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Beyond the office walls: Exploring trust and knowledge sharing in the hybrid work setting

-A qualitative study on employees' perception of the challenges and opportunities when adopting the hybrid work setting

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Abstract

The covid-19 pandemic has led to many changes for organizations and has accelerated the shift from a traditional work model to a hybrid one. The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of how trust and knowledge sharing have been impacted by the hybrid work setting from an employee's perspective. To achieve this, the study uses a qualitative approach with an abductive design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Swedish employees from three different industries that operate in the greater area of Gothenburg, Sweden. The findings show that there are challenges in building non-work-related relationships which have a negative effect on trust as well as creating trust with new colleagues. Further, the findings show that explicit knowledge has been impacted positively while tacit knowledge has been impacted negatively. The hybrid work setting has given more flexibility to employees, which has positively affected their work-life balance and enhanced productivity.

Acknowledgment

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1.0 Introduction

Organizations that operate in today's global environment face several difficulties and must be flexible in the ever-changing organizational and global environment. An effective strategy for achieving a competitive advantage in this dynamic context is to foster creativity and innovation within the organization. Research has consistently shown that knowledge sharing plays a significant role in driving creativity, innovation, and personal and organizational performance (Gagné et al., 2019). The authors further describe that despite this evidence, organizations have trouble with employees withholding knowledge and information, although different ways of encouragement for knowledge sharing are implemented (i.e., open space office). Patel (2019) proposes in his article that an organization can create innovation and knowledge sharing by focusing on four different practices: by creating a unified vision, motivating teams to collaborate, building online spaces for sharing, and fostering cross-departmental interaction.

Researchers consistently emphasize that an organization's success relies upon their ability to share knowledge effectively and efficiently. This ability plays a crucial role in gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage in the dynamic and evolving business environment. They further argue that trust between employees' facilities for effective knowledge sharing (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019; Williams & Schubert, 2018). Thus, making trust an important factor that can significantly influence an organization's ability to share knowledge and ultimately determine its success in the business market.

The pandemic that hit the world in 2019 forced many organizations to adapt and change to new circumstances. Working from home became a solution for minimizing the spread of the virus, meaning that employees were obliged to work from home and conduct all communication via different online platforms (i.e., Teams, Zoom, Webex, Slack, Google Drive). This adjustment meant that new issues and opportunities arose for both organizations and employees, and several effects are now presented. Statista (2021) conducted online interviews in Sweden, asking employees how many days they wanted to work from home after the pandemic. Nearly two-thirds (sixty-one percent) said they wanted to continue working from home two to three days a week. Ninety-four percent stated that they wanted to work from home for at least one day, indicating that only six percent said they did not want to continue working from home.

These results indicate that organizations may need to adapt their policies regarding where employees can work after the pandemic, to facilitate their employees' desire to be more flexible and work in a hybrid setting. However, it is important to recognize that the hybrid work setting presents new challenges for organizations. Communication, relationship building, and trust among employees may become more complex in a hybrid work setting, potentially impacting sharing of knowledge within an organization.

The trend in Sweden shows that the adaptation of the hybrid work setting is increasing, suggesting that this work model may soon be the new normal for employees and organizations. Svanberg (2022) writes that both employees and organizations believe that a return to a pre-pandemic working model is unlikely and that a hybrid work setting is here to stay. Moreover, a survey conducted by McKinsey, which included nearly three hundred executives, revealed that on average, executives plan to reduce office space by thirty percent as they intend to continue offering a hybrid work setting. These trends clearly indicate the growing adaptation of a hybrid work setting, driven and accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This shift towards a hybrid work setting, which combines working from home and in the office, presents both opportunities and challenges for organizations. On one hand, it offers employees increased flexibility and increased work-life balance, but on the other hand, it poses challenges for the important organizational elements of communication, relationship building, trust development and knowledge sharing among employees.

1.1 Problem Statement

From earlier literature, it can be stated that trust among employees and in the organization plays an important role in knowledge sharing. Further, knowledge sharing is crucial in fostering an organization's innovation and creativity which can create a competitive advantage. Hybrid work is becoming an increasingly popular working model as the pandemic has accelerated the adaptation of this work model. Organizations and employees are facing new challenges and opportunities, and understanding the dynamics of trust and knowledge sharing in this context is becoming more relevant. The integration of new technologies and increase in virtuality pose unique challenges for building trust in organizations. Dirks & de Jong (2022) argue that as employees are no longer bound to physical offices, there is a growing need for research that address and seeks to understand the impact this work model has on trust and explore effective strategies to address these challenges.

1.1.2 Research Aim & Research Question

This study can give organizations valuable insights into how to effectively foster trust and knowledge sharing among employees in hybrid work environments. By investigating the effects on trust and knowledge sharing in a hybrid work setting, this study can provide a deeper understanding of this specific phenomenon. The results of this study have the potential to be a basis when developing new policies and practices that support the fostering of trust and effective sharing of knowledge within organizations in the context of hybrid work. The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of how employees have experienced the change to a hybrid work setting and how this new work model can affect trust and knowledge sharing among employees. The aim of the study is to explore what factors influence the development of trust between employees and impact the flow of knowledge and identify possible challenges and opportunities this work model entails.

Research question: How does a hybrid work setting affect trust and knowledge sharing between employees?

2.0 Literature Review

In this section, earlier research on trust and knowledge sharing is presented. The focus is on how these two variables are affected in different work settings, such as virtual, physical, and hybrid settings. Literature regarding digital communication is further presented. The literature review is the main foundation for conducting the analysis.

2.1 Trust

Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995) defines trust as *"The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. This definition of trust is applicable to a relationship with another identifiable party who is perceived to act and react with volition toward the trustor"* (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman 1995, p.712). The authors state that trust is needed in an organization as achieving personal and organizational goals is often tied to working in teams and task interdependence (Mayer et al., 1995).

Literature on trust has grown over the last decades and is stated to be an essential part of fostering, maintaining, repairing, and elevating social relationships in the workplace (Dirks & de Jong, 2022). Authors such as Rousseau et al. (1998) and Mayer et al. (1995) published influential studies regarding organizational trust and following that, the research field of trust grew exponentially. As the literature on trust in an organizational context has grown, a great amount of research and knowledge has emerged in the field. Dirks and de Jong (2022) have reviewed research in this field and identified two waves that have shaped the field in important ways. During the first wave, from 1995 to 2007, conceptual clarification of trust was provided by introducing a definition of trust that became widely adopted by scholars (Dirks & de Jong, 2022). Further, the research in wave one provided a foundation for trust, its nomological network, and generally accepted theories. The second wave, from 2007 to 2021~ shifted the perspective from which trust was examined, from the trustor to the trustee. It also shifted from being studied at one level at a time i.e., team or leader, to cross-level models that integrated several variables. In wave two, research focused on understanding the dynamics of trust as the literature from wave one states that trust is a dynamic construct, but the research conducted tended to investigate trust as static (Dirks & de Jong, 2022). The authors conclude that the emergence of a third wave is a near certainty. Fundamental and disruptive changes

have appeared both in societies and in organizations that will have a significant impact on trust. New technologies in the workplace have intensified and opened up to virtuality which has been stated to create new challenges for building and maintaining trust in organizations. Further, the authors state that more fluid structures and roles are emerging in organizations, employees do not necessarily need to come into the office to work but can do so from home instead, a trend that has increased due to the pandemic (Dirks & de Jong, 2022). The authors conclude that these new trends will lead to major challenges for trust and that there is a need for research to understand the effect it can have on trust and how it can be addressed.

Trust has been widely researched in an organizational context and has been stated to play a critical role in the workplace (Koskinen et al., 2003; Imam & Zaheer, 2021; Ardichvili, 2008; Al-Alawi et al., 2007). Findings show that face-to-face interaction and mutual trust enhance knowledge sharing (Koskinen et al., 2003) and that trust has a mediating effect on knowledge sharing that in turn affects the success of a project or work task (Imam & Zaheer, 2021).

Al-Alawi et al (2007) state that interpersonal trust is a critical attribute in organizational culture and is strongly linked to knowledge sharing. It involves an individual or group's expectation of reliability in the promises or actions of others. When team members trust each other, they are more likely to respond openly and share their knowledge. Effective communication between staff is crucial to foster trust and knowledge transfer, and it goes beyond simply exchanging information. It involves human interaction, including conversations and body language, which are greatly enhanced by social networking within the physical workplace. Information systems are arrangements that support daily operations, problem-solving, and decision-making in organizations. They interact with people and data to facilitate efficient and effective knowledge transfer. Thus, effective communication, trust, and information systems are essential components of knowledge transfer in organizations (Al-Alawi et al., 2007).

In Abrams et al (2003) study, they found that creating personal connections was a factor that can help build trust. The researchers found that learning about common things that are not work-related helped in developing a relationship. Further, creating a non-work-related connection with a colleague seemed to have a positive outcome when promoting interpersonal trust. Ensuring frequent and rich communication is stated to have a critical role when creating trust. More frequent communication allows for more opportunities to assess a person and their relationship by learning about the other one's abilities, intentions, and

behaviors leading to the creation of trust in another one's competencies. The researchers further found that engaging in collaborative communication promotes interpersonal trust and stated that people tend to seek out those who tolerate brainstorming. Individuals are more likely to seek advice or information from people whom they trust and feel that they can rely on, as they believe that they will not be penalized for not knowing the information or having the answer themselves (Abrams et al., 2003).

Huang et al (2011) investigated how cognition-based trust and affect-based trust affect explicit and tacit knowledge sharing within an organization. Cognitive-based trust is defined as the trust individual has in another one's ability and competencies (McAllister, 1995). Further, affect-based trust is defined as the emotional bond between two individuals, where care and concern for one another are central, and is believed to be reciprocated, thus making the emotional ties between two individuals the link to create trust. Huang et al (2011) found that cognition-based trust has no significant effect on tacit or explicit knowledge sharing intentions and suggest that if cognition-based trust is established, an individual believes that there is no need to share knowledge as there is a belief that the other person is capable and have the competence already. However, the authors found that affect-based trust has a positive effect on knowledge sharing, thus arguing that affect-based trust is the dominant factor for sharing knowledge. Further, the affect-based trust had a stronger influence on explicit knowledge than on tacit knowledge.

Mäkelä & Brewster (2009) suggests that different interaction contexts are likely to have varying levels of trust-building effects and on how much shared experiences and interactions individuals have with one another. Shared experiences such as working in a team with hands-on projects are effective trust-builder as it creates a stronger shared experience base. Shared experiences help individuals to form a better understanding of each other as they are exposed to the other's tacit knowledge and language system, and it enables them to intuitively grasp the intended message (Mäkelä & Brewster, 2009). Different levels of interactions play a crucial role in fostering and building trust between individuals, researchers furthermore discuss the importance of frequent interactions. Abrams et al (2003) and Huang et al (2011) argue that more frequent interactions facilitate a deeper understanding of an individual's attributes it provides opportunities to observe their character, skills, and intentions and thereby fostering and establishing a stronger foundation for trust-building. Torro et al (2020) argue that individuals connect better when interacting face-to-face as their thoughts and understandings of each other align better compared to other communication channels. Visual

and auditory cues such as appearance, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice contribute significantly when building trust between two individuals.

2.2 Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is defined as *"the process intended at exploiting existing knowledge, and knowledge sharing are, hence, defined as being about identifying existing and accessible knowledge, in order to transfer and apply this knowledge to solve specific tasks better, faster and cheaper than they would otherwise have been solved"* (Holdt Christensen, 2007, p.37). Holdt Christensen (2007) states that knowledge sharing should not be viewed as a separate activity but instead as an ongoing activity and should be part of the process of overcoming interdependencies in an organization. Allen et al. (2015) define knowledge transfer as the process by which knowledge is disseminated from one individual to another within the organizational context. Effective knowledge transfer is crucial in the development of social capital and the optimization of organizational effectiveness in complex and intricate workplace environments. Successful task completion is dependent on the exchange of information and interactions among employees. However, physical separation or remote work may pose significant challenges to such interactions. Hence trust becomes a crucial component of knowledge transfer, and its establishment is more likely to occur through face-to-face communication as opposed to electronic communication. The prevalence of telecommuting in the modern workplace necessitates a need to examine trust's potential impact on knowledge transfer. Ensuring the preservation of interpersonal relationships and effective communication among employees is critical to mitigate any potential challenges that may arise in hybrid work settings (Allen et al., 2015).

