact us,

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*Best regards,
Flakron Istrefi & David Vierö*

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Starting dialog

Background about the person

W - What is your position and how did you reach your current position?

W - What are your education, qualifications, and skills in the field?

W - Why did you decide to work in HR or as Line manager?

Background on the informant's position

W - What are your daily responsibilities and tasks?

W - What are your goal(s) in your work? Do you know what you are aiming for?

W - How much impact do you have on your daily work?

Background on the Organization

W - How has the reorganization impacted your department?

W - Can you briefly describe the historical evolution of your department?

W - How has your department changed during your years at the department?

Question regarding the reorganization

W - Can you describe any other time where you have been a part of an extensive reorganization?

W - Can you describe how you got information about the reorganization?

W - Has the reorganization/remote work affected your daily work? If yes, in what way?

Question regarding working from home

W - How has working from home affected your work?

W - Can you describe pros and cons of working from home?

W - Can you describe how your collaboration with other departments is affected by working from home?

Question regarding the relationship between HR and Line manager

W - How do you feel the remote work have affected your relationship with HR/Line manager

W - How was it before the reorganization/working remotely?

W - How do you (HR) support the line managers? / How do you collaborate with HR?

Ending Questions

W - Is there anything that you want to add or something that we haven't asked that you feel you want to share?

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