



## DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED IT IT FACULTY

# Communications Effect on Trust in The Hybrid Workplace

An explorative case study of an outsourcing  
company providing financial services

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the way people work, with many organizations shifting to remote work as the result. As we move towards a post-pandemic world, the hybrid working method that combines remote and in-office work is becoming increasingly popular and not likely to go away. Trust is considered a critical factor in the future of remote work, due to the lack of visibility of each other in the office, therefore, organizations need to prioritize trust for the smooth and successful functioning of the workplace. Trust has been researched in remote work, and there has been limited studies in the context of the hybrid working method. This thesis explores the role of communication in how trust is built between managers and employees in the hybrid workplace through a case study of an outsourcing company providing financial services. The data was collected through eleven semi-structured interviews with managers, employees and HR from the company and analysed with thematic analysis. This thesis has contributed with how trust is built between managers and employees in the hybrid workplace. Findings show that communication have some effect on trust building but does not need to be the only factor. Framework that combines media synchronicity theory and social exchange theory was applied and points to that media with high synchronicity, high symbols sets, and high transmission velocity is the way to build trust. Moreover, the managers desired informing communication from the employees and employees desired availability and help from their managers to build trust.

**Keywords:** Trust, communication, hybrid workplace, media synchronicity theory, social exchange theory

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Trust in an Organization .....	4
Trust Built Through Communication .....	5
Trust Building in MST and SET .....	6
Current Study .....	12
Methods .....	14
Qualitative Case Study .....	14
Sampling .....	14
Semi-structured Interviews .....	16
Interview Guide .....	17
Ethical Considerations .....	18
Data Analysis .....	20
Findings .....	23
Communication derived trust .....	23
Media of high synchronicity .....	25
Reciprocal relationship building.....	26
Communication strategy .....	28
Non-communication derived trust.....	29
Situational trust-building .....	30
Support trust-building.....	31
Discussion .....	33

Practical Implications .....	37
Suggestions For Future Research .....	38
Limitation of Study .....	39
Conclusion .....	41
References .....	42
Appendices .....	49
Appendix 1. Consent form.....	49
Appendix 2. Interview guide.....	51
Appendix 3. Translation.....	72
Appendix 5. Summary of themes .....	73

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020 and became a crisis in many ways (Suskind et al., 2020). One area that the pandemic affected was the working conditions. Many people were forced to adapt to working remotely as a result of the pandemic (Statiska Centralbyrån, 2021). In Sweden during the pandemic, the government recommended that people stay home (e.g. krisinformation.se) and at its height around 40% of workers worked remotely full-time (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2021). In 2016, before the pandemic, about 2% of workers in Sweden worked permanently from home, while 13% did so occasionally (Bolander et al., 2021).

Remote work refers to working outside of the office and can be done from any location (Baruch, 2000; Taveres, 2017). Remote work has been growing in popularity since the 1990s due to technological advancements (Taveres, 2017), but the COVID-19 pandemic made it to be relevant again, and even more in research (e.g. Viererbl et al., 2022; Pernefors & Bjurenvall, 2021). Research on remote work, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has covered topics such as isolation (Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022), informal communication (Viererbl et al., 2022), relational communication (Jämsen et al., 2022), employee engagement (Pernefors & Bjurenvall, 2021), and job satisfaction (Kakkar et al., 2022).

Now the pandemic is fading away, and the option of hybrid remote working is becoming increasingly popular. There is no current data on how many people are still working remotely after the pandemic, but a study by Netigate (2021) found that 71% of people in Sweden wanted a hybrid method of working. As the pandemic became an interesting time to study remote work, the hybrid working method will also be an interesting time to study it since it can imply many challenges. Research on the hybrid working method

has already been addressed in previous studies in terms of trust in a virtual and face-to-face workplace (Fischer & Walker, 2022), collaboration (Yang et al., 2022) and preferences around remote work (Smite et al., 2022). Many workers and organizations have experienced both the benefits and downsides of remote work, which is still being debated in articles (e.g. Wigert & White, 2022; Fayard et al., 2021). One factor that is highlighted as critical in the future of remote work is trust (Staglin, 2021).

Hybrid remote work can have implications for trust. Microsoft came out with a study where it was concluded that managers feel more difficult in trusting their employees, since they cannot see them (Microsoft, 2022). Employees can also feel reluctant to trust their managers if they for instance are not honest (Staglin, 2021). Fayard et al. (2021) points out that human interaction is important to build trust. In the hybrid working method human interaction would be possible, however there can still be distrusting issues since everyone might not be at the office at the same time (Staglin, 2021). Moreover, the hybrid working method is wanted by so many workers, and is not likely to go away (Netigate, 2021; Staglin, 2021; Smite et al., 2022), so it is important for organisations to consider trust for the workplace to run smoothly and successfully (Julka, 2021).

This study aims to further develop the research on trust building in the hybrid workplace. Research covering trust relationships in virtual teams has been widely researched over the decades (Gilson et al., 2015). Through studies between trust and commitment in organizations, it has been found that communication is one essential factor that can affect trust building (Togna, 2014). In this hybrid working method, communication can go through different channels (e.g., face-to-face, online). Krehl and Büttgen (2022) who researched remote leadership during COVID-19 and how the digital tools were used, suggest that future research should consider how the digital tools are used in the work environment after

COVID-19. This thesis will further build on Krehl and Büttgen (2022) and give insight to how different communicative channels is used to build trust in a hybrid working environment.

In previous research, it is found that leaders play an important role in fostering trust in remote work (Kayworth & Leidner, 2000; Furumo et al., 2012). Moreover, previous studies on trust or communication either focus on the employees' perspective (e.g., Fischer & Walker, 2022) or the leader's perspective (e.g. Krehl & Büttgen, 2022). This thesis aims to give the perspective from both the managers and employees in the same context to understand both sides. Furthermore, it will draw on Torro et al.'s (2022) framework on media synchronicity theory together with social exchange theory that explains how trust can be generated through different communication channels. Followingly, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1: How does communication affect trust between managers and employees in the hybrid workplace?*

*RQ2: What communicative strategies lead to trust building between managers and employees at the hybrid workplace?*

Firstly, a review of the relevant literature covering recent developments in trust related to communication, together with a remote work setting, will be presented. Followingly, the method section will cover the methodological choice of the data collection and analysis. The findings section will cover the themes found from the analysis. Lastly, the discussion section will discuss these finding in relation to Torro et al.'s (2022) framework and the literature presented. The implication of the study and suggestion for future research will also be given.



## Literature Review

In this following section, literature on trust in organizations will be covered first, outlining its definition and importance. It will then be followed by how trust can be built through communication. Following this, the theoretical framework of a model by Torro et al. (2022) that combines media synchronicity theory and social exchange theory will be introduced. Finally, a summary of the current study will be presented.

### Trust in an Organization

Trust is generally considered an essential aspect of positive and productive social processes (Zhang et al., 2008) and has been shown to have benefits for organizations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Trust has been found to predict commitment (Heavey et al., 2011), satisfaction, and to stay at the company (Cunningham & MacGregor, 2000), making it an important goal for employers to build (Zhang et al., 2008). According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995, p. 712), trust is defined as:

“the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party”.

Trust has been commonly studied in relation to commitment to the organization (Togna, 2014; Whitener, 2001). From this research, communication, trust, and commitment are three variables that has been found that could be connected (Togna, 2014). Studying these variables has been particularly relevant in virtual work in order to understand how the lack of face-to-face meetings can affect the levels of trust, since face-to-face interaction may be important for building trust (Tucker et al., 2023; Brown et al., 2014). In Togna’s (2014)

report, where he studies these variables, communication has been identified as a way to build trust.

## **Trust Built Through Communication**

Previous research on trust in an organisation discusses the importance of communication in building trust. Internal communication can generate trust within the organization (Togna, 2014). Research on internal communication also underlines the importance of employees trusting the communication of the organisation: “if internal stakeholders do not understand their organisation’s strategic direction, they cannot be committed to it and may be reluctant to trust it or their senior managers” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 190). To raise trust in employees, managers need to communicate honestly and directly. Moreover, more personalized, and face-to-face communication can improve trust (Togna, 2014). Soderberg and Romney (2022), who research how leaders can built trust, found that humble communication fosters trust. Specifically, leaders should give feedback, ask questions, coordinate tasks, be an active listener, avoid gossip, and be authentic (Soderberg & Romney, 2022).