Acquiring and leveraging knowledge is crucial for organizations to gain a sustainable competitive advantage in a dynamic economy (Wang & Noe, 2010). While staffing and training systems that focus on selecting and developing employees with specific knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies are critical, organizations must also actively facilitate the transfer of expertise and knowledge from experienced employees to other colleagues (Wang & Noe, 2010). The authors state that to achieve this, organizations should prioritize and effectively utilize the knowledge-based resources already present within the organization. Knowledge sharing among employees and across teams is essential in this regard, as it enables employees to contribute to the use of knowledge, innovation, and the competitive advantage of the organization (Wang & Noe, 2010). Knowledge sharing has been proven to

have a positive relationship to the reduction of costs, quicker completion of NPD projects, increased team performance, organization's ability to innovate, and an organization's ability to perform in terms of sales growth and revenue (Collins & Smith, 2006; Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009; Z. Wang & Wang, 2012).

The exchange of knowledge within an organization is crucial for its long-term success and competitive edge. Researchers present findings that knowledge sharing enhances organizational performance and job performance by utilizing knowledge more efficiently (Halisah et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2020; Abdelwhab Ali et al., 2019). Knowledge sharing can also lead to personal benefits for the employee such as increased pride, a sense of belonging with colleagues or the organization, more respect from others, a better reputation, and less alienation (Constant et al., 1994). The sharing of one's expertise or skills can make them feel more valued and appreciated by others (Matošková et al., 2022).

In a study conducted by Ouakouak & Ouadraogo (2019), it was found that personal trust did not have a significant impact on knowledge sharing, whereas professional trust did. However, it is also stated that personal trust has a significant impact on professional trust, thus making professional trust a mediator of the relationship between personal trust and knowledge sharing.

Explicit and tacit knowledge are two different forms that knowledge can be presented in. Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that can be easily communicated, documented, and transferred between individuals. It is formally presented and well documented and can be stored and revisited (Huang et al., 2011; Schoenherr et al., 2014). Tacit knowledge is described as more implicit, derived from experience and is subjective, and often based on actions and behavior making it very ambiguous. Compared to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is harder to transfer as it is often a result from learning by doing and sharing experiences over time. Explicit knowledge can more easily be shared as it can be codified, written down and distributed whereas tacit knowledge is more difficult to share as it is embodied in actions and routines (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019). Schoenherr et al (2014) further state that explicit knowledge is connected to more formal interactions and communication while tacit knowledge is connected and generated within collaborative relationships.

2.3 Virtual Work Setting

Trust is described as a key element not only in the physical workplace but also in virtual communities when sharing knowledge (Ardichvili, 2008; Chiu et al., 2006). Professional virtual communities view the willingness of individuals to share knowledge as a significant concern, and trust is considered a critical factor in facilitating knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a comprehensive framework of trust for knowledge sharing in professional virtual community environments (Hsu et al., 2007). To establish interpersonal knowledge-based trust in virtual work teams, Ardichivili (2008) recommends combining online community interactions with teleconferences and some in-person meetings. Further, the author describes the role of the institutional trust theory that suggests that individuals may participate in a community mainly composed of strangers if they have trust in the integrity and policies of the organization as a whole. Ardichivili (2008) suggests that to foster this type of trust, organizations should make their expectations and procedures transparent through clear and widely accessible communication. This can be done by establishing and communicating a set of institutional norms that promote institution-based trust. These norms should indicate that knowledge sharing is an organizational expectation and a moral responsibility for all employees and that the organization trusts their loyalty, competency, and ethical standards (Ardichvili, 2008).

Jawadi et al. (2013) argue that despite earlier findings, leadership that takes place virtually should not only be focusing on task-related activities but also on social activities. Leaders should pay attention to social activities to motivate and enhance the participation of the employees and reach effective task success. There is a need for leaders to express empathy and show concern for their employees to reach high-quality exchanges (Jawadi et al., 2013). Further, the authors state that relationship-building practices in virtual teams need to be reconsidered and that team members' feelings need to be taken into consideration. By encouraging the employees to express their opinions, pay attention to their different needs, and try to reach a consensus amongst team members, leaders can more easily foster and maintain trust in virtual teams. The social context of virtual teams should be considered as it enables leaders to create teams that are cohesive with a shared social context (Jawadi et al., 2013).

When covid-19 spread across the world, organizations and their employees needed to quickly adjust to new restrictions and recommendations to stop the spread of the virus. This led to a

sudden shift, from working in an office to working from home (Bolisani et al., 2020; Tønnessen et al., 2021). Researchers have studied how working from home during the pandemic has affected knowledge sharing and performance (Bolisani et al., 2020; Tønnessen et al., 2021). Tønnessen et al. (2021) studied how internal and external digital knowledge sharing and creative performance were affected when working from home during the pandemic. The authors found that digital knowledge sharing was a significant predictor of creative performance. Working from home can affect how colleagues interact and impact knowledge sharing and management (Bolisani et al., 2020). The authors state that managers must recognize the benefits of working from home, but these should not be assumed, as working primarily or solely from home can impede the ability of employees to exchange knowledge with their colleagues, leading to reduced productivity. Furthermore, a constant online connection can lead to stress and decreased productivity and interpersonal relationships. Businesses should be aware of these potential negative effects and implement measures to mitigate them. Bolisani et al. (2021) present in their result a balanced distribution of how respondents viewed their new working conditions. One-third of the respondents considered the situation of working from home normal, one-third more challenging, and one-third less challenging. Further, the authors state that overall, the results indicate a polarized experience of working from home with two extremes, those strongly for and those strongly against.

2.4 Physical Work Setting

Christensen & Pedersen (2018) found that physical proximity significantly promotes knowledge sharing among individuals. Physical proximity can have direct and indirect effects on knowledge sharing, specifically by promoting spontaneous interactions and face-to-face communication, and by fostering strong relationships. Furthermore, their research shows a correlation between proximity and relationship-strength, as people located close are more likely to form strong connections. As a result, colleagues with close relationships will share knowledge more frequently. Proximity fosters knowledge sharing by forming strong social relationships, leading to high levels of trust and a reduction of social costs. (Holdt Christensen & Pedersen, 2018).

When identifying barriers to knowledge sharing Reige (2005) presents three main levels at which they can occur. First, at an individual level, barriers include lack of time, lack of contact time, and poor communication skills. Second, the organizational level barrier includes

limited formal and informal spaces to share, the physical work environment, and limited infrastructure that supports sharing. The third level is technology, where barriers include lack of integration with IT and work processes, reluctance to use new technology, and lack of technical support (Riege, 2005). To overcome these barriers researchers have identified actions that can be employed. Reige (2007) compiled a list highlighting some of these actions. To overcome the lack of time, managers can allocate time every week to facilitate sharing initiatives. Lack of contact time can be overcome by supporting face-to-face meetings and creating a superior physical and virtual environment that supports knowledge sharing. Poor communication skills can be overcome by providing feedback processes and supporting open communication flows. Overcoming organizational barriers such as the ones mentioned above can be done by providing and supporting formal and informal meeting spaces, designing work areas that assist in timely knowledge sharing, and allocating resources that support communication and collaboration. To overcome technological barriers, actions such as integrating IT systems that are suitable for the way the employees work, providing time and resources that allow employees to learn and familiarize themselves, and providing external and internal support services (Riege, 2007).

2.5 Hybrid Work Setting

With the global outbreak, an increased need for digital technologies has emerged to facilitate knowledge creation, distribution, and sharing (Deng et al., 2023). The authors found that the use of digital technologies enhances communication and coordination among individuals based on their knowledge, needs, and information-sharing requirements, ultimately leading to effective knowledge sharing and decision-making. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to facilitate the sharing and use of knowledge through digital technologies, especially in the current distributed working environment (Deng et al., 2023).

In the context of post-covid, working both from home and in the office has become a more common way leading to a hybrid setting (da Silva et al., 2022). Allen et al state that the absence of regular face-to-face interactions with colleagues can significantly impact the dynamics of interpersonal processes in the workplace. Further, organizational resources and knowledge are shared through relationship networks. The authors argue that this shift from a physical to a virtual workplace can have profound effects on communication, relationships between colleagues, and knowledge sharing. Workplace relationships are stated by Allen et al (2015) to be impacted by the frequency employees work virtually or in the office, and that the

higher amount spent working virtually the higher the impact on workplace relationships. Further, the authors state that organizations that offer the ability to work virtually must have support systems for it to effectively work. Organizational digital workplace strategy is important for creating an effective digital workplace and entails adapting the culture to this form of working and is suitable for facilitating collaboration and flexible work (Williams & Schubert, 2018). The authors convey a key element that needs to be considered when developing a digital workplace strategy, the negative effects that occur with limited face-to-face interactions can be mitigated by using versatile communication tools and technologies. Further, the strategies need to be agile and adaptable to meet future needs, requirements, and technologies so that employees can effectively conduct their work individually and in collaboration with others. The hybrid work setting has been found to better facilitate the work-life balance demands as it gives the flexibility to balance the job role with family and responsibilities and activities (Morganson et al., 2010). The authors further describe that the hybrid work setting can have inherent barriers to creating workplace inclusion. They state that employees can feel excluded and isolated as they miss out on informal and formal opportunities when they are not physically in the office. The authors found that employees who work only in an office have higher levels of workplace inclusion compared to those who work in a hybrid or virtual work setting.

2.6 Digital Work & Communication

The digital workplace is becoming more and more common, and this work model allows employees to be more flexible in where and when they work. If the digital work is effectively planned, communicated, and properly implemented it can lead to significant advantages and cost savings (Attaran et al., 2019). Further, the authors state that flexibility in planning the workday increases employee's moral and it has positive impact on their health. The digital work model increases employee's autonomy as they can choose work location and working hours more independently, increasing both productivity and engagement (Attaran et al., 2019). The digital workplaces and virtual teams are characterized by the lack of or limitation of face-to-face interactions (Jawadi et al., 2013). As face-to-face interactions are not the commonly used communication media, it poses some limitations for employees as the absence of auditory and visual cues and back and forth communication can lead to issues regarding sharing ideas, taking decisions, and coordinating work (Abrams et al., 2003; Dennis et al., 2008; Gajendran et al., 2022). Further, Darics (2020) argues that this limitation

creates challenges for interpreting and understanding emotions and feelings in digital communication. More frequent interaction is a key factor for creating trust among employees as it allows for a deeper understanding of a person's behavior and competences (Abrams et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2011). It has been found that for effective digital communication to function in an organization, frequency is more important than the choice if media used to communicate (Morgan et al., 2014).

Digital technologies and communications are becoming more relevant in today's organizational environment and play a crucial role in facilitating the connection between employees in an organization (Deng et al., 2023). Digital technologies such as zoom, Microsoft Teams, and online resources and tools have the capability to enhance coordination and communication which can foster knowledge sharing. However, Deng et al (2023) state that this capability is not guaranteed as individuals can be constrained by digital technology and create complex interactions between employees. The authors found that digital technology enhanced coordination and communication between employees which positively affected knowledge sharing as. Digital technology such as email and chat facilitate collaboration among employees as external and internal communication is enhanced Deng et al (2023) argue that this improved communication can lead to increased knowledge sharing.