During a hybrid remote work setting, communication can take various forms, from face-to-face to different media channels. Written channels include letters, brochures, reports, manuals, posters, bulletin boards, email, websites, the internet, blog, podcast, chat rooms, instant messaging systems or intranet. Oral channels include face-to-face communication, meetings, focus groups, social gatherings, telephone conversations and video conferencing (Berger, 2008 as cited in Vercic & Spolijaric, 2020). Krehl and Büttgen (2022) researched how leaders could effectively use digital tools during remote work in the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that video conferencing has become the most widely used

medium to replace face-to-face communication. Moreover, leaders tend to use a variety of tools but often fail to use the most appropriate tool or combination of them. Remote leaders must regularly assess if the tools still fit or need to change and avoid using too many tools. Rather than controlling communication, leaders should support it and provide space for virtual coffee breaks to foster social connections (Krehl and Büttgen, 2022). Moreover, Tucker et al. (2023) investigated trust and commitment in virtual team communication through computer-mediated communication. The results point to that visual computer communication led to better trust than non-visual.

## **Trust Building in MST and SET**

The articles by Tucker et al. (2023) and Krehl and Büttgen (2022) used the theories media synchronicity theory (MST) and media richness theory (MRT) to evaluate digital tools. MRT theorize which media is the most effective (Daft and Lengel, 1986 as in Dennis et al., 2008; Dennis & Kinney, 1998 as in Dennis et al., 2008). The theory has been criticised for not being able to explain everything, and face-to-face communication does not need to be the richest (Dennis et al., 2008). Dennis et al. (2008) suggest that MST is better suited for this purpose. MST focuses on how well the media supports synchronicity, namely when people work together. They do not argue that any media is inherently better than others, and that many communication processes needs multiple mediums (Dennis et al., 2008).

Research on trust and commitment tends to use social exchange theory (SET) (Togna, 2014; Whitener, 2001). Eisenberger et al. (1986) further explored SET in terms of commitment to the organization. From this perspective, it is expected that trust and commitment are linked to each other (Togna, 2014; Whitener, 2001). SET is used to explain behaviour and social exchange in an organization (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). The basics of

it involves that relationships will evolve into “trusting, loyal and mutual commitments” (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005, p. 875), but certain rules of exchange must be followed to achieve this (Cropanzo et al., 2017).

Torro et al. (2022) combined MST with SET to explain how social exchange is facilitated through media synchronicity, particularly how different media capabilities can affect trust building in remote work environments. They combined these two theories with the knowledge that remote work has become more common, and communication now goes through different media channels. They propose that this will affect how social ties and trust are built (Torro et al., 2022). They suggest that the lack of face-to-face communication can be mitigated with different digital tools (Torro et al., 2022). SET has never been combined with a technological point of view before. They believe that it is beneficial in terms of its generalizability and combining them provides a nuanced perspective instead of researching them separately (Torro et al., 2022).

Torro et al. (2022) based MST on Dennis et al.’s (2008) view. Dennis et al. (2008) defines “media synchronicity as the extent to which the capabilities of a communication medium enable individuals to achieve synchronicity” (Dennis et al., 2008, p. 581). Communication can be synchronous, namely communication that is happening at the same time (e.g. face-to-face communication) or asynchronous, communication is not taking place at the same time (e.g. email). Dennis et al. (2008) also points out that media can have different capabilities. Dennis et al. (2008) defines it as “potential structures provided by a medium which influence the manner in which individuals can transmit and process information” (p.583). They have in total 5 capabilities: transmission velocity, parallelism, symbol sets, rehearsability, and reprocessability. Transmission velocity refers to the speed of the medium. Parallelism refers to the number of people who can receive the message at the

same time. Symbol sets refers to the number of ways the information conveyed by the medium can be interpreted. Rehearsability refers to the ability to fine-tune the message. Reprocessability refers to the ability to re-examine the information (Dennis et al., 2008).

Torro et al. (2022) base SET on Blau's (1964 as cited in Torro et al., 2022) view. Blau's (1964 as cited in Torro et al., 2022) perspective of SET focuses on interpersonal communication. Trust and reciprocity are pillars of social exchange (Blau, 1964 as cited in Torro et al., 2022; Cropananzo and Mitchell, 2005). Torro et al. (2022, p. 164) "analyze social exchange via patterns of trust and reciprocity, which may or may not occur in various human interaction conditions". The definitions of reciprocity and trust that Torro et al. (2022) base them on can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Definitions of Trust and Reciprocity*

	Definition	Torro et al.'s definition
Trust	According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995, p. 712), trust is defined as: "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party"	Trustworthiness is established by assessing the trustee's perceived benevolence, capability, and integrity, which serves as the foundation for building trust. Trust can be built through peripheral, central and habitual routes (Torro et al., 2022).
Reciprocity	Reciprocity is defined by Gouldner (1960, p.161) as "a pattern of mutually contingent exchange of gratifications"	Divided into four groups: social bonding, informal reciprocity, emotional reciprocity, and reciprocal services. Reciprocal interaction in social bonding encompasses both verbal and nonverbal forms of reciprocity, such as engaging in compliments, problem-solving together, and shared activities. Informal reciprocity involves personal or impersonal participation, diverse discussion topics, self-disclosure, spontaneous and unplanned agendas. Emotional reciprocity entails the explicit expression of emotions, providing emotional support, and engaging in discussions about emotions. Reciprocal services involve the exchange of concrete and uncodified information, like seeking help, and the act of doing favors for others (Torro et al., 2022).

The model of media synchronicity in organizational social exchange that Torro et al. (2022) made "posits that in ICT-mediated interaction, media synchronicity facilitates the communication patterns of trust and reciprocity and, thus, social exchange" (p.166). Torro et al. (2022) adopts Petty and Cacioppo's (1986 as cited in Torro et al., 2022) and Hung et al.'s (2006 as cited in Torro et al., 2022) idea about how trust is built. It has three routes: *the*

*peripheral route, the central route, and the habitual route.* The peripheral route is used when people are not familiar with each other, and trust is established through presumptions and traits of the person. When people become more familiar with each other, trust is built through the central route, which is based on cognitive trust. Lastly, when people have a strong relationship, trust is formed through the habitual route, where trust building becomes a habit (Hung et al.'s 2004 as cited in Torro et al., 2022; Torro et al., 2022).

Torro et al. (2022) has made three premises based on how trust building can be affected by media capabilities. First one is that “media of higher synchronicity facilitate cognitive trust building more effectively than those of lower synchronicity” (Torro et al., 2022, p.168). They argue that media with faster transmission velocity will lead to quicker information transmission and higher symbol sets, increased social cues, that will lead to better cognitive trust building (Torro et al., 2022). However, media of lower synchronicity can also “emphasize cognition-based trust building as a conveyance process” (Torro et al., 2022, p.168) since media that have higher rehearsability, and reprocessability make it possible to fine tune the message and be re-examined the message again (Torro et al., 2022). In addition, they also argue that “media of lower synchronicity emphasizes trust building via the peripheral route” (Torro et al., p.169). It is relevant for trust building in groups. Media that has higher parallelism, can reach multiple people, enables many peripheral cues to be exposed and evaluated between individuals. Lower number of symbol sets does not lead to as many social cues and slower transmission velocity will entail slower information transmission (Torro et al., 2022).

SET proposes if rules of exchange are followed then after some time relationships will evolve into trusting ones. Part of that exchange rules is reciprocity (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). Reciprocity and trust are connected, and Torro et al. (2022, p. 169) conclude that

“reciprocity is a demonstration of an individual’s trustworthiness”. Reciprocity can be understood as a transaction, something is given and returned (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). Furthermore, they are all divided into separate groups of reciprocity: social bonding, informal reciprocity, emotional reciprocity, and reciprocal services. Detailed explanation of these can be found in table 1.

Each reciprocity group has a premise made by Torro et al. (2022). First one considers social bonding: “reciprocal interaction (social bonding) is facilitated more effectively by a medium of higher synchronicity” (Torro et al., 2022, p. 170). Similar as cognitive trust building, social bonding will also benefit from media with fast transmission and higher symbol sets (Torro et al., 2022). The second premise considers informal communication. They propose that “media synchronicity has nonlinear associations with informal reciprocity” (Torro et al., 2022, p. 171). For lower synchronicity, media that has high rehearsability and reprocessability can lead to making connections more easily. High parallelism can lead to multiple discussion and lower symbol sets will support informal reciprocity (Torro et al., 2022). For higher synchronicity, media with faster transmission and higher symbol sets can enhance informality because it can lead to a more direct personal connection (Torro et al., 2022). The third premise considers emotional reciprocity and media synchronicity also “has nonlinear associations with emotional reciprocity” (Torro et al., 2022, p. 172). So, for lower synchronicity, media with lower symbol sets can lead to more emotional talk that can be consider “safe”, and higher rehearsability and reprocessability can lead to more emotional talk. For higher synchronicity, natural symbol sets can lead to an easier way of expressing emotions and decreased misinterpretation, and higher transmission velocity can lead to faster conflict resolution and could mitigate possible misinterpretations (Torro et al., 2022). The last premise considers reciprocal services, and they argue that “reciprocal services are



facilitated more effectively by a medium of lower synchronicity” (Torro et al., 2022, p. 173).

Higher rehearsability and reprocessability can be tools to cooperate easier and higher parallelism will lead to easier ways of seeking and finding help (Torro et al., 2022).

## **Current Study**

The COVID-19 pandemic created a unique context to study trust, as many people were forced to work from home (Panteli et al., 2022). While trust in a virtual environment has been extensively researched before the pandemic (Gilson et al., 2015), research on remote work regarding trust before the pandemic cannot simply be transferred to the situation during the pandemic (Panteli et al., 2022). Therefore, the hybrid remote work, which has become popular, will also be an interesting area to study as it poses many challenges.

The hybrid work setting has already been somewhat explored in research (e.g., Verma et al., 2023; Fischer & Walker, 2022). Fischer and Walker (2022) examined trust in both virtual and face-to-face workplaces from the employees' perspective. Trust was found to be multidimensional, and an interpersonal connection was found to be more effective in its formation. Little difference was observed between virtual and face-to-face work environments, but those who primarily worked virtually and had limited access to their leaders reported that trust formation required more effort on the leaders' part (Verma et al., 2023).

Communication has been proven to foster trust (Togna, 2014). Strictly digital communication can present certain challenges (Brown et al., 2014). Krehl and Büttgen (2022) made a valuable contribution by examining how digital tools are used by leaders, as research in this area is lacking. Determining which and how many communication tools to use can be challenging for leaders. This thesis aims to build upon Krehl and Büttgen (2022)

and explore how communication can build trust between managers and employees in the hybrid workplace. To evaluate the communication tools, Torro et al.'s (2022) framework for MST and SET will be applied to understand how digital tools can contribute to trust-building.

# Methods

## Qualitative Case Study

This thesis aims to explore how communication can affect trust building between employees and managers in the hybrid workplace. To accomplish this, an exploratory qualitative case study was conducted at a global outsourcing company that provides financial services. A case study can be understood as “an inquiry that focuses on describing, understanding, predicting, and/or controlling the individual (i.e., process, animal, person, household, organization, group, industry, culture, or nationality)” (Woodside, 2010, p. 1). In addition, case studies are often associated with qualitative research method (Woodside, 2010), and are well-suited for exploratory research (Putney, 2010).

Qualitative research is a good method for uncovering people’s thoughts and ideas (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Even though the sample size is smaller in qualitative research, it can still provide some generalisability to other cases (Kvale, 2007). Fischer and Walker (2022) who explored trust in the virtual and face-to-face workplace used a qualitative method and noted that it provided more clarity about trust and confirmed through diaries, which enabled them to get the immediate point of view from the leaders.

Furthermore, exploratory research aims to describe and further investigate a social phenomenon (Treadwell & Davis, 2020), which is relevant for this study. In addition, it takes a constructive point of view. Constructivism holds “that there are multiple interpretations of reality and that the goal of research is to understand how individuals construct reality within their natural context” (Moser & Korstjens, 2017, p. 271).

### ***Sampling***

For this case study, one company was decided as the case. A case study can be one or more cases (Putney, 2010). Due to the scope of this study, studying more than one company would be too extensive and the data would be complex to interpret. To find the appropriate company for the case study, purposive and convenience sampling were used (Bigsby, 2017). Purposive sampling is used to find cases based on criteria and cases that would give useful information (Campbell et al., 2020). Convenience sampling involves using convenience and availability to find participants (Bigsby, 2017). Both convenience and purposive sampling fall under the category of nonprobability sampling, which has its own advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that nonprobability sampling cannot provide generalizability since the sample cannot be considered representative of the population. However, nonprobability sampling is commonly used in exploratory studies, such as this thesis. The overall aim is to describe a communicative phenomenon, not to provide generalizability to a population (Bigsby, 2017). Companies that to my knowledge, worked in a hybrid method, were contacted until one was found and agreed. The selected company for this research is an outsourcing company that provides business services such as accounting, tax, audit. They are a global company with 7000 employees in 158 offices in 7 different countries mainly situated in UK or Nordic countries. This research will only be conducted with the office in Sweden.

Participants for the interview were decided with the HR department of the company. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants inside the company (Bigsby, 2017). The target participants for the study were managers, employees working under said manager and employees working in HR. This is to understand both views from the managers and employees. HR personnel was added to understand the principles that govern the communication guidelines and strategies. Using the characteristics outlined above, the

participants were recruited and selected by the HR department. The HR department was given a cover letter with information about the study and the consent form (see Appendix 1) to recruit the participants, so the participants would be informed about the study. The sample size for the interviews landed on 11 participants. Overview of the participants can be found in table 2. For qualitative research 3-16 participants are the guideline for a single study, where individuals can voice their opinions and be able to make cross-case generalities while also not having too much data (Robinson, 2014).

**Table 2.**  
*Overview of The Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Position
P1	28	Female	HR
P2	36	Female	HR
P3	46	Female	Manager
P4	37	Female	Manager
P5	35	Female	Manager
P6	47	Female	Employee
P7	28	Male	Employee
P8	49	Male	Employee
P9	52	Female	Employee
P10	54	Female	Employee
P11	48	Female	Employee

### ***Semi-structured Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were the method to collect the data. From an interview the participants can themselves describe their experiences and opinions (Kvale, 2007). Semi-

structured interviews follow a structure and themes but there is not a particular order that has to be followed, instead it can follow what is said by the participant. It also allows for follow-up questions on what is said by the interviewees (Roulston & Choi, 2018). The nature of semi-structured interviews allows for flexibility, which is important for this research as it enables the interviewer to delve deeper into details that were not considered before (Bryman, 2012). In total, 11 interviews were conducted between March 20th and April 3rd, within a two-week time frame. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Each participant was contacted through email and sent a link to the Zoom meeting. The interviews were conducted in both Swedish and English and lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. Each interview was video, and audio recorded and followed the interview guide.

### ***Interview Guide***

Furthermore, even if semi-structured interviews should be flexible, it is also important to maintain a level of consistency between interviews in order to be able to compare and contrast the responses from different participants. To achieve this, an interview guide was created, that the interviews followed (Bryman, 2012). Interview guides for semi-structured interviews are like a script that outlines a couple of topics and some suggested question in those topics (Kvale, 2007). Three different interviews guide (see Appendix 2) was made for the different target groups of the interview: managers, employees, and HR. They are all similar as they cover the same themes. The only differences are that they are adapted to each group, so the questions were tailored to each group to elicit relevant responses.