Dennis et al (2008) developed an extended version of the media synchronicity theory, where they argue that communication is composed of two primary processes: conveyance and convergence. The theory suggests that the choice of communication media depends on the complexity of the work task and the need for rich information. Highly complex tasks that require a lot of information and interactions are best suited for face-to-face interactions which allows for immediate feedback and richer communication. Further, less complex tasks can be handled using fewer rich media such as email or other computer-mediating communication (Dennis et al., 2008). The conveyance process concerns the element of sharing new and relevant information so the receiver can understand the situation or task and create a mental model of it. Participating in conveyance entails engaging in substantial information processing where large and diverse sets of information can be exchanged, which requires time to analyze the information and create a mental picture. The convergence process involves discussing and interpreting the already shared and processed information. The main goal is to reach a shared understanding of the meaning of the information which often requires back-and-forth communication. Convergence requires less information processing compared to conveyance as it focuses on verifying and adjusting the existing understanding

of the situation or task. Dennis et al (2008) argue that there are two key implications entailing that most tasks require both conveyance and convergence processes but state that the amount and duration of these processes are very dependent on the task and individuals involved. If information is not effectively conveyed, incorrect conclusions might be drawn, similarly, if a shared understanding can't be reached, individuals can't proceed as they lack common ground (Dennis et al., 2008).

Synchronous communication is described as when individuals communicate at the same time e.g., face-to-face or video conferences, and asynchronous communication is described as communication between individuals that does not occur at the same time e.g., email. Media synchronicity is defined as *"the extent to which the capabilities of a communication medium enable individuals to achieve synchronicity"* (Dennis et al., 2008, p.581). The authors argue that convergence processes have a greater need for synchronous communication while conveyance processes do not have the same need. Further, the authors describe that media synchronicity contains five media capabilities: transmission velocity (the speed a message can reach the recipient. symbol sets (social cues, body language, and vocal tones), parallelism (simultaneous transmissions), rehearsability (how the media allows for fine-tuning and rehearsing before transmitting the information) and processability (the ability to reexamine and process the information again). High transmission and symbol sets are often connected to high synchronicity while parallelism, rehearsability and processability are usually connected with low synchronicity.

Dennis et al (2008) argue that familiarity with the task, media, and individual play a critical role in the importance of conveyance and convergence. Familiar communication context means individuals who have experience with working together thus have developed roles and norms. Meaning that the convergence process will take less time as they can reach an understanding and same mental picture faster. Novel communication context means individuals who as no prior experience working together, requiring a longer convergence process as they need to develop a shared understanding and mental picture. The authors state that individuals who collaborate that have well established norms reduces the necessity for high synchronous media while individuals who collaborate without established norms increases the need for high synchronous media.

Several researchers have used the media synchronicity theory that Dennis et al (2008) developed, to investigate communication, social exchange, and performance in an

organizational context. Parlamis & Dibble (2019) investigated whether teams using several communication modes performed better than those who only used one mode. The authors found no difference in achieved goals between the teams which contradicts the media synchronicity theory. However, they found that face-to-face interactions are dominant and could lead employees to not use other media such as chat or mail. It is suggested that since face-to-face communication tends to be dominant, complex tasks require more awareness for communication processes and a need for organizations to use the right media for convergence and conveying processes (Parlamis & Dibble, 2019). Torro et al (2022) explored in their study how media synchronicity facilitates trust in technology mediating interactions. The authors found that high synchronicity allows for a more effective way of building trust as social cues and back-and-forth interactions are more present. Gajendran et al (2022) studied how text-based communication impacts complex reasoning and performance and found that this way of communicating makes it more difficult for employees to have an effective convergence process as compared to face-to-face communication. Further, the result showed that motivation maintenance, the way an employee continues to invest time and energy in their work, and performance on complex issues were reduced.

3.0 Method

In this section, a detailed description of the research design and methodology is made. A description of the choices and considerations made during the research process will be presented as well as the research strategy. design, data collection, data analysis, research quality, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Strategy

When studying a social phenomenon, the research method chosen should help the researcher to answer the research question. A problem driven research methodology means that theories are the outcome of a researched phenomenon, whereas a method driven approach is when theory is generated first subsequently searching for a phenomenon where the theory can be applied (Bell et al., 2019). This study adopts a problem driven research methodology to address the research question. In this study, a qualitative research strategy is applied, and an abductive approach is used.

As Bell et al. (2019) state, using a qualitative research strategy is appropriate when the goal of the study is to understand a phenomenon from the respondent's perspective, as it allows the researcher to see their reality and how they experience and interpret it. Furthermore, the qualitative method allows the exploration of in-depth and rich data collection and offers flexibility in the research design and data collection (Bell et al., 2019). Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research captures and uncovers the respondent's perceptions, feelings, and thoughts, and provides for more nuanced answers. This is why the qualitative approach is a good fit for this study which aims to capture the respondents' experiences regarding hybrid work setting to answer this study´s research question.

This study has used earlier literature regarding trust and knowledge sharing in organizations as the main theoretical approach for creating an understanding of the field. Due to the pandemic, new conditions for employees have occurred and the work environment has changed. Literature is lacking in this area as the post covid context has accelerated the adaptation of the hybrid work setting, creating a gap for theoretical and empirical insights. This study, therefore, adopts an abductive approach which allows for an open mind about the phenomena hybrid work but use existing literature, going back and forth between the data and the literature. The focus of this study is to understand how employees are experiencing

the hybrid work setting and how this can have an impact on trust and knowledge sharing. With this aim, an inductive approach is suitable. The abductive approach is an interpretative approach that involves the processes of moving between the empirical phenomenon and theory (Bell et al., 2019). This study has relied upon earlier literature on trust and knowledge sharing as the main theoretical framework, but the hybrid work setting in the Swedish context has limitation in theoretical literature and empirical insight, hence an abductive approach is best fitted in this study.

3.2 Research Design

This study is a case study with a focus on employees who have adopted the hybrid work setting after the pandemic. The case is limited to the greater area of Gothenburg, focusing on employees in three different industries. This case study allows for investigating potential differences between the different cases in their corresponding industries. As the hybrid work setting is becoming the new normal, seeking an understanding of how it can impact trust and knowledge sharing is important. The case study had a specific focus on three different industries to spread the respondents which allowed for investigating potential differences and give insight if there are general and similar effects that this work model entails across several employees or specific related effects to different industries. The analysis of a case study can be within-case or cross-case. Within-case analysis entails searching for unique patterns in each case while cross-case entails searching for patterns between the cases. This study has chosen the dimension of industries to allow for a cross-case analysis to be made.

A case study is a research design that undertakes a deeper investigation, focusing on a specific setting or situation (Bell et al., 2019). Further, the authors state that "a case is an object of interest in its own right" where a researcher aims to explain the case in a deeper context. Each person in this case study represents a single case and focuses on their specific experience with working in the hybrid work setting. A case study is beneficial when investigating a phenomenon as it provides a rich and detailed picture, providing deep insights (Bell et al., 2019).

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3.3 Data Collection

The selection of cases and respondents in this study was based on several criteria that needed to be fulfilled. The first step was to identify employees who work in the greater area of Gothenburg, Sweden. Three industries were investigated in this study: automotive, retail, and infrastructure. The respondent had to have worked entirely at the office before the pandemic, allowing for an understanding of the hybrid work in a post covid context. Secondly, the respondent needed to at least work from home one day a week.

In this study, the respondents have been purposefully selected to meet specific criteria. Bell et al. (2019) state that purposeful selection takes place when the respondents are chosen to satisfy certain criteria in relation to the aim of the study. This ensures that the respondents are relevant to the research question and that the collected data will be useful in the study. Bell et al. (2019) argues that most qualitative research entails some sort of purposive sampling. The respondents in this study were chosen on their likely/probable ability to contribute to a theoretical understanding.

Table.1 *Overview of participating respondents*

Name	Department	Industry	Date	Length	Interview type
R1	IT	Automotive	13-04-2023	47 min	Video call
R2	IT	Automotive	11-04-2023	40 min	Video call
R3	Economy	Automotive	08-05-2023	40 min	Video call
R4	Economy	Automotive	17-04-2023	31 min	In-person
R5	Economy	Infrastructure	05-04-2023	58 min	Video call
R6	People and Culture	Infrastructure	13-04-2023	35 min	Video call
R7	IT	Infrastructure	20-04-2023	33 min	Video call
R8	Purchasing	Retail	21-04-2023	44 min	Video call
R9	People and Culture	Retail	16-04-2023	43 min	Video call
R10	Purchasing	Retail	03-04-2023	36 min	In-person

The method used in this study to collect data was semi-structured interviews. This data collection method was used to reach a deeper understanding of how the respondents are experiencing hybrid work and how this affects trust and knowledge sharing. Using this method aligns with a qualitative research strategy. Bell et al. (2019) describes that conducting semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to receive more in-depth answers and that it allows for a more flexible collection of data as interview questions can be changed or added. Further, the author states that this method gives the respondents room to elaborate and express themselves in connection to the phenomenon that is being studied. During the semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was used. The guide was developed by the researcher and used during all the interviews. Using an interview guide will help the researcher to ask questions that are relevant to the purpose of the study and still leave room for the respondent to answer freely (Bell et al., 2019). The guides ensure that the respondents answer the same fundamental questions that are relevant to the study allowing for some consistency. The interview guide was based on previous research and literature. A pilot interview was conducted to test the quality of the questions, the relevance, and the general understandability of them. Some questions were altered after feedback from the respondent.

As the study focuses on employees who work both from home and in the office, they were given the choice to participate in the interview either physically or virtually. The respondents were informed before the interview that it would be recorded and were given a consent form to sign. Before the interview, I introduced myself and briefed them on what the study was about in general terms.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data in this study was first recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. This allowed for high-quality and deep analysis of the material. Notes were taken during the interviews to highlight and capture important elements in the interview. By recording and transcribing the interviews, the limitation of memory can be overcome. Full attention can be on the respondent, creating a connected and deeper conversation (Bell et al., 2019)

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the empirical data as it allowed for the emergence of patterns and themes. Amy et al state that qualitative research requires a different approach for analyzing the data compared to quantitative research. Since qualitative data is visual and

textual, not numeric, it is often analyzed by coding and searching for themes or patterns (Donley, 2012). Supported by Bell et al. (2019) who state that qualitative research can be analyzed with a thematic analysis, entailing searching for reoccurring patterns in the respondents' answers leading to emerging themes. The first step was to generate codes that were closely related to the data. Familiarization with the data was achieved through listening to the interviews again and re-reading the transcribed text before starting the initial coding process. All the interviews recorded were transcribed within 48 hours. The second step was to review the codes and search for themes that had emerged from the data. Three main themes were established in relation to the research question. In table 2 an example of how the thematic analysis was conducted is presented.

Table.2 Examples of coding

Illustrative quote	Code	Sub-theme	Main theme
"When I work from home chatting about random stuff doesn't happen, like when I am at the office, and I meet people at lunch or when grabbing a coffee" R5	No naturally occurring conversation	Informal and spontaneous communication	Communication
"Everyone does not have their camera on, and I feel it makes it difficult to connect" – R9	Difficult to connect online	Digital communication	Communication
"I think it is important to have fun outside of the office, not just work all the time" – R2	Connecting with people outside of work	Building and maintaining relationships	Work relations
"I think it is very important to meet to solve issues or problems and discuss a way forward" – R1	Engaging in problem-solving	Collaboration	Work relations
"Since we don't have to be at the office at the same time it could mean that I don't meet certain colleagues which I feel is a bit sad" R6	Missing the opportunity to see colleagues	Strategies and work structure	Work culture
"There are many who are not active in meetings and are doing something else instead during the meeting" R4	Uncertainty of engagement in meetings		Work culture

3.5 Research Quality

By choosing a qualitative research strategy, limitations regarding validity and reliability arise automatically. Bell et al (2019) state that reliability, replicability, and validity are the criteria most common in business research. However, in a qualitative study there are limitations when applying these criteria as they focus on measurement, which is not as applicable in qualitative research. It can be stated that reliability, replicability, and validity in this study is hard to measure and achieve as it is an unstructured process of collecting data and conducting analysis. When analyzing the data, it is difficult to completely approach it with an objective mind. Bell et al. (2019) state that qualitative data and its analysis are impossible without some subjectivity from the researcher. Instead, qualitative research can be evaluated by two other criteria, trustworthiness, and authenticity (Bell et al., 2019).