The questions were made with previous literature and the theoretical framework by Torro et al. (2022) in mind. The articles by Fisher and Walker (2022), Krehl and Büttgen (2022), and Tucker et al. (2023) were the main articles that gave the inspiration for the questions. Before starting to ask questions in the interview Kvale (2007) mentions that a

brief introduction should be made about the study. Additionally, after the interviews been made, there should be a debriefing, where the participant will be given an opportunity to ask any question. These two parts were included in the interview guide. Finally, to ensure that the questions were easily understood by participants, the questions were also adjusted to an everyday language the participants would understand (Kvale, 2007). A pilot study was also made to ensure that the questions would be understandable. A pilot study can have multiple functions, one is to understand how comprehensive it is, another to focus on logistical issue like time management (Persaud, 2010). The pilot study for this study found that some questions should be reformulated and added. The interviews followed this interview guide but changed or added questions when it deemed relevant. The interview ended when all the themes from the interview guide had been covered, and participants had no further comments on the topic.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

As interviews can lead to many ethical and moral issues, ethical considerations have been considered throughout every step of the study (Kvale, 2007). Kvale (2007) has outlined the possible ethical concerns at the seven steps of research. First three considers the initial processes of the research. First one is that the purpose of the study should have a scientific purpose as well as seek out for an improvement for the situation researched (Kvale, 2007). This thesis aims to investigate how trust dynamics is affected by communication between employees and managers in the current hybrid workplace situation to further expand the current research, but also provide information for how organisations can navigate through, as well as hopefully improve the hybrid working situation. The second considers informed consent (Kvale, 2007). Before the interview the participants were informed about the study

as well as their rights through the consent form (see Appendix 1). For instance, participants were informed of their rights from their anonymity and confidentiality will be kept. The participants were required to sign the consent form before the interview took place. Third considers the interview process, that it can be stressful and have consequences (Kvale, 2007). As can be seen in the interview guide, the interview will start with introductions and warming up questions to ensure that the participants will feel comfortable.

The fourth and following steps consider the ethical issues after the interviews been made, from the transcription to the reporting (Kvale, 2007). The participant's confidentiality and anonymity are protected throughout the whole research process. The data provided from the participants can be considered sensitive for them and for the organisations that they work at, since they are providing with information about their experience and viewpoints from the workplace. Therefore, any indication of the participants identity will be removed, and they will be referred to as participant 1 instead of their names. The transcription will also accurately reflect what the participants say.

The interviews were held in both Swedish and English, as was best suited for the participants. Quotes that were deemed relevant for analysis in Swedish were translated into English. Translation can involve a number of ethical issues (Gawlewicz, 2019). When something is translated the translator have to consider how they should represent the person. Furthermore, translating means that the meaning of what is being said can be changed. To counter these issues, the researcher has to be clear about how the material were translated (Gawlewicz, 2019). After the material were transcribed and sorted into themes, the important parts were manually translated from Swedish into English by the researcher. It started with a literal translation, and then into a freer translation so the



meaning of what is being said is captured (Gawlewicz, 2019), and examples of that can be found in Appendix 3.

### ***Data Analysis***

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a common qualitative analysis method used to identify themes in data and addressing research questions. The advantage outlined for this approach is its flexibility, namely that it is not tied to any specific theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-step process for thematic analysis, a process that goes from coding to establishing themes.

First step involves familiarizing oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step is for the researcher to become familiar with the data in depth. It is recommended to read through everything at least once to understand the data to eventually produce codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcribing the data is a way that that can be achieved, by immersing yourself in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to become familiar with the data, all of the 11 interviews were manually transcribed in a Word document, meaning each interview was listened to and read through during that process.

Second step entails generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the familiarization, the initial things that has been underlined are turned into initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 88) defines codes as: "codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst". Coding can be either data-driven, theory-driven or driven around certain questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Repeated patterns across data will turn into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clark (2006) share advice for the initial coding stage which is to code as many patterns as possible, keep a little of the surrounding data and that codes can be coded multiple times. The initial

coding process was made manually made through a Google Doc and mind maps. The coding process was theory driven. In Table 3 examples of initial codes is shown, and more contextual data was retained to enhance understanding.

**Table 3. Examples of coding**

Illustrative quotes	Code
<p>I mean not 100%, I think not because if I were to communicate with written communication with my employees only they wouldn't know, no I think they wouldn't trust it I might just as well be a very well behaved AI, I think it's important to see the person</p> <p>- P3</p>	<p>Preferences for having face-to-face communication for trust, and written communication is not trustworthy</p>
<p>I think she trust me especially if we work with oppin and that's a system where we put our work in and we have to put our work in there so if I work 8 hours she will see you what I have done in my 8 hours, if I haven't done it, well then she will also know so in that in that part I think she she trusts us and in our work or otherwise she will bring it up in one to one or yeah on other occasions</p> <p>- P7</p>	<p>Other resources, like the system, leads to trust</p>

Third step involves turning those codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codes will be divided into main themes, sub themes, be discarded or sorted into something where does not fit anywhere (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were searched for with theory

and research questions in mind. Two major themes were found in this step with three sub themes in each part.

In the fourth step those themes will be reviewed to the earlier steps so they will be consistent in every step (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When the themes are reviewed it can be found that some themes do not have enough support, or new themes are found (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial themes were reviewed again through the program NVivo, and some sub-themes were changed and removed as they did not have enough consistency or support. The final main themes were divided into two, one that found that communication support trust, and one that found that communication do not support trust. First theme had three sub-themes and the second two sub-themes and descriptions of these can be found in Appendix 5.

In the fifth step the themes will be more refined and given names (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The essence of the themes will be identified, and a name will be given that captures what that is. Followingly, the sixth and last part involves producing the report and give support for the themes found (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes developed from these previous steps is presented in a clear way with quotes that strengthens the arguments.

## Findings

Two main themes were established: (1) communication derived trust and (2) non-communication derived trust. The first main theme has three sub-themes that explain communicative strategies that can build trust more effectively in the hybrid workplace. The second main theme discusses trust that was reportedly built through other means than communication in the hybrid workplace and has two sub-themes that explain them.

**Table 4.** Summary of the main themes and the sub-themes

Main themes	Communication derived trust	Non-communication derived trust
Sub-themes	Media of high synchronicity Reciprocal relationship building Communication strategy	Situational trust-building Support trust-building

### Communication derived trust

The first major theme discusses how communication can affect the trust at the hybrid workplace. The hybrid workplace makes for a different context for communication: “The most challenging thing is to lead hybrid because the communication is very different from when you are meeting someone in person or when you are meeting it on the screen” (P4). As a manager, it needs to be remembered that the employees can be in the office or at the home at the same time: “You need to always be like aware of that you have, that I have employees on the office and at home so I need to be in both places” (P4). Participant six described how that it can be a struggle of keeping track of everyone: “It's more everybody is

everywhere sometimes it's easy to forget that someone didn't get the same information as everybody else" (P6).

The company has a policy of working three days in the office and two days at home for the hybrid working method. The company wants to give their employees their freedom and flexibility. Participant one and participant two describes how this policy works:

So our policy is at least three days a week in the office and two days at home and you are free to choose which days you want to come in but we recommend that you try to come in the same time as your colleagues or manager (P1).

We talk a lot about the core with why we want people to be in office, we see so much upcomings with that but we also see that people need, after the pandemic we see that people need a more flexible way to work so we think that's a good balance (P2).

It is generally followed by the employees, but some are at the office two days a week, and some are there more often: "I would say like averages maybe two days from three days to two and half in average" (P1). Which days the employees are in the office can depend on some things. The manager in the team has decided one mandatory day in the week where everyone should be at the office to see each other and have meetings: "We started with mandatory days so we had Thursdays like everybody was going into the office at the same time" (P4). The rest of the days the employees can decide themselves. Although sometimes some employees can be sick and then do not come on the mandatory days so it is a possibility that you will not meet your team members for a while: "It could be that you are in different days so there could be someone in the group that you actually have suddenly not physically seen in three weeks" (P10).

The hybrid working method is characterized by working both remote and in the office, and as mentioned for some participants, this could be a challenge. The following sections will discuss how communication during this context can build trust.

### ***Media of high synchronicity***

This sub-theme summarizes some of the participants, both managers and employees, preferences for media of high synchronicity, primarily face-to-face communication, in relation to building trust. It is reported that when you see someone in person it is easier to communicate: "I prefer a personal meeting in every instance, partly because it is much easier to get the information across, in a video meeting there is a lot of communication that is lost " (P8). It is also preferred since it is faster, because if you use any other communication tool, the communication will take longer time: "If something happens that is problematic, which has happened, the communication routes will be instantly much longer" (P5).

It is reported that one part of why face-to-face communication build trust is due to the visibility of the person: "Yeah I think you create more trust by seeing each other physically, if it only were chat then I don't think you would have the same trust" (P10). It is the part where you can see the body language that makes the difference: "I do prefer the personal meeting because you can see the whole person in another way, you can see the body language in another way" (P9). Participant three describes further that only written communication would not be trustworthy and underlines that the personal meeting is preferred:

If I were to communicate with written communication with my employees only, they wouldn't know no, I think they wouldn't trust it I might just as well be a very well behaved AI, I think it's important to see the person (P3).

After face-to-face communication, video communication is the second option to build trust due to its similarity to face-to-face communication: "I think it at least works almost as good, that you book a time and connect through the screen" (P9). It is also said that it is different from face-to-face communication:

When you see each other like we are now in a meeting online then, it's also you have a little bit more of a distance and it's one step closer to personal contact but still not, you can still just click, you can hide your camera, you can just interrupt the meeting, it's more difficult to just step out of an office (P3).

Moreover, written online communication is not viewed as trustworthy, due to the risk of misinterpretation: "There is risks for misinterpretation and the trust can be affected by that, like because if I get a feeling today that my manager is angry at me now, then maybe I will be more withdrawn and maybe won't answer" (P8). Participant eight discusses other communication tools and primarily believes that it is not possible to build trust without face-to-face communication, but then shares an instance with a colleague where it was possible:

I could never build a relationship to a person that I only have over video link or chat or, although I worked with a colleague in Rumania through many years before she quit, and we have kept some contact through private mail after, and like I have never met her (P8).

Furthermore, participant eight discusses the possibility to build a relationship but comes to the conclusion that it would take longer time and cannot measure to one you build in person: "You can build that but I want to say that it takes much longer time and it can't compare to a relationship you build to a person you meet in person" (P8).

### ***Reciprocal relationship building***

The second sub-theme discusses reciprocity. Building trust is also related to reciprocity, meaning building a connection through discussing other things non-related to work, emotions, and helping each other. Some participants acknowledge this, and explains that building a relationship is easier in person: "It does take longer time if you do not see each other physically, just about to say, you don't eat lunch together in that way or drink a coffee or have that small talk that builds that relationship" (P9). They have one-to-one meetings between the managers and the employees where they can discuss different things about work and non-work-related things. For participant three those meeting is way to build trust: "We have by weekly meetings one-on-one and I talk about what it is what is important and what happens in their day-to-day life and so that's an important tool for me to build trust" (P3).

For conversations that relates to emotions and difficult topics is almost always wanted to have in person for both managers and employees: "I think that it's very important to see each other face to face and so for instance if you're going to have a difficult conversation, I think it's always preferred to see each other face to face" (P3). For the employee's perspective, participant six explains: "I wouldn't write an e-mail back to my manager so I think I wouldn't share that we unless I am physically near" (P6). Usually, the one-to-one meetings are the place for discussing those types of topics and participant five describes how it is beneficial to do it in person:

Yes, we only have it face-to-face just because I can better read how they are and if it is something that is not said, but I think as said before that we or those in my team are good at sharing if it is something private or something they think about and I think it is just because we talk at the office and not by the screen (P5).



For informal talk, it is also easier to do it face-to-face since it is more accessible: "I think it's also easier on the, on the office because then we go to lunch together or we maybe go to the coffee machine together then it's more natural to talk other things than work" (P4). However, it can also happen over other communication tools: "The most common is when we are talking about other things I would say is on the office but it can happen on screen as well" (P4).

Cooperative task is even more of a scale than informal talk, and even if there could be a preference for doing it in person at the office, it can also depend on the problem itself:

If we are in the office, so then we, well it depends if it's something longer, then we try to find a room so we don't disturb anyone else, but if it is something short then you jump over to the others desk or something, when you're home, yeah then we book something and do it over the screen and sometimes it can be enough with a chat, it depends on what it is (P10).

### ***Communication strategy***

The third sub-theme brings up a communication strategy that could build trust. It is a pattern that managers could feel that the lack of communication from employees could lead to that the trust is broken. Managers were more inclined to not trust their employees in the team than vice versa. One aspect that could lead them not trusting their employees is lack of communication. Some participants, even though they were not managers, they had a leader role in the team, and they were also concerned about this. Participant nine underlines that the lack of communication can affect the trust: "It is rather when there is a lack of communication which makes that the trust is broken" (P9). For participant ten it is not as important through what communication tool the communication goes through, as long as it is any type of communication:

But as long as we talk with each other either through writing or speaking then I think we can keep the trust and it doesn't matter if it is online or in person so, not for my part at least (P10).

Participant three describes that they would like their employees to inform about their whereabouts when they are working remote:

If you say that okay I have to leave the my home office for a couple of hours during the day to do something else that's fine but, I want to know because if someone asks me where is this person I want to be able to respond that we have an agreement (P3).

For participant five, this is not an issue since the employees in the team already implement this, so it makes it easier to trust them:

I have very, yeah but good colleagues and employees in that way, they are very good at yeah like writing in our group chat if they go away for example so it makes it easier for me to feel safe with where they are (P5).

## **Non-communication derived trust**

The second main theme discusses that some participants reports that trust can be built outside of communication: "I wouldn't say that the way we communicate affects the trust between us somehow" (P7). There were mostly employees who thought that communication has no relation to trust. These participants still would prefer to talk face-to-face for the most part, however they would think that trust would have no relation to communication. Instead, other factors would be related to building trust. Participant six describes it:

I don't think it has an effect on my trust for my manager [...] if we are in the office we talk to each other during the day, well, if was it from home it could be days without

communication but I don't think I trust my manager less for that but we are not as close and sharing, not sharing that same way but I don't think it has any effect on the way how I trust her (P6).

All of the participants reported that they trusted each other. It is based on different reasons and these coming sub-themes will report some other reasons than communication.

### ***Situational trust-building***

The first sub-theme brings up other things, like the circumstances or situation, to build trust. First of all, it is reported by participant three that the company policy helps to be able to trust that the work is being done:

But also, I am very much helped by the general, policy at the office or at the our company is that we are talking very much about self leadership meaning that I have the responsibility for performing my own tasks and ask for help if I require help (P3).

Followingly it is reported by participant seven that the company's system that tracks time when you are working helps to ensure the trust:

I think she trust me especially if we work with oppin and that's a system where we put our work in and we have to put our work in there so if I work 8 hours she will see you what I have done in my 8 hours, if I haven't done it, well then she will also know so in that in that part I think she trusts us and in our work (P7).

It is also reported by participant 11 that the circumstance, meaning being able to work remote, has helped the trust:

No but maybe it got better, yes but it actually has gotten better, it has shown that it is possible to trust your employees even if you do not monitor them, you are not in the same place, you do not have the same supervision on everyone, on all the employees,

in despite of that all the work has been done in time and we have delivered everything in time so the trust has been strengthen I think (P11).

Participant 10 is on the same note as participant 11 and also think that the situation during the pandemic helped build trust in the group:

Yeah so it probably turned to the better when it only was digitally and then it has stayed a little when it turned hybrid, in some ways it is easier because when we were only in the office it wasn't just as easy (P10).

### ***Support trust-building***

The second sub-theme concerns around employees' opinions for what the manager should do for them to be trustworthy. First of all, it is reported by several employees that availability is important:

"For me it is really important to have a present manager, because when you work remote it is important that I get the help when I need it, when I'm at home otherwise the working day is just ticking on" (P8).

Availability and that managers support them is one reason for employees to feel trust for their managers: "She is supportive and available I would say" (P6). The managers also report that they are trying to make themselves available:

I try to show myself on the office so because they are they are also getting into the office different days in the week so maybe it's Name going in on Mondays and Name on Wednesday so for me it's very important to see everyone just to, they build up this bond (P4).