3.5.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness contains four criteria that are equivalent to the criteria in quantitative research: credibility equivalent to internal validity, transferability equivalent to external validity, dependability equivalent to reliability, and confirmability equivalent to objectivity (Bell et al., 2019).

Credibility refers to ensuring that the study is conducted in good practice and that the researchers have correctly interpreted the data collected from the respondents (Bell et al., 2019). This is often referred to as respondent validation and entails allowing the participants to corroborate on the findings or sharing the quotes intended to be used in the study. In this study the respondents were sent their corresponding quotes from their interviews to ensure that the quotes used were accepted and that the respondents consent to using the quotes in the study. The respondents were also asked if follow up questions or unclarity regarding the interview data could be later asked about in email.

Transferability refers to how well a study can be applied in a different context, and as qualitative research focus on depth rather than breadth, it tends to be directed to contextual uniqueness (Bell et al., 2019). The focus in qualitative research should be on achieving thick description, meaning collecting rich and detailed data of the culture. This research investigates three industries which could lead to less rich and detailed collection of the culture as there is variety in the respondents work setting and structure and design of the hybrid work setting. However, the spread of the respondents in the three different industries

could enhance the likelihood of capturing various perspectives and contextual nuances that lead to a higher transferability for the investigated phenomena the hybrid work setting.

Dependability can be enhanced by ensuring that complete records of all processes are kept described in the research, and that peers can audit the processes and records (Bell et al., 2019). In this study, increased dependability has been achieved by clearly describing the interview process and data analysis. Further, the thesis has been peer-reviewed during the course of the project by supervisors and other master students, to ensure that the processes are correctly conducted and understood.

Confirmability refers to the insurance of objectivity, but as this is impossible in a qualitative study, it is focused on acting in good faith, meaning that it should not be apparent that the researcher has allowed personal values or theoretical biases to influence the research process or its findings (Bell et al., 2019). Auditors can establish confirmability, and as previously stated, peer-reviews have been conducted during the process by supervisors and master students. However, Bell et al (2019) argue that complete objectivity is impossible to reach in qualitative research and should be considered and reflected upon so that the researchers' biases are minimized in the analysis.

3.5.2 Authenticity

Authenticity concerns the wider perspective the impact of the research has on social and political issues (Bell et al., 2019). It highlights the responsibility a researcher must accurately represent multiple perspectives and viewpoints within a social setting, enabling respondents to reach a greater understanding of their situation and encourage them to change. In this study different perspectives and viewpoints have been represented as respondents are from different organizations and industries, as well as different roles. Further, the interview guide was semi-structured which allowed the respondents to elaborate and discuss their reality in a freer way, thus enhancing their ability to convey their perspectives and viewpoints.

3.5.3 Ethical Consideration

Bell et al (2019) state that there are four ethical principles that should be takin into consideration and ensured that they are minimized and are not transgressed. The four principles are harm to participant, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and finally, deception. In this study, the principle of harm and informed consent have been ensured by allowing for anonymity so that the respondents cannot be identified. Further, a consent form

was signed by all the respondents to ensure that they had the correct information about the study's intention and their participation.

In qualitative research there is a principle of risk to subjects and that the information gathered should not be disclosed, and confidentiality for the respondent's personal information is ensured (Donley, 2012). In this study, a consent form was sent out to the respondents containing information about the study, handling of personal information, processes of analysis and presenting of the result and final thesis (see appendix 2). It is stated in the consent form that participation is voluntary, and that participation will be anonymous, recording of the interview will be made, handling of collected material will be limited to the researcher, and that all material will be erased after the conclusion of the project. The respondent signed the consent form before the interviews. Informed consent is described by Donley (2012) to include consent to participation, information about the study, why it is conducted, expectation from participants, and risk and benefits.

4.0 Findings

In this section, the empirical data, and main findings from the interviews with employees are presented and described. The first part shortly describes the respondent's work environment and provides a background for the reader. The following section is structured into three parts, communication, work relations, and work culture. These are the main themes derived from thematic analysis. Quotes are presented in the result to highlight the respondents experience and to present their perspective more accurately.

Table.3 *Overview of the main themes and sub themes*

Main themes	Communication	Work relations	Work culture
Sub-themes	Informal and spontaneous communication Digital communication	Building and maintaining relationships Collaborations	Strategies and work structure

4.1 Understanding the hybrid work setting and work tools

Due to the pandemic, the respondents' work setting has changed. None of them have worked in a hybrid work setting before and are new to this way of working. The respondents state that they work from home approximately two to three days a week. The majority of the respondents do not have specific days where they must be physically in the office. All organizations have a guideline on how many days, or percentage, an employee can work from home. However, the majority of the respondents state that these guidelines are a more general official statement and that they and their colleagues can be more flexible. It is further stated that the teams they work in can set their own guidelines so that they can fit their team best. The respondents' team members are stated to be offered the same possibility to work from home and can individually choose if they want to work more from the office or from home.

Work is conducted both from home and at the office and the communication and collaboration between their co-workers are a combination of physical and digital media. They are reliant on digital tools both when in the office and at home to work both individually and to communicate and collaborate with their colleagues. They use digital tools to communicate

such as online video meetings, chat functions, shared documents, and email. Everyone describes that digital tools are a vital part of their everyday work and that they are a crucial element in their ability to conduct their work.

4.2 Communication

In the interviews communication was a reoccurring theme among all the respondents. They describe that the transition from physical to digital communication has worked well but that the context in where and how they communicate has changed. Both positive and negative aspects are expressed by the respondents. Flexibility and efficiency were expressed as positive effects of the hybrid work and informal communication, reading body language, interpreting a written text, and understanding context was expressed as the negative effects.

4.2.1 Informal & Spontaneous Communication

All the respondents expressed a lack of spontaneous conversations with their colleagues when working from home. They describe that personal conversations are not naturally occurring when you communicate online to the same extent as when you communicate face-to-face in the office. Spontaneous conversation is described as the interactions that occur when you walk by your colleague or when you talk in the break room and concern both personal and professional topics. Further, they all explain that the conversations online are more concerned with work and that they usually communicate with their co-workers when they have it scheduled in their calendars.

R10 described the experience of communicating online versus communicating face to face as below.

> *"In online meetings or short check-ups, you don't really have time for asking how their weekend was. They are more focused on work-related issues" – R10*

R5 described a similar experience to the difference, shown in the quote below.

> *" You don't have the same kind of conversation in an online meeting as when you grab a coffee with colleagues or have lunch together. You miss out on this natural way of communicating." – R5*

R6, R7, and R8 expressed that they feel as though they are disturbing their co-workers if they call unannounced. When they are working from home and do not know what their co-workers are doing, they feel that they might interrupt their co-workers, making the respondents less inclined to call unannounced. R8 described the experience as below:

"For me to call my colleague I need to have a specific question. I can't just call and disturb them; I must really want something from them to call them." – R8

A similar experience is described by R6 who feel that they must have a reason to call and that they do not want to disturb their colleagues unless it is something important. The respondent also states that they do not call or text their colleagues to ask about general or personal things just to strike up a conversation. This is described in the quote below:

"I would never call someone on teams just to talk about their day or random stuff, I feel that I have to have a purpose to call someone when I work from home. In the office is it more natural because you bump into your colleagues every now and then." – R6

Even though all the respondents expressed a lack of spontaneous communication, R1, R2, R7 & R8 also describe that when they communicate online the conversations are often more concise and that their co-workers are prepared before, they have their materials or questions ready to be presented. This leads to a more efficient way of communicating and unnecessary or irrelevant topics are avoided. Further, all the respondents describe that when they work from home they can concentrate better because they do not get disturbed by their co-workers to the same extent. They explain that in the office they can get disturbed by a co-worker that drops by their office to ask a question or to make conversations. R8 described it as this:

"You sit at your desk and are focused and then a co-worker walks by and asks you something and then you lost your focus." R7

R2 expressed that before the pandemic when he/she was always in the office, they didn't plan their days that much. Now in a hybrid work setting he/she describes that if they have two days that they are in the office, he/she will plan it better and have an agenda to get tasks done and to talk to specific people.

"Before you would just come into the office every day and do your work but now when I go to the office, I have a clearer idea of what needs to get done and who I need to talk to. I know I am going to get disturbed by someone, so I don't schedule any important meetings when I am at the office, instead, I try to solve problems and talk to the right people." R2

The findings show that the difference in communication in the office and online has affected the respondents' approach to knowledge sharing. As spontaneous communication, body language and social cues occur less in the online setting, the respondents discuss the challenges of conveying and receiving information and ideas in a nuanced way. It is expressed by the respondents that all information can be shared in the office as well as online but that the latter limits the exchange of creativity and ideation.

The majority of the respondents state that when working from home it is more difficult to quickly get a hold of a colleague. One challenge mentioned by the respondents was the struggle to ask for information or a question online. They state that in the office you can swing by a colleague's office and quickly get an answer and ask follow-up questions, but that working from home limits this kind of interaction, making it harder to get information fast. R1 and R2 experienced this in some cases but also state that they often can write in a chat with a colleague and get a quick response. R1 however states that you can get quick information in a chat but that it doesn't allow for the same depth as when speaking to the person.

"When you chat with someone you don't get the same depth, it is often that you feel like 'ok, I can't ask anymore' and just write ok I got it." -R1

4.2.2 Digital Communication

The majority of the respondents expressed that it is more difficult to understand intonation in written text. Experiences of misunderstandings when communicating in mail or chat were recurrent in the respondents' answers. It is stated that when they use written language, they need to be more aware of who the respondent of the text is and how it may be interpreted from their side. The misunderstandings are connected to how the recipient of the message perceives the intonation, if is aggressive or harsh, or friendly and soft. Further, the respondents describe that everyone has their own way of communicating in text, such as being more informal by using emojis for example or they use a more formal language. If a

colleague is used to communicating in a more informal or formal way and the respondents are used to the opposite, misunderstandings are more common. All the respondents agree that if you know the recipient of the text well, it is less likely that a misunderstanding will occur as they are familiar with how the respondents communicate both face-to-face and online.