Further, participant 10 explains that the reason the manager is trustworthy is because the manager will help out when it is needed: "There is like always time so there I always trust that she will listen and be there, you will never feel invisible" (P10). Moreover, trust

can be visualized when the manager does not try and control what they do: "I have had previous managers that has like micromanaged and almost read every email before you send it away and that is not trust for me then, but it is not like that now, absolutely not" (P9). In addition, it can be not asking questions about their work: "She doesn't like constantly ask me questions about everything I do because that would make me probably feel that she doesn't trust that I'm doing my job" (P6).

## Discussion

In regard to RQ1, how communication can affect trust between managers and employees in the hybrid workplace this study has found both support for that communication can build trust and evidence against it. The findings both have similarities and differences with previous research (Togna, 2014). The findings in this report suggest that: (1) media of high synchronicity can build trust, and (2) other aspects than communication can relate to building trust.

Participants reported that in the hybrid working environment, communication and other factors can affect trust building. These are reported in the major themes and sub-themes of the report (Table 4). Togna's (2014) study pointed out that communication can affect trust, but the findings in this report are less conclusive. Participants' reports suggest that face-to-face communication can enhance and establish trust, which is consistent with Togna's (2014) and Fischer and Walker's (2022) research, where interpersonal connection and face-to-face communication were found to improve trust. However, this study also found that some participants use other aspects to measure and build trust, such as the company's systems and the circumstances. These participants believe that communication is important, but it does not significantly impact trust. This suggests that trust can be developed through various means.

Furthermore, employees generally perceive their managers as trustworthy, primarily due to their availability and support. Overall, they desire managers who are available, who can answer questions, give support and are not controlling. These reports are partly in line with Soderberg and Romney (2022) who, found that leaders should give feedback, ask questions, coordinate tasks, be an active listener, avoid gossip, and be authentic to foster

trust. Additionally, participants in the report did not consider communicative behaviour as a factor when evaluating their managers' trustworthiness.

Togna's (2014) report focuses on the aspect of commitment and trust to the organization. In an organization, it is possible to have managers at different levels, and while it is not specified in Togna's (2014) research, it is plausible that the study refers to higher-level managers. In this thesis, the managers were positioned directly above the employees in the team, resulting in more frequent contact. Higher level managers employees would usually have less contact with, but they play a crucial role in communicate the strategic direction of the organisation. Welch & Jackson (2007) claim that employees need to understand the strategic direction in order to trust the senior managers. Consequently, the different types of managers may impact how trust is established between managers and employees.

In regard to RQ2, what communicative strategies lead to building trust, the findings are partly in line with Torro et al.'s (2022) framework of social exchange theory and media synchronicity theory. Torro et al.'s (2022) framework is new, and they have based the framework on theory instead of testing it. In this way, this thesis has also tested this framework. The findings in this report suggest that trust is built through (1) media of higher synchronicity, high symbols sets and high transmission velocity, and (2) informing about the whereabouts.

The participants report that especially media of high synchronicity, high symbols sets and high transmission velocity, meaning face-to-face communication can build trust. Many participants thought that face-to-face communication was the medium that led to better trust due to the fast transmission and the visibility of the person. Thesis reports are in line with Torro et al. (2022) who have argued that cognitive trust building will be beneficial of

media with faster transmission velocity and higher symbol sets. Moreover, video meetings were the second-best option. Furthermore, are also in line with Krehl and Büttgen (2022) and Tucker et al. (2023) that video conferencing has become more popular, and that visual computer communication will lead to better trust than non-visual. Video-meetings also have the same transmission velocity and almost the same symbols sets, only a little less. In addition, reciprocity, closely linked to trust, plays a crucial role in building relationships, and media with higher synchronicity, symbol sets, and transmission velocity are preferred for this purpose. Such media allow for easier and more accessible communication, facilitating the development of personal connections.

Furthermore, Torro et al. (2022) suggest that media of lower synchronicity that has high rehearsability and reprocessability can also build cognitive trust. However, participants held mixed opinions regarding the ability of online written communication to foster trust. While one participant managed to establish trust with a colleague through written communication, it was acknowledged that this method requires more time. The highlighted issues with chat-based communication include the potential for misinterpretation of messages and the potential for conflicts to arise. There is an indication that trust building could be done through written communication. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, there is a possibility that trust is built different with different managers, the same could apply with colleagues. Your closely working team members differ from other colleagues. Torro et al.'s (2022) framework proposes that using media with lower synchronicity can facilitate trust building among individuals who are not familiar with each other, but it is also more suited for group settings. Although, the group setting was not investigated further in this report, but the premise might be aligned with this.



There are findings in this report both align and differ with Torro et al.'s (2022) framework. While Torro et al. (2022) suggest that reciprocal reciprocity is best built through media of high synchronicity, the participants in this study reported that other mediums could be used. Additionally, while Torro et al. (2022) suggest that the framework can help mitigate limited face-to-face communication, this study found that face-to-face communication is still the most preferred and effective form of communication for building trust. Furthermore, trust-building through written communication may be time-consuming. In organizational contexts where teams need to connect and meet deadlines, waiting for trust to develop may not be feasible. The framework may require adaptation to suit different social contexts, as it may not apply to every situation. For instance, online communication may be enough to establish trust in casual or distant relationships.

Moreover, a communicative strategy was identified that can enhance trust between managers and employees. The characteristics of the hybrid working method is that the work can be in the office and remotely. In this company, their policy is three days in the office and two days at home. However, although adherence to the policy varies among teams. For instance, there is a possibility that you will not see your team members for a while. Not seeing team members regularly can negatively impact trust. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to receive communication from employees informing them about their whereabouts. Lack of communication can lead to a breakdown in trust between employees and managers. Managers can foster trust more easily by being aware of their employees' location and work activities.

Furthermore, the process of building trust differs for employees and managers. For the managers, the communication from the employees builds trust. As for the employees, they most likely want to know that they can get help when needed. Although, employees could

also benefit from the same communicative strategy managers would like. One participant stressed the importance of receiving timely assistance. During remote work, visibility becomes crucial as employees are unaware of whether managers are available or occupied. By communicating their availability, managers can assist employees in knowing when they can receive support.

## **Practical Implications**

This study can provide practical implications since trust has been identified as a predictor of commitment (Heavey et al., 2011), with satisfaction being more likely to stay at the company (Cunningham & MacGregor, 2000). Additionally, trust has been shown to have organizational benefits (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Hybrid remote work is likely to stay as it has provided many benefits, which entails that the findings of this study offer valuable insights into how this work arrangement can influence trust. These findings can assist managers and employees in building trust within this working environment.

Firstly, face-to-face communication between managers and employees can be essential to build a trusting relationship. Therefore, it is important for individuals to meet in person and have shared office days. The findings suggest that communication methods that foster relationships, for instance, emotional discussions and informal talk is more accessible in person.

Secondly, the findings indicate that managers expect employees to keep them informed about their whereabouts at all times. The one aspect that could lead to that the trust would be broken is the lack of communication. The hybrid working method allows for working in the office and remote, and when working remote the visibility aspect of seeing

what everyone is doing disappears. Managers should remind their employees to communicate their whereabouts, and employees should keep it in mind as well.

Finally, the findings suggest that employees expect their managers to be available and supportive when needed, while also not trying to control their actions. As previously mentioned, the lack of visibility in a remote work setting may prevent employees from realizing when their manager is occupied with other tasks. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to communicate their availability to employees, so that they do not have to wait or wonder when they can receive assistance.

## **Suggestions For Future Research**

Future research could explore how new relationships can be built in the hybrid workplace. Those who are relatively new at the company express concerns about the difficulties they face in getting to know everyone. Some employ a strategy of being present at the office every day to facilitate acquaintance. Torro et al. (2022) also based their framework on the premise that the level of familiarity among colleagues affects communication routes when establishing trust. This aspect could be further investigated, particularly in terms of how trust is developed and the time it takes for new employees to establish it. Additionally, future research could explore into other hybrid policies and their equivalence in terms of trust-building principles.