R1 describes their experience with the written text between colleagues as stated below:

> *"If a person uses swearwords or a more aggressive way but with a fun or kind undertone when talking to someone and then switches to written text using the same way of communicating, people can take offense or feel uncomfortable as they can't hear and understand the subtext of it." – R1*

R2 describes the difference between communicating with their closest colleagues and with people they haven't worked with as much before as stated below:

> *"I am a person who uses a very informal way of writing with my close colleagues but when I write to people I don't usually speak to, it is more difficult to read them. Do they not want to do the job because they didn't answer with thank you? It can be difficult to sometimes understand how they received the message or for me to understand them" – R2*

All the respondents expressed how the lack of body language negatively affected how well they can communicate with their colleagues. Both in calls and in text the respondents stress that the inability to see the other person creates a barrier between them and the recipient. By not seeing the person, communication with misunderstandings is more prominent in these conversations. It is stated that social cues such as body language and expressions are important when communicating with colleagues as it helps create an understanding of how a message is delivered. Since it is not possible to see how the recipient of the message reacts it becomes a challenge to understand and respond to the reaction. R10 describes their experience between communicating online versus face-to-face in relation to the response and reaction from the recipient:

> *"It was much easier to talk face-to-face as I didn't feel safe or comfortable with how the message was going to be received. I needed to see their face in order to understand exactly how they received the information."- R10*

The majority of the respondents also state that digital communication and the lack of social cues make it difficult to know how their colleagues are feeling. They believe that it is very

limiting to communicate online when it comes to understanding their colleague's well-being and that it is easier to see in person how their colleagues are feeling both negative and positive emotions. R9 describes the lack of body language in connection to colleagues' well-being stated in the quote below:

> *"I believe that my relationships have been affected in a negative way because you don't see the body language or the personality behind in texts, and that makes it difficult to understand if your colleague is feeling down or just in general how they are feeling." R9*

When asked about how a hybrid work setting has affected their relationships with their colleagues, R1 and R9 state that their relationship with their closest colleagues has become better when working in a hybrid setting. They state that it is easier to communicate more often as they can chat with them online and don't have to walk to their office or wait for the lunch break. R1 describes it as following:

> *"With a small group of colleagues, I have a more personal relationship and a feel that it has developed better in a hybrid setting. Earlier I had to wait for them to finish a meeting to go and grab a coffee but now we have a private chat channel where we can write about everything anytime." – R1*

Further, R5 and R8 respondents have experienced the opposite effect in their relationship with their colleagues. They describe that the hybrid work setting has led to weaker relationships because they do not connect with them as much as they did when they were in the office. They state that spontaneous conversations occur less in a hybrid work setting and, when they are in the office less, they don't always have the time or opportunity to engage in these types of conversations. It is also stated that even though they come to the office, their colleagues are not always there. R5 describes the experience as stated below:

> *"It feels like I have lost the closeness to my colleagues, I don't feel the same team spirit as I did before. When I am at the office for maybe one or two days, I need to do certain things and I don't always prioritize grabbing that coffee." – R5*

Some respondents state that the hybrid work setting has led to more thorough documentation of tasks and work processes. They state that this has made it easier to share certain

information that contains more detailed or precise instructions with more people. Written information is also saved and can be referred back to, making it easier for multiple people to read and understand the information at any time. Further, R1 explains that written information in some situations is preferred as it allows taking in the information at the individual's own pace, and the chance to revisit the information if necessary. The experience is described as following:

> *"It is always good with written information because you can always go back and look again, but in meetings, if someone speaks really fast you can't reflect but with written text, you can take it at your own pace." R1*

All the respondents discuss how different information and problems are more fitting in one setting. Information that can be easily understood, such as instructions, policies, or basic 'how to' questions is stated to be equally easy to convey online as in the office. This type of information is stated to not require as much effort since follow-up questions and discussions are usually not needed for understanding it. However, the majority of the respondents state that they have experienced problem-solving and idea creation are more likely to occur in the office when meeting colleagues physically. The respondents describe that when they are in the office and are speaking with colleagues, they receive more impressions and nuances compared to online, expressing that these are factors that affect creativity. R10 describes the situation as following:

> *"I feel that the creativity is a bit lost when we are not in the office, you don't see the nuances in the same way, it is the little things you know." R10*

R4, R5, R6, R7, and R9 discussed that creativity in the team or organization is less or non-existent when working from home. They state that to create these back-and-forth discussions or spontaneous questions that lead to an idea, they must be in the office for this to occur.

R1 describes that there are situations where R1 has felt that meeting a colleague physically allows for a more efficient way of communicating as the use of body language and social cues are possible. Further, the tools used are simpler in the office, such as a whiteboard or pen and paper, and this simplicity enables a quicker exchange of information, problems, and ideas. The respondent describes the situation as following:

> *"Sometimes it feels that using pen and paper and three persons can solve a problem quicker than you writing documents and switching between fifteen*

different [digital] tools just to draw a symbol that doesn't exist in all the tools." – R1

All the respondents discuss how more explicit knowledge can be conveyed online as well as in the office, but that the main challenge is time. They state that when explaining or instructing a colleague online it requires more time and effort. Both in writing and in video calls have been experienced. R1 discussed how writing information is more time-consuming and requires a more thorough approach as R1 has limited information of the receiver's basic and earlier knowledge.

> *"One problem is that you write long novels because you expect that everyone starts from scratch but maybe just one sentence would be enough… …you have to add so much more background information, so you end up with half a novel." – Respondent 3*

Further R1 stated that sending written information doesn't allow for seeing if the receiver understood the information and often feels the need to explain more to be confident that the information is understood.

> *"You can't see on the body language if the person understood so you just think 'well shit, I will write this whole thing' and it is often unnecessary information." – R1*

R3 state that as some information or explanation is preferred to transmit in the office as it allows for a more nuanced way of speaking and can take short time to convey compared to doing it digitally:

> *"I have experienced that I wait to explain or show something until I am at the office because it would take too long online, and it is just easier to do it at the office then instead." R3*

4.3 Work relations

4.3.1 Building and maintaining relationships

The majority of respondents have experienced a change in their relationships with their colleagues. Both positive and negative experiences have been expressed in relation to building and maintaining relationships with their colleagues. As a result of the hybrid work setting the respondents do not interact with their colleagues physically in the office more than two to three times a week. The findings highlight that the lack of this interaction in the office has led to less personal communication between colleagues for most of the respondents.

Most of the respondent state that the relationships they had with colleagues before they started to work in a hybrid setting are easier to maintain. They explained that their relationships with their closest colleagues have been built up over time. That they have connected with them, both professionally and personally, and created an understanding of who the person is and how they act and behave. They feel more confident in their relationship with those colleagues and state that because of this, it is not as challenging to maintain the relationship even though they do not see them every day in the office. R9 describes the experience as following:

> *"I feel that since I have a good relationship with my closest colleagues when we started to work in this hybrid way, I still feel that we have the same connection." R9*

The findings also show that the respondents feel more comfortable communicating with colleagues they have met physically in the office. R1 and R2 describe that they create better connections with colleagues when they meet them at the office. It allows them to get a better impression of the person and can with more ease read the situation and the room. Further, they state that having a personal conversation with someone enhances the relationship, making them more comfortable and relaxed with said person.

Moreover, all the respondents discussed the difference between creating a relationship with someone before the pandemic when they work at the office, and now when they work in a hybrid work setting. R4 and R10 state that it is more difficult to get to know someone when they don't see them that often in the office. Online communication doesn't allow them to form a bond in the same sense as it limits their ability to connect and understand a person. Further, R5, R7, and R8 have experienced that it takes longer to get to know someone in a

hybrid work setting. They explain that even though they believe that it is possible to form the same kind of relationship with someone working hybrid, the process is longer as they don't see the person as often as they would have before when only working in the office. They stress that it is important to physically meet colleagues in and outside the office as it is where they feel they can connect better and create trust. The situation is described by R8 as following:

> *"I think it takes longer time to build this trust when you don't just work in the office but if you work in a place long and work relatively much from the office, you can build up this trust despite working two or three days from home." R8*

Further, R4, R6, and R9 discussed how relationships and trust are affected when new colleagues enter their team. They described that when a colleague quit, and a new team member was introduced, the team dynamic changed. R6 described the situation as following:

> *"My team changed, and a new person joined the team, and I felt then that I had to build up that trust again, not just with the person who is new but also we as a whole team." R6*

Further, R4 states that building relationships and trust with new colleagues takes much more energy and believes it to be more difficult in a hybrid setting. R4 argues that it is crucial to meet physically at the office for this to happen and further states that it is more difficult to include new team members in the team and in the work community as the hybrid work limits how often the team and department are at the office on the same day and time. The experience is described as following:

> *"It is more difficult to build new relationships in this way, it takes more energy or maybe commitment to create a relationship but also to make sure that they are included in the community." R4*

The majority of the respondents state the importance of meeting in real life to form and create a bond with their colleagues. They express the need for informal events, such as having lunch together, grabbing a coffee, and after work where they go out for dinner or drinks. They describe that those events are where they best create stronger relationships because they interact with them in a more personal way. R5 R6, and R8, and R10 state that in order for

them to form a stronger bond with colleagues they want to experience them in a different setting where not everything is concerned or revolved around work.

> *"After an after work I feel that I have gotten a better picture of my colleague and a better understanding of who they are as we don't just talk about work." R8*

4.3.2 Collaborations

The collaborations between colleagues in the same team as well as with other teams and departments have, according to most respondents, changed. They explain that there are both positive and negative aspects that the hybrid works setting has led to. The majority of the respondents expressed that the collaboration with their team members has not been affected in a negative way. They state that the hybrid work setting gives them the opportunity to meet their colleagues in the office and online, increasing their flexibility on how and when they can collaborate. R7 and R8 describe the experience as following:

> *"I feel that we [the team] can easily plan when we should have a meeting to discuss something because we can be at different places and still have these occasions where we talk about a project or upcoming event." R8*

> …

> *"For me, the most positive thing is that we can have like a debrief online where we go through everything that needs to be done, and then we can decide how we should start working on it and we don't have to be in the same room or same place which I feel can be time-consuming sometimes." R7*

However, the majority of the respondents also state that collaborations with other departments have decreased in some respects. The hybrid work setting is described by the majority of respondents to limit their chances of meeting colleagues outside of their team. They discuss how this might not be a direct problem as collaborations that are planned and organized between teams and departments are well managed. However, it is stated that when there is no obvious reason to collaborate or a direct need for it, they rarely find opportunities to interact and create a discussion that can lead to collaboration. R4 and R10 further discuss how collaboration and creativity are created and built between teams and departments, mostly

when they are in the office. R4 described a situation in the office where this had happened and stated that this doesn't occur online as he/she seldom interacts spontaneously with colleagues from different departments.

> *"You know when I talk to someone from another department or team during lunch or at the coffee station, and it can be about anything, sometimes we realize that 'wait a minute, you can help me with this', and we start to talk about it and giving advice or ideas." R4*

R2, R6, and R9 describe that there is a barrier to collaborating with colleagues they do not know that well. It is stated that asking for help or input on a problem is more natural with colleagues they know better and that they prefer to have this exchange with them. R2 further stated that this can also happen the other way around, that if a colleague doesn't know him/her they do not feel comfortable asking for help even though he/she might have the more accurate information to give. The situation is described as following:

> *"If you don't know the person, they might not feel comfortable asking for help, so they ask another colleague instead of writing to me." R2*

Further, R6 describes that the exchange of information when working from home is a more conscious choice. He/she states that receiving or giving information online occurs most often when there is a need.

> *"It is a more conscious choice to share knowledge when you are home. Someone else wants me to know something specific so they call me or send an email." R6*

The findings suggest that the respondents' experiences of time and space affect how and when they exchange knowledge with colleagues. To receive or give information online can be more time-consuming and requires more effort. It is also stated that more explicit knowledge can be exchanged both online and in the office with the same ease, but that more abstract/tacit knowledge is easier to be exchanged in the present.

In situations where a more complex issue or problem is to be discussed, the majority of the respondents prefer to do this physically in the office. Many suggest that workshops or brainstorming sessions are more natural to have in the office as it allows for a bigger group to interact with each other. R5 and R10 argue that when they have meetings online, it is more

difficult to engage with everyone and that it doesn't give the same opportunity to interact and create a conversation that flows easily. R5 described the situation as following:

> *"When we discuss things online, I experience that we don't have the same flow when we talk. In a [physical] meeting we see each and know when we can interrupt or, well more generally it is easier to have these sorts of conversations." R5*

Further, R1, R2, R3, R4 and R8 state that they experience workshops in the office is to be the best place to have information exchanges. They state that in those situations more abstract knowledge can be exchanged as it gives them the opportunity to better explain and understand information that is hard to write down. R1 described how he/she sees the need for a workshop as it allows him/her to learn new things and get another perspective:

> *"I think it is important to meet up and have workshops or something like that. You meet people from the organization, and it is then that new knowledge emerges." R3*

R5, R8 and R9 discuss how they have experienced the process of explaining and instructing colleagues on how to do a specific task, and that they prefer to do so in the office. Online communication limits their ability to point and show with the body, making the process longer as they have to explain it using only their voice. They also state that the tools used for presenting the information can be limited online. R5 described a situation as following:

> *"I sometimes get the feeling of being less competent… Because it is more difficult to show something online as I can't show all my screens, and everything takes longer time online." R5*

4.4 Work culture

When working in a hybrid setting the majority of the respondents mention a change in the work culture as communication, interactions, and work processes are not exactly the same as they were before when they were working solely in the office. The findings show that when the respondents work from home the communication and interactions that they have with their colleagues are mostly work-related. Further, R4, R9, and R10 also discuss that there is less frequent communication and interactions with colleagues from different departments.

It is stated by all the respondents that when they work from home, they have experienced that as they cannot see their colleagues and know what they are doing during meetings or during the workday, they sometimes question if their colleagues are in fact working or doing something else. Most of the respondents do not have the requirement of turning on their cameras during meetings, which they state is sometimes a problem. When conducting meetings in real life they can see if their colleagues are actively listening to them and explained that they do not know if this is the case when conducting them online. They have felt mistrust or uncertainty about what their colleagues are doing when working from home, both in online meetings and during the workday.

> *"There are people who don't have their cameras on, and you don't really know if they are present or doing something else completely." R4*

R5, R6, and R10 discuss how they feel the need to check in more often when they work from home as they are not sure if their colleagues are doing their tasks at hand. Further that it has created a stronger need for check-ups and monitoring of what their colleagues are working on.

> *"You want to control maybe more when you are at home because you might not trust that the other person is doing what they are supposed to do." R10*

Further, some respondents expressed that if it is not a meeting that concerns them directly, they have sometimes been doing something else simultaneously. This leads to the belief that others do it as well and is stated that it sometimes creates mistrust between them and their colleagues.

R3, R5, R6, and R8 have experienced the feeling of disturbing their colleagues when they work from home. They state that since they do not know what their colleagues are doing at the moment and if they are busy, they feel that they would be in the way or interrupting. They express that instead of calling if it is not something urgent, they will instead write an email which often takes longer for the colleague to answer than a phone call would. It is further stated by all the respondents that when they work from home it is mostly individual work because they actively choose to work on tasks that require minimum interdependence with their colleagues. The reason is further described to be linked to how well they can focus, and the respondents agree that they all can achieve a better focus at home as it is less distractions.

R2, R5, R6, and R8 have experienced that when they communicate online, they feel it is a different set of norms and rules that they have to take into consideration. The common ways of talking or expressing oneself in the office have changed when doing it online. R2 states that online R2 has experienced that some colleagues can express their disagreements more openly as they might feel safer or more confident behind a screen. Further, this has created situations where they were supposed to unite a team or department and instead, it led to a fragmentation of the people involved. R5 and R6 describe that the role they and their colleagues take in social interactions and settings are not the same online as in the office. They state that there is a difference in how people behave as they have colleagues who are shyer in person but speak more often online or the opposite, colleagues who are more comfortable in person and drawbacks when speaking online.

Moreover, some respondents have expressed that they believe it is more challenging to create and maintain a sense of belonging in the organization. R1 and R6 discussed the importance of creating a good environment and fostering a work culture that represents the organization and its values. They believe it is more challenging to maintain and spread a work culture online as it is something that happens in between and automatically when interacting in the office. R6 describes the situation as following:

> *"I think that this can be the biggest argument for why working from home is not beneficial. The building and creating of a culture with, both close colleagues and in other departments, happens in the little simple things that occur in the office." R6*

Further, R2 describes that colleagues who do not experience the same sense of belonging in the organization might have it more difficult to create this in a hybrid work setting. That this way of working is not a great fit for everyone. Some colleagues do not feel comfortable communicating online in big groups and prefer to use a private chat channel instead, while others have no issues of writing in a large group. R2 also states that this creates a barrier for people in the organization as they do not feel comfortable in this way of communicating, hindering them from entering the community and creating a sense of belonging.

> *"I think that they [the organization] have a very big challenge to create the feeling of belonging. I worked in the office for a long time and think that has made me more passionate about the company and I feel a sense of*

belonging. And I think that this is missing a lot when we work from home"
R2

All the respondents unanimously agreed that the hybrid work setting has made it easier to balance work and personal life. They state that the hybrid work setting is more favorable as it gives them a better work-life balance. The flexibility to choose to work in the office or from home has given the respondents more opportunities to spend more time with family, friends and engage in personal activities. Earlier they found it difficult to fit this into their schedule but as they have more autonomy when planning their workday, it has become easier. Commuting to and from work has been stated as the biggest source of saving time when working from home. Further, R2, R7, and R8 expressed that in their hybrid work setting they can work different hours than they would have at the office. R2 and R6 describes the combination of working from home and at the office as following:

> *"You get more personal time, and it makes me feel better that I can prioritize certain things and it affects the mental health in a positive way."*
> *R2*

> …

> *"I think it promotes a better balance between personal and professional life which I believe is very important." R6*

4.4.1 Strategies and work structure

During the interview, the majority of respondents addressed and described a concern that there were no clear strategies or work processes connected to the hybrid work setting. Some respondents had specific guidelines about when they had to be in the office and how many days they needed to be there. But general strategies and work processes tailored to the hybrid working setting were lacking. The respondents addressed issues such as the need to measure work output differently, the need for more clear guidelines or rules, long-term strategies that are part of the organization's values and goals, and strategies for creating and maintaining work relationships. R2 describes thoughts of how the organization could benefit from setting specific days when everyone needs to be in the office as it could promote interactions.

> *"I have started to wonder if the company should decide a specific day where everyone from a certain department needs to be at the office to create these interactions between everyone" –R2*

Further, R4 discusses the need for more clear frameworks that are more suited for a hybrid work setting as it could provide better structure and guidance for employees:

> *"I think it is very important that we set up these frameworks around how we work in a hybrid setting and I think those need to be evaluated and looked over to make sure that we create a good hybrid work setting" – R4*

Further, R10 believes that a hybrid work setting requires more commitment from the leaders in the organization and that planning for the future is a critical step to ensure that this work model is sustainable as R10 believes this work model to continue:

> *"I believe that it [the hybrid work setting] demands more from leaders and the board to make sure that the organization has a good strategy. This way of working is something I believe will remain and that demands thinking and planning for the future for this to hold and be successful in the long run." – R10*

The issue of evaluating work differently in a hybrid work setting was express by R1 and mentions the absence of a system or process to assess employees' performance and for reevaluate the current method used so it is more fit for the dynamics of remote and office work:

> *"There is no stamp clock, people can work four hundred percent or slack a lot during work, and to discover this I believe we have to change the way we evaluate people and right now I wouldn't say that we have a system or process for that." R1*

R6 express the need for the organization to facilitate more interactions between colleagues, particularly non-work related events:

> *"Even though we see each other at the office I think that we need more ways of creating a relaxed and spontaneous way to talk that is not always work-related when we are home." R6*

5.0 Analysis

In this section, the empirical findings are connected with previous literature regarding trust and knowledge sharing in organizations. It discusses and analyses the empirical findings in relation to previous literature to emphasize the research phenomenon. The structure is divided into three parts, following the structure of the empirical findings, highlighting the important findings and implications of this research.

The main findings in this study suggest that the hybrid work setting has led to changes in employees' way of communicating, building, and maintaining relationships, and their work culture. These changes have led to positive and negative outcomes that affect their work situation. The overall perceptions and experiences of the hybrid workplace are described as positive and are preferred by all the respondents compared to their earlier work setting of working only from the office. Further, there was no significant difference between the respondents from the different industries and the findings did not show great variance on the experiences and perception the respondent had of the hybrid work setting.

5.1 Communication

5.1.2 Informal & Spontaneous Communication

It is suggested from the main findings that informal communication and spontaneous interaction factors are affected when working in a hybrid setting. Challenges such as lack of spontaneous conversations and informal communication are highlighted. These aspects of the hybrid work setting can affect the employees' development of trust in each other as they interact less frequently and in a more formal way and it may form a barrier to establishing trust.

Previous studies emphasize the importance of interactions face-to-face and their critical role in fostering and building trust among employees (Al-Alawi et al., 2007; Koskinen et al., 2003). Face-to-face interactions provide employees with valuable non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language and enable individuals to more effectively communicate and create a stronger bond (Al-Alawi et al., 2007). The findings in this study show that in a hybrid work setting, employees highly value face-to-face interactions as it is stated that spontaneous and informal communication often occurs in the physical workplace. In line with previous research, this study's findings support the notion that face-to-face

interactions play a crucial role in fostering trust in a hybrid work setting. The absence of physical proximity and reduced opportunities for informal communication and spontaneous interactions may pose a challenge in creating and building trust among employees.

Abrams et al (2003) state the importance of creating non-work-related relationships among employees as this helps develop relationships and promote trust. The findings in this study highlight the lack of informal communication when working in a hybrid setting as digital communication is limited to work-related subjects. As non-work-related relationships are stated to contribute to trust, this limitation may hinder the development of trust and create challenges for employees to form strong relationships. Non-work-related relationships can be tied to affect-based trust and McAllister (1995) states that it is based on the emotional bond which is the link to creating trust. The limitation of informal communication in a hybrid work setting may impede the formation of non-work-related relationships. As employees have limited opportunities to engage in casual conversations and personal interactions, the emotional bond necessary for affect-based trust may be compromised. This can create challenges for employees to form strong relationships and trust each other beyond work-related matters. Moreover, Huang et al (2011) found that affect-based trust has a positive effect on knowledge sharing between employees. It can then be argued that the findings in this study may indicate a negative impact on knowledge sharing as there are barriers for employees to create trust, impeding the desire to share knowledge. When trust is lacking, employees may hesitate to share their knowledge, experiences, and insights with colleagues, leading to a decline in the exchange of valuable information and a potential loss of creative ideas and problem-solving capabilities within an organization.

The findings suggest that there is less spontaneous communication between employees and Abrams et al (2003) argue that frequent interactions are critical when creating trust, which indicates from the findings in this study that a hybrid work setting creates difficulties and barriers for employees to build and maintain trust. This can further be supported by Mäkelä & Brewsters (2009) study where their findings show that the number of shared experiences helps employees to form a better understanding of each other.

The value placed on face-to-face communication by employees in a hybrid work setting reflects the importance of non-verbal cues and the ability to establish stronger bonds through personal interactions. However, the limitations imposed by the hybrid work arrangement, such as reduced opportunities for informal communication and spontaneous interactions, pose

challenges to trust-building. The study also emphasizes the significance of non-work-related relationships in promoting trust among employees. The lack of informal communication in a hybrid setting, where digital interactions are predominantly focused on work-related subjects, hinders the development of these relationships. As non-work-related relationships contribute to trust-building, this limitation becomes a barrier for employees to establish and maintain trust with their colleagues.

5.1.3 Digital Communication

In the findings, it is emphasized that social cues, body language, the voice of tone are limited in the digital work setting. It is highlighted that there are challenges when communicating online as conveying and receiving information is restricted by the lack of body language and social cues. Receiving information fast is also highlighted in the findings and found by most to be more difficult online compared to being at the office. However, it is presented in the findings that written information has made it easier to share more information and allows for the ability to take in the information at a preferred pace. This finding is consistent with the media synchronicity theory where parallelism and processability are two media capabilities that are connected to lower synchronicity such as email, chats, and documents, and allows for more information simultaneously to be shared and reexamined to process the information again (Dennis et al., 2008).

The more efficient and concise communication that is stated to occur in the virtual workplace can lead to a higher level of trust in work-related aspects. It can thus be argued that clear communication can show the ability of competence to deliver and conduct their work in an efficient manner. Ouakouak & Ouedraogo (2019) found that professional trust had a positive impact on knowledge sharing. However, written communication can be a challenge as nuance and tone cannot be conveyed in this form of communication which can lead to misunderstandings (Darics, 2020). This increases the risk of creating a barrier between the employees and hinders the development of personal trust between them. Ouakouak & Ouedraogo (2019) also state that personal trust has a positive impact on professional trust, making it the mediating role between trust and knowledge sharing.

These findings present both challenges and opportunities to share knowledge among colleagues. Explicit knowledge is suggested to have been impacted positively in a hybrid work setting as it can be conveyed both online and, in the presence, and has led to more thorough documentation. This is in line with Dennis et al (2008) as the conveyance process,

sharing new and extensive information, does not require high synchronicity but can be shared by written text. However, tacit knowledge is suggested to be more challenging to communicate in an online setting as the findings suggest that discussions that lead to ideas and creativity are easier to have physically in the office. It can be argued that tacit knowledge is more difficult to exchange as it relies upon nonverbal communication, spontaneous interactions, and personal connections which is in line with Gajendran et al (2022) findings that complex reasoning and convergence processes are more difficult in a text-based communication.