Furthermore, future research could delve deeper into the differences among communication tools. Torro et al. (2022) suggest further investigation into how system quality and system outputs facilitate the conditions for social exchange. They also propose exploring the distinctions between email and electronic conferencing, despite their identical nature, as they possess different conditions for social exchange. This study reveals

similarities and differences between face-to-face communication and video communication, which could be further investigated.

Moreover, future research could examine how trust is developed with different managers in the hybrid workplace. The findings suggest that different types of managers can influence the development of trust. Leaders play a vital role in trust-building in remote work (Kayworth & Leidner, 2000; Furumo et al., 2012). Comparing managers at various levels could provide further confirmation of the findings presented in this report.

## **Limitations of Study**

This study has several limitations. Interviews as a method have been criticized. They are criticized for not being scientific enough, being too subjective and biased, and for the lack of generalizability due to the small number of subjects (Kvale, 2007). Qualitative research is often compared to quantitative research, which is characterized by testing hypotheses, measuring numbers, and involving a larger number of subjects. In contrast, qualitative research is exploratory in nature, analysing responses, and often has a smaller sample size (Kvale, 2007). However, these criticisms are not considered problematic as the aim of this study is to delve into the participants' perspectives and opinions regarding trust and communication.

This case study focuses on a single company, so the results may provide an indication for other companies, but they cannot be generalized to every organization. The relevance of the results will depend, for example, on the hybrid work policy in place. The policy determines how frequently workers interact with each other, which may affect the applicability of the findings. Furthermore, the results will only be relevant as long as companies choose to continue working in this manner. Additionally, although it is a global

company, this study only interviewed workers in the Swedish offices, so the results may only be applicable within the Swedish cultural context. Moreover, the majority of the participants were women, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other gender groups.

## Conclusion

This thesis has contributed to understanding how trust is built in a hybrid work environment. It has explored the topic of building trust in the hybrid workplace between managers and employees and the role that communication plays in this process. The analysis addresses how communication can affect trust, while also identifying other factors that influence trust. The study highlights that using media with high synchronicity, high symbol sets, and high transmission velocity can contribute to trust-building. Additionally, it suggests that providing regular updates about one's whereabouts can help address the lack of communication that can be experienced during hybrid work. However, some participants emphasized other factors, such as the ability to work remotely, as important measures for trust-building. Followingly, managers and employees had differing opinions on how trust is built. Managers emphasized the importance of knowing their employees' whereabouts, while employees expressed the desire for managers to be available and provide assistance when needed.

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# Appendix 1. Consent form



## UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Consent to Participate in Research

### **Internal Communication Effect on Trust Dynamics Between Leaders and Employees in The Hybrid Workplace**

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about how internal communication affects the trust relationship between leaders and employees in the hybrid workplace. This study is part of the final degree project for the MSc in Communication at the University of Gothenburg. Linn Gyllenhammar Byström, under the supervision of Aleksandre Asatiani, Associate Professor at the University of Gothenburg, is conducting the study and asking you to participate in this project.

**Project Description – Activities and Time Commitment:** If you decide to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Completing the interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes. It will be conducted online via Zoom in English.

**Benefits and Risks:** There is little risk to you in participating in this project. The current research is considered to be a low-risk research by the directions of the European regulations (Directorate-General for Research Science. Economy and Society, 2010). A low-risk research means that you will not be doing anything dangerous. However, I might ask questions which make you feel uncomfortable. In case you feel uncomfortable, you can either skip the question, or opt out of the study by not finishing the interview. There won't be extra, direct benefits to you for taking part in this project. Participation in the interview is voluntary and therefore is not paid. However, by participating in the interview you will be helping me to understand how internal communication can affect trust dynamics between leaders and employees. This information can be potentially used to help improve communication and trust in the hybrid workplace.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** This research does not use sensitive data according to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). As we will not inquire about sensitive data or data which allows for your recognition, the data can be considered to be anonymous. I will inquire, however, about some personal information such as gender, age, and your position in the workplace. This data will be used for analysing the characteristics of the population.

The interview will be recorded in a password-protected format and stored in a password-protected dedicated computer. Linn Gyllenhammar Byström will be the only person who will know the passwords to access the files. My supervisor and the academic personnel appointed to control the quality of the thesis project will be the only individuals who can require me to gain access to those files for academic research purposes only. The data collected during the study will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis project. Your responses will be reported in the thesis in an anonymous manner. No names or other identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting data. The results of the research might be publicly shared by means of articles. If you want to get access to your transcripts that will be possible, as well as retracting any statement.

**Voluntary Participation:** You can freely choose to take part or not take part in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits for either decision. Even if you agree to participate, you can stop at any time.

**Age of Requirements:** The EU GDPR 2016/679 regulations regarding data only allow us to gather and store information from people below the age of 18 years with the explicit consent of their parents; therefore, people below 18 years old are not allowed to participate from our study as we cannot ensure parental consent from these people.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this study, please email Linn Gyllenhammar Byström (gusbyslia@student.gu.se) and/ or Associate Professor Aleksandre Asatiani (aleksandre.asatiani@ait.gu.se).

**Consent:**

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information presented to me in this document. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, asked questions and had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from it without giving any reason.
- I am 18 years old or older.

By agreeing to sign this consent form, you understand the purpose, risks, and benefits of this research study and you agree to the terms and conditions for the current research. Your questions and/or concerns have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Name and last name of the participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_/03/2023

## **Appendix 2. Interview guide**

Version 1 for HR

### Introduction

The interviewee will be welcomed to the interview and be informed of the background and purpose of the interview. Furthermore, the interviewee will be told about the process of the interview and the approximate time (30-60minutes). Most importantly, the interviewee will be informed of the rights in regards to confidentiality and right to refrain from answering questions or stopping the interview at any time.

### Background questions

- Could you state your age?
- Could you state your gender?
- What is your position in the company? Could you describe what you do?
- How long have you been working for the company?
- How do you in HR work? What are your responsibilities/ assignments/ work tasks?
- How many of you are there?
- Could you describe the company?
- How are the teams structured?

### Hybrid working method

- What are the companies regulations for the hybrid working method?
- What was the decision based on?
- How much do you work from home versus at the company?



- How much is everyone working remote or in the office?
- What is your impression of the employees' opinions of hybrid working?
- Is it something you will keep for the long term?
- Do you think hybrid working method works well?
- Has the hybrid working method come with any issues that you can notice in HR?

Trust definition:

Trust is defined as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).

More simply: Trust is when someone is willing to take a risk and be vulnerable by relying on another person to do something they expect them to do, even if they can't control or monitor the other person's actions.

Theme 1 Trust general

- What is your impression of the trust in between the managers and the employees?
- How can you tell?
- What roles does HR play in forming trust among employees?
- How do you support your employees and managers?
- What do you (if anything) implement in order to make that trust stronger?
- Describe an instance when you felt like your employees and leaders show trust to each other.

- Describe an instance when that trust was broken.
- Do you have an impression that employees share a strong bond?
- What role does HR play in making the employees share a strong bond together?
- Does the hybrid workplace affect the trust?
- Comparing to being face-to-face while being remote, does that have a difference?

### Theme 2 Communication general

- What is your perception about the communication among managers - employees? Is it good? How do you know? How can you tell?
- Which communication tools is used to communicate in the company?
- How effective do you feel like the communication tools are?
- How does the hybrid workplace affect the communication?
- How can you/ what can you do to support your managers/ employees if they feel like they struggle with the hybrid communication strategies?
- How does informal talk exist in the company? Is it still as present online as in the office?
- Do you in HR encourage informal talk?

### Theme 3 Communication capabilities and trust

- Do you think communication can affect trust?
- Do you think that the certain characteristics of communication tools affect trust building?
- Is face-to-face communication better, or email, text, phone calls? Does it matter?

### Finishing questions

- Would you like to give any comment on the topic we have discussed or anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any final questions?

### Swedish version

Den intervjuande kommer att välkomnas till intervjun och informeras om bakgrunden och syftet med intervjun och studien. Dessutom kommer den intervjuande att informeras om processen för intervjun och den ungefärliga tiden (30-60 minuter). Det viktigaste är att den intervjuande kommer att informeras om deras rättigheter och att konfidentialiteten kommer att hållas och att de har rätt att avstå från att svara på frågor eller avsluta intervjun när som helst.