Lack of formal and informal spaces and lack of contact time can create a barrier for knowledge sharing as it impedes employee's ability to interact in different social settings and minimize the chances to interact face-to-face (Riege, 2005). This could indicate that the hybrid work setting can lead to decreased knowledge sharing if informal and formal settings are not promoted and if face-to-face interactions are less occurring.

5.2 Work Relations

5.2.1 Building & Maintaining Relationships

The findings show that the lack of physical interaction has led to less personal communication between employees. The findings also show that relationships that were already established before the pandemic are easier to maintain. Further, getting to know a colleague is longer in a hybrid work setting, and new colleagues entering a team can impact the group dynamics and trust. The findings highlight the importance of meeting in presence, both in a professional setting as well as a personal one, to form a more personal and deeper bond.

As earlier relationships are stated to be easier to maintain it can be argued that this can be the case as trust has already been built up and that they have a better understanding of each other's work style and personalities. Suggesting that trust is built through shared experiences and interaction which becomes more challenging in a hybrid work setting. This is in line with Mäkelä & Brewster (2009) who argue that shared experiences create a base where trust can be more effectively built. Further, Abrams et al (2003) state that personal connections where employees learn about things that are non-work-related have a positive impact on personal trust. As the findings suggest, the hybrid work setting limits the interactions where employees meet at the coffee station or have lunch together, limiting the connections regarding non-

work related as it is also suggested that when communicating digitally, it is often more formal and work-related. It can thus be argued that the hybrid work setting presents challenges for employees to connect and build trust with new colleagues as they have no shared experience base and have limited interactions related to personal connections in this work model.

Christensen et al (2018) found that working closely together in a physical office fosters a stronger relationship between employees and leads to higher levels of trust. This can corroborate why the majority of the respondent who worked together with their colleagues in the office before the hybrid model was implemented, described that these relationships are not affected by the hybrid work setting as they have already established strong relationship ties. It further confirms the argument that the building of new relationships is more difficult and creates weaker bonds between colleagues in a hybrid work setting. Torro et al (2020) state that media that allows for higher synchronicity, such as face-to-face interactions, is a more effective way of building trust as it facilitates the use of non-verbal communication and social cues. As a hybrid work setting allows for both physical and digital communication, employees still have the ability to form trust with each other, but the process can take longer time.

4.2.2 Collaborations

The findings show that collaboration among team members has been affected positively by hybrid work setting to some degree as it has allowed for a more flexible way of communicating and collaborating. This finding is in line with Deng et al (2023) who state that digital technology increases coordination and communication. However, it is highlighted that spontaneous collaboration and ideation outside an employee's team have been negatively affected as the hybrid work setting limits their interaction with colleagues from other teams and departments.

Jawadi et al (2013) identified collaborations as a key aspect of knowledge sharing and achieving effective collaboration requires trust, open communication, and shared social context within the work environment. The findings in this study suggest the hybrid work setting have reduced face-to-face interaction and limited the interaction between employees from different teams and departments. As a result, the chances for unplanned interactions, knowledge sharing, and collaborative discussions that occur more naturally in the physical workplace have diminished. The hybrid work setting contains a shared social context in which the employees can interact more spontaneously. This finding aligns with the study of

Jawadi et al (2013) who state that social context is imperative for achieving collaboration. Suggesting that knowledge sharing, especially tacit knowledge, between teams and departments has decreased in a hybrid work setting and that the limited shared social context can hinder the flow of knowledge, idea exchanges, and innovations. This is further supported by Schoenherr et al (2014) who state that tacit knowledge is more likely to be created and transmitted in collaborative relationships.

The findings in this study suggest that there is a barrier to collaboration between colleagues they have a weaker relationship with. Multiple researchers argue that trust is a critical factor in facilitating effective knowledge sharing between individuals (Al-Alawi et al., 2007; Hau et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2011; Imam & Zaheer, 2021; Koskinen et al., 2003). The findings in this study indicate that employees are more inclined to reach out for help and feedback from colleagues they have a stronger relationship with. Dennis et al (2008) state that familiar communication contexts where employees are familiar with working together have a shorter convergence process. This suggest that employees are more comfortable reaching out to colleagues they have a stronger bond with, as trust have already established a level of trust and shared understanding, which could explain the findings in this study that employees choose to reach out to colleagues with whom they have experienced working together with for a longer period. The importance of trust is further supported by Abrams et al, who state that individuals are more inclined to ask for advice and information from colleagues they trust. aligning with the findings in this study. This finding resonates with the result of the current study, indicating that trust influences knowledge sharing behavior, as employees who have established trust are more likely to engage in knowledge exchange.

Moreover, it is found that problem-solving and creativity are more likely to occur in the office due to the possibility of receiving more impressions and nuances. This finding is in line with Dennis et al (2008) who state that more complex task and the need for richer information is more suited for high synchronicity media such as face-to-face interactions as social cues, body language, and vocal tone and the ability to transfer the message at a greater speed is easier. It can thus be argued from the findings in this study that tacit knowledge, ideation, creativity, and innovation are restricted in a digital context. Limited infrastructure that supports knowledge sharing and can lead to a decrease in exchange of knowledge, however, it can be overcome by allocating resources that support communication and collaboration (Riege, 2005). As the findings suggest that tacit knowledge sharing is more

likely to occur in the office, organizations should ensure that they allocate resources as they see fit so they can foster a collaborative culture environment.

Dennis et al (2008) state that novel communication context entails being unfamiliar with the media, task, and individual and that this context requires a higher synchronous media. The findings show that information conveyed online requires more time and effort from the employees and can contain unnecessary information. This corresponds with Dennis et al (2008) as the hybrid work setting is more unfamiliar compared to the physical work setting, meaning that this unfamiliarity could require more time from the employees as digital communication has lower synchronicity. Employees do not have enough knowledge about their colleague's prior knowledge and do not have a shared understanding, meaning sharing certain information digitally can limit the conveyance and convergence process. If the information is not effectively shared it could lead to incorrect conclusions as well as a barrier to reaching a shared understanding of the information (Dennis et al., 2008).

As the findings present a challenge to collaborate with colleagues from different teams and departments it can be argued that the hybrid work setting limits the chance of knowledge sharing between teams and departments. Further, sharing tacit knowledge is more challenging to share in digital communication and with colleagues outside one's immediate team.

5.3 Work Culture

The findings of the study indicate that the hybrid work setting has had a significant impact on the work culture, resulting in changes in communication and interactions among colleagues. One notable effect is the emergence of mistrust when employees work from home as there is no requirement for most of the respondents to enable their cameras during meetings, leading to a perceived need for increased monitoring of their colleagues' work. This finding suggests that trust may be compromised in a hybrid work environment, potentially influencing knowledge sharing and collaboration. As several researchers argue that face-to-face interactions create better relationships and build trust among employees (Allen et al., 2015; Holdt Christensen & Pedersen, 2018; Torro et al., 2022), not using the camera during digital meetings could result in a barrier for creating trust.

Additionally, the study reveals that social norms differ between working from home and being present in the office. The shift to remote work has created a different set of expectations and behaviors, potentially affecting how employees interact and share

knowledge with one another. The altered social dynamics may pose challenges to the development of trust and collaboration, as well as the exchange of tacit knowledge, which is often fostered through informal and spontaneous interactions. Creating a shared understanding of situations and tasks is essential for building trust and Mäkelä & Brewster (2009) state that shared experiences help in understanding each other as they are familiarized with their knowledge and language system which facilitates intuitively grasping the intended message. As the hybrid work setting has changed where and how employees communicate it could be argued that they need to relearn how their colleagues function in relation to the digital domain. This can be corroborated by Allen et al (2015) study where they state that the absence or limitation of regular face-to-face interactions can significantly impact the interpersonal processes between colleagues in a workplace.

When working from home the respondents stated that a greater focus can be achieved as there are less distractions from colleagues. Further, that the task they perform at home is more individual and have a low interdependence with colleagues. This focus could contribute to a higher productivity was aligns with the findings of Attaran et al (2019). However, this was the general experience that was presented in the findings meaning that all the respondent view working from home as a more individual work time. The findings further suggest that many of the respondents experienced disturbing their colleagues when they work from home because they are unsure what their colleagues are doing. It can be argued that since the respondent holds their own view that working from home is where they can have more focus and not be disturbed, they become more reluctant to reach out to their colleagues for help or feedback. This general view that working from home is where everyone does more individual tasks, could create a new norm in organizations that essentially hinders collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Moreover, the findings highlight the difficulty in maintaining a sense of belonging within the organization when working in a hybrid setting. The physical separation from colleagues and limited in-person interactions may hinder the establishment of strong interpersonal connections and a shared sense of purpose. This lack of connection and belonging could further impact trust levels and inhibit knowledge sharing among employees. This finding is in line with the study of Morganson et al (2010) who state that employees working in a hybrid work setting have a lower level of inclusion as compared to employees who work only in an office.

The study reveals that the hybrid work setting has contributed to a better balance between work and personal life for the respondents. Work and personal life can be better managed as commuting is reduced, leaving more time for engaging in activities, responsibilities, and family. Aligning with Morganson et al study (2010) which states that the hybrid work setting allows for more flexibility and the ability to balance work and personal life. This improved work-life balance can have positive implications for employee well-being and productivity which can be corroborated by Attaran et al (2019) findings that show that the flexibility in the work model has a positive impact on their health and productivity and engagement.

5.3.1 Strategies & Work Structure

The findings in this study highlight the absence of clear strategies and work processes specifically designed for the hybrid work environment. In the findings, it is suggested there is a lack of guidance and framework for measuring work output and fostering work relationships in the digital context. The respondents highlighted the importance of facilitating interactions between colleagues, both in the office and during remote work. They emphasized the need for relaxed and spontaneous communication channels that extend beyond work-related topics, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. Allen et al (2015) state that it is crucial for organizations to have a support system for hybrid work to effectively function. Furthermore, the evaluation of work in a hybrid setting was discussed, with a call for the development of new assessment methods that accommodate the unique dynamics of remote and office-based work. Organizational digital strategies are emphasized to be an important factor in creating an effective digital workplace and need to adapt to the organizational culture and facilitate collaboration and flexible work (Williams & Schubert, 2018). The authors state that by using versatile communication tools and technologies the negative effects of reduced face-to-face interaction can be mitigated. Further, they stress the importance of agile strategies that can adapt to future needs and requirements, ensuring that employees can conduct their work and collaborations in an effective manner. Reige (2007) states that there are several barriers to knowledge sharing that can be overcome by implementing certain actions.

The findings indicate that employees are experiencing a lack of strategies and frameworks regarding different aspects of the hybrid work. As Allen et al (2015) and Williams & Schubert (2018) argue that support and strategies in the hybrid work setting are essential, it could be argued that organizations are lacking in this area, which could lead to the emergence

of new issues and challenges. As the findings suggest, there are several barriers to knowledge sharing and Reige (2007) states that organizations need to create supportive tools, structure, and processes for overcoming this. This further argues that organizations that offer a hybrid work setting need to ensure that they have multiple supporting strategies and frameworks that enable employees to share knowledge.

6.0 Conclusion

In this section, the main findings and conclusions are presented. The section is divided into three parts where part one provides an answer to the research question. Part two presents the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, and the third part suggests future research that could be conducted with this research as a base and the limitations of this study.

6.1 Answer to Research Question

In conclusion, this study aimed to investigate the effects of adopting a hybrid work setting on the creation and building of trust among employees and the extent to which knowledge is shared. The findings shed light on the factors that influence the development of trust in a hybrid work setting and the impact this work model has on knowledge sharing within organizations. The research question is *"How does a hybrid work setting affect trust and knowledge sharing between employees?"* and this study has revealed that the adoption of the hybrid work setting has both positive and negative effects on trust and knowledge sharing. Further, new insights have been gained regarding this growing phenomenon and the challenges and opportunities it creates for employees and organizations.

Trust has been impacted in both a positive and negative way in the hybrid work setting. The physical separation and increased reliance on digital communication has been presented to create challenges for employees to foster trust. Personal relationships are stated to be more difficult to foster and it requires a longer period of time to build trust in this work model. The hybrid work setting poses challenges as digital communication is not as effective in creating spontaneous interactions that are informal which is a crucial element in the process of building and maintaining relationships. In this study, it has been clear the hybrid work setting mostly affects the building of trust negatively between new colleagues. The lack of shared experiences and the limitation of physical social context has been found to be a challenge when establishing a new relationship. However, as the hybrid work setting combines both a physical and a digital workplace there are opportunities for trust to be fostered and maintained through intentional efforts and the effective use of technology.

The flexibility and autonomy provided by a hybrid work setting enhanced productivity and collaborations as employees have better work-life balance and control over their work environment. It is easier to coordinate work when combining physical and digital communication leading to more efficient collaborations. This creates more opportunities to

collaborate as it increases shared experiences which help with fostering trust among employees. However, there is a general view that working from home is connected more to conducting individual work creating an imbalance in where and how employees collaborate. Organizations must ensure that the combined working model facilitates and fosters a collaborative culture, encouraging frequent and meaningful interactions in both the physical and digital space.

The study further highlights that there are challenges for spontaneous collaborations outside of employees' immediate teams. This has a negative effect on knowledge sharing in a hybrid work setting as it limits the ability to interact and collaborate between teams. The shared social context is reduced, thus decreasing the flow of knowledge as teams are more isolated and less integrated with the whole organization. In the hybrid work setting opportunities for sharing explicit knowledge have increased, and information is more effectively documented. This creates a stronger and larger knowledge base for organizations and the opportunity to share knowledge across the entire organization with more ease. Tacit knowledge however was affected negatively as this type of knowledge is transferred more naturally occurring in the physical workspace, and since the hybrid work setting decreased the opportunities for physical interaction, tacit knowledge is restricted in the work model. However, the hybrid work setting also present opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing as it provides access to diverse perspectives and expertise across departments if the organization implement tools and strategies for cross-collaboration that facilitates interactions that generate ideation, creativity, and innovation both within teams and across the organization.

6.2 Implications & Contributions

6.2.1 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the existing literature on trust and knowledge sharing by exploring the impact of the hybrid work setting. The findings in this study align with several findings in previous literature and further strengthens that fostering trust between employees is more effective in a physical workplace (Al-Alawi et al, 2007; Chirstensen & Pedersen, 2018; Darics, 2020). Further, the digital workplace impedes personal relationships as rich and frequent interactions are more difficult to engage in digitally. As previous literature has stated that trust and knowledge sharing can be facilitated in a combination of physical and digital workplaces, this study further emphasizes the importance of both physical and digital

interaction for building trust and sharing knowledge. Previous research shows that tacit knowledge is often exchanged through shared experiences (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019) and is connected to being able to convey nuances and richer communication (Parlamis & Dibble, 2018). This study can corroborate existing research as it demonstrates tacit knowledge is more challenging in a digital work setting and often occurs in the physical workplace where shared experiences are more frequent.

The study contributes to theoretical knowledge by deepening the understanding of trust, knowledge sharing, relationship building, and collaboration in the context of hybrid work. It provides insight into the opportunities and challenges that are related to this work model and offers suggestions for organizations on how they can create a supportive and collaborative environment. Increasing the chance for successful hybrid work.

6.2.2 Practical Implications

The findings in this study have found that there is a lack of strategies regarding the hybrid work setting. As this model poses both challenges and opportunities for fostering trust and knowledge sharing, organizations should implement strategies that can facilitate this. Organizations and leaders should focus on creating a work culture that supports and embraces the hybrid work setting. This includes providing necessary resources and technologies to facilitate effective digital communication and collaboration among employees.

The findings of this study suggest that organizations and leaders need to be mindful of the importance of fostering non-work-related relationships even in a hybrid work . Strategies should be implemented to provide opportunities for employees to engage in informal interactions and socialize virtually. This could include virtual social events, team-building activities, or dedicated communication channels for non-work conversations. By recognizing the significance of non-work-related relationships and actively addressing this aspect of communication, organizations can support the development of trust and enhance collaboration in a hybrid work setting. Organizations should not just focus on creating these opportunities to interact in the physical workplace as it is difficult to coordinate for all employees from different teams and departments to be in the office at the same time. Instead, promote cross-team and department activities digitally to ensure more frequent interactions and opportunities for collaboration.

As the hybrid work setting has led to isolation between teams and departments organizations and leaders should create opportunities for employees to have shared experiences such as virtual team-building activities, collaborative projects, and regular in-person meetings. This further helps with fostering a sense of belonging in the organization and helps build trust among employees and creates a work culture that supports and enables employees to share knowledge. It is important to acknowledge the balance between individual and collaborative work and the importance of encouraging employees to collaborate in both the physical and digital workplace while also providing dedicated time and space for more individual work.

Organizations and leaders should be aware of how the hybrid work setting can affect the process of building trust and sharing knowledge when new employees are hired. They should recognize the challenges that physical separation and digital communication have and ensure that they have the right support and tools to integrate the employee. The onboarding process in a hybrid work setting should focus on effectively integrating the employee into the organization and in the team. By tailoring the onboarding process to the dynamics of a hybrid work setting, organizations can establish a strong foundation for trust and knowledge sharing among new employees and current employees and promote a sense of belonging and collaboration.

Overall, organizations and leaders should recognize the opportunities that the hybrid work setting entails if properly implemented. It enables collaborations to a wider extent within the organization and fosters greater knowledge sharing. Further, it allows employees to be more flexible in their work which leads to higher motivation and increased productivity.

6.2 Limitations & Future Research

The findings in this study may be limited to the specific context and participants involved as the study was conducted on Swedish employees in the greater area of Gothenburg. This limits the generalizability of the result to other geographical places and industries. Further, as there was no significant difference between the three industries suggesting that the impact of a hybrid work setting is not influenced by a specific industry. This could potentially indicate that unmeasured factors have been overlooked in this study.

This study focused on employee's perception of the hybrid work setting, and I proposed that future research could investigate how leader facilitates for trust and knowledge sharing and what challenges and opportunities they believe the hybrid work setting have. Further, future

research can be conducted where organizational structure and hierarchy are investigated to understand if these factors could influence trust and knowledge sharing in the hybrid work setting. Additionally, explore the role of management practices within the different organizational structures to shed light on how these factors influence trust and knowledge sharing.

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8.0 Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1. Interview guide

I first want to ask also to ask you if it is possible for me to record the interview with your permission? If there are any questions you don't understand or don't wish to answer just let me know and I will explain or move over to the next question.

Introductory Questions:

- For how long have you worked for the case company?
- What is your current role at the case company?
- What are your main responsibilities in this role?
- How often do you work from home?
- Do you decide on your own when you work from home or are there rules/guidelines?
- How many in your team also work in a hybrid setting?
- If there are guidelines, could you describe them?

Theme 1: Digital Tools

First, I want to clarify what we mean by digital tools. Digital tools are the technical tools used for work, for example, communication, structuring, calculation, or collaboration. This can include components ranging from computers to mobile devices, and various business systems that can simplify work tasks and delivery of work. It can also include various systems such as chat functions, email, video calls, etc.

- How would you describe that your company works with digital tools? Are all the tools possible to use from home?
- How would you describe using digital tools in your daily work? - And for what means? How much?
- In what ways is your work affected by digital tools? - What is simplified or made more difficult?
- How have you experienced the change from working physically on-site to working more digitally in collaboration with colleagues

Theme 2: Communication, and Colleagues

- Through what digital means or tools do you communicate with your colleagues? -
- How would you describe the difference between communicating face-to-face versus digitally?
- What are the challenges you have experienced in the hybrid model regarding communication?
- What are the opportunities you have experienced in the hybrid work setting regarding communication?
- How do you believe these challenges and opportunities have affected your relationship with your colleagues?
- Is there something you feel lacks when working in a hybrid setting? - Why? - How does this affect your relationship with your colleagues?
- How do you perceive relationship building to be affected when working in a hybrid setting?

Theme 3: Trust in a hybrid work setting

- What is trust according to you? – and in connection with your colleagues?
- How do you think the trust between you and your colleagues has been affected by working both virtually and physically?
- What do you believe is the biggest challenge to build trust?
- Do you think there are any areas of improvement that your colleagues can work with to create trust in a hybrid setting?
- How do you think that this work model can affect your relationship with your colleagues in the future? – What are the positive and negative outcomes?

Theme 4: Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing refers to the process of exchanging information between people, teams, or organizations. This knowledge may be explicit/concrete, which comes from documents or procedures, or tacit/more abstract, meaning it is developed from experience.

- How do you experience your collaboration with your colleagues when operating from home?
- What are the challenges have you experienced when collaborating in a hybrid work setting?
- What are the opportunities you have experienced when collaborating in a hybrid work setting?
- Do you have a knowledge sharing exchange with your colleagues in your daily work? - If yes: how?
- How do you experience sharing knowledge and conveying information in the digital work and physical work?
- What are the challenges you have experienced when sharing knowledge in the hybrid work setting? Can you give an example of when knowledge sharing was made more difficult when working from home?
- What are the opportunities you have experienced when sharing knowledge in the hybrid work setting? Can you give an example of when knowledge sharing was made easier when working from home?
- How do you experience the success of sharing knowledge when you work at home compared to working in the office?
- What type of knowledge do you think is important to share? – How do you think that these different types of knowledge can be shared in the different work settings?

Concluding questions

- Is there something else that you would like to add now that we have approached the end of the interview that you might believe is of importance?
- Do you have any follow-up questions connected to this interview? Or something else you want to ask before we end?

8.2 Appendix 2. Consent form

The hybrid work setting – a qualitative study on employees' perception and experiences in this work model

Study aim

The aim of the study is to investigate and explore how employees have experienced working in a hybrid work setting. Further, what challenges and opportunities have arisen in this work model. To answer this question, I want to hear more about what you as an employee experience.

Who am I?

The study I am conducting is my master's thesis within the Master Program in Innovation and Industrial Management, at the University of Gothenburg. The study is conducted independently by me, Erica Bredberg.

Data Collection

The data collection will consist of qualitative interviews that will be recorded with the permission of the participants.

Voluntary participation and non-disclosure

Participation is voluntary and confidential, and participation will be anonymous. Participants can choose to cancel their participation at any time and have the right to withdraw from the study if they wish. Personal names are not registered, and participants will be given a pseudonym or number when interviews are transcribed and analyzed. This also applies to the organization.

Handling of collected material

In the final thesis, extracts from interviews may be cited and given a pseudonym. The collected material and interview transcriptions will not be used for any purpose other than the study's scientific research purpose. Recordings will be erased after the conclusion of the project.

Results and publication

The results of the study will be published in the form of a master's thesis completed in June 2023. The essay can be provided to participants if requested.

For questions and further information please contact: Erica Bredberg
Tel: 0705 68 33 70
Mail: erica.bredberg@outlook.com

Consent Form

Research student: Erica Bredberg

Program: Master's in Innovation and Industrial Management, University of Gothenburg, School of Business, Economics, and Law

- The interview will be recorded, with the respondent's approval.
- Collected data will be analyzed by Erica Bredberg
- The material collected, such as notes and recordings, will only be available to authorized people.
- Access to the data will be limited to Erica Bredberg. My supervisors and examinators may need access to part of the transcripts.
- The recordings, transcripts, and notes will be deleted after the thesis is handed in and accepted.
-

By signing this form, I agree on:

- Voluntarily participate in the above-mentioned thesis project.
- I understand that I at any time can withdraw from participating in the study.
- The collected material from the interviews will be used only for the purposes described above.
- I have read and understood the information and consent form.

Date and Signature