### Bakgrundsförfrågningar:

- Kan du ange din ålder?
- Kan du ange ditt kön?
- Vad är din position i företaget? Kan du beskriva vad du gör?
- Hur länge har du arbetat för företaget?
- Hur arbetar du inom HR? Vilka är dina ansvarsområden/ uppgifter/ arbetsuppgifter?
- Kan du beskriva företaget?
- Hur är teamen strukturerade?

### Hybrid arbetsmetod:

- Vilka är företagets regler för hybrid arbetsmetod?
- Vad var beslutet baserat på?
- Hur mycket arbetar du hemifrån jämfört med på företaget?
- Hur mycket arbetar alla på distans eller på kontoret?
- Vad är din uppfattning om de anställdas åsikter om hybrid arbetsmetod?
- Är det något du kommer att behålla på lång sikt?
- Tror du att hybrid arbetsmetod fungerar bra?
- Har ni i HR märkt av några problem som hybrid arbete har kommit med?

### Förtroende definition:

Mer enkelt uttryckt: Tillit är när någon är villig att ta en risk och vara sårbar genom att lita på en annan person att göra något de förväntar sig att de ska göra, även om de inte kan kontrollera eller övervaka den andra personens handlingar.

### Tema 1: Generellt förtroende

- Vad är ditt intryck av förtroendet mellan chefer och anställda?
- Hur märker du av det?
- Vilken roll spelar HR i att skapa förtroende mellan anställda?
- Vad implementerar du (om något) för att stärka det förtroendet?
- Hur ger ni stöd till era chefer och medarbetare?

- Beskriv en situation när du kände att dina anställda och ledare visade förtroende för varandra.
- Beskriv en situation när det förtroendet bröts.
- Har du intryck av att anställda har en stark samhörighet?
- Vilken roll spelar HR i att göra anställda dela en stark samhörighet tillsammans?
- Påverkar hybridarbete förtroendet?
- Jämfört med att vara ansikte mot ansikte när man är på distans, har det en skillnad?
- Kommer anställda och chefer med klagomål?

## Tema 2: Generell kommunikation

- Vad är din uppfattning om kommunikationen mellan chefer och anställda? Är den bra? Hur vet du det? Hur kan du berätta det?
- Vilka kommunikationsverktyg används för att kommunicera inom företaget?
- Vem beslutar om det? Hur?
- Hur effektiva tycker du att kommunikationsverktygen är?
- Hur påverkar hybridarbete kommunikationen?
- Kommer anställda och chefer med klagomål? Något som inte funkar?

- Hur kan ni/ vad kan ni göra för att ge stöd till era medarbetare om de känner att du skulle ha problem med hybridkommunikation?
- Hur ser det ut med informella samtal? Finns det lika mycket online som på företaget?
- Uppmuntrar ni i HR informella samtal?

### Tema 3: Kommunikationsförmåga och förtroende

- Tror du att kommunikation kan påverka förtroende?
- Tror du att vissa egenskaper hos kommunikationsverktyg påverkar förtroendeuppbyggnad?
- Är ansikte mot ansikte kommunikation bättre, eller e-post, text, telefonsamtal? Spelar det någon roll?
- Kommer anställda och chefer med klagomål?

### Avslutande frågor

- Vill du ge någon kommentar om ämnet vi har diskuterat eller något du vill lägga till?
- Har du några slutliga frågor?

## Version 2 for Leaders

### Introduction

The interviewee will be welcomed to the interview and informed of the background and purpose of the interview as part of a study. Furthermore, the interviewee will be told about the process of the interview and the approximate time (30-60minutes). Most importantly, the interviewee will be informed of the rights in regards to confidentiality and right to refrain from answering questions or stopping the interview at any time.

### Background questions

- Could you state your age?
- Could you state your gender?
- What is your position in the company?
- How many employees are in your team?
- How long have you been working for the company?
- How much do you work from home versus at the office?
- How do you like working in a hybrid method?
- What is the best and the worst part of it?

### Trust definition:

Trust is defined as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).

More simply: Trust is when someone is willing to take a risk and be vulnerable by relying on another person to do something they expect them to do, even if they can't control or monitor the other person's actions.

#### Theme 1 Trust general

- Do you trust your employees that work in your team?
  - o Why, why not?
- Do you and your team know each other well?
- Do you share a strong bond, a sense of belongingness?
- Could you describe an instance when you felt like you trusted one of your employees in your team?
- Could you describe an instance when that trust was broken?
- Do you feel like your employees in your team trust you?
- Describe an instance when you felt like they trusted you or did not?
- What do you do for your employees in your team to feel like they can trust you?
- Does the hybrid method affect the trust?
- Comparing to being face-to-face while being online, does that have a difference?

#### Theme 2 Communication general

Do you feel like you have good communication in your team?

Which communication tools do you use to communicate with your employees in your team?

How do you use them, do they have separate purposes?

How effective do you feel like they are?

How does the hybrid workplace affect which one you use?



Would you use them differently if you only worked online or in the office?

### Theme 3 Communication capabilities and trust

- Do you think how you communicate with each other (employees and leaders) affect trust building?
- Do you think that certain characteristics of communication tools affect trust building?
- Do you feel like face-to-face communication or similar (like video communication) is better for fostering trust than let's say email? (Cognitive trust – know each other better, need to put in cognitive effort) Email can also lead to cognition-based trust but it requires more time, motivation and effort.
- Do you feel like email or chats foster trust? (If they do not know each other as well then, that way of building trust is better and also if the channel can reach multiple people.
- Which communication tool makes it easier to connect with employees in your team?
- Is it easier to connect with your employees in face-to-face or video calls than through text?
  - o Why, why not?
- Which communication tool would you prefer to use if you would like to informally talk to your employees in your team? Like when you are not discussing work.
- Do you have conversations when you discuss and express your emotions about anything with your employees in your team?
- If so which communication tool, would you prefer to use when you discuss emotions?

- When you help each other with tasks or similar, which communication tool would be preferred?

#### Finishing questions

- Would you like to give any comment on the topic we have discussed or anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any final questions?

#### Version 2 för Ledare

##### Introduktion

Den intervjuande kommer att välkomnas till intervjun och informeras om bakgrunden och syftet med intervjun och studien. Dessutom kommer den intervjuande att informeras om processen för intervjun och den ungefärliga tiden (30-60 minuter). Det viktigaste är att den intervjuande kommer att informeras om deras rättigheter och att konfidentialiteten kommer att hållas och deras rätt att avstå från att svara på frågor eller avsluta intervjun när som helst.

##### Bakgrundsfrågor

- Kan du uppge din ålder?
- Kan du uppge ditt kön?
- Vad är din position i företaget?
- Hur länge har du arbetat på företaget?

- Hur mycket arbetar du hemifrån jämfört med på företaget?
- Hur gillar du att arbeta enligt hybridmetoden?
- Vad är det bästa och sämsta med det?

Förtroende definition:

Mer enkelt uttryckt: Tillit är när någon är villig att ta en risk och vara sårbar genom att lita på en annan person att göra något de förväntar sig att de ska göra, även om de inte kan kontrollera eller övervaka den andra personens handlingar.

Tema 1 Förtroende generellt

- Har du förtroende för dina medarbetare som arbetar i ditt team?
  - o Varför, varför inte?
- Känner du och ditt team varandra väl?
- Delar ni en stark gemenskap?
- Beskriv en situation när du kände att du litade på en av dina medarbetare i ditt team?
- Beskriv en situation när det förtroendet bröts?
- Känner du att dina medarbetare i ditt team litar på dig?
- Beskriv en situation när du kände att de litade på dig
  - o eller inte gjorde det?
- Vad gör du för att dina medarbetare i ditt team ska känna att de kan lita på dig?
- Påverkar det hybridarbetsplatsen förtroendet/ tilliten?
- Jämfört med att vara ansikte mot ansikte medan man är online, har det någon skillnad?

## Tema 2 Kommunikation generellt

- Känner du att ni har god kommunikation i ditt team?
- Vilka kommunikationsverktyg använder du för att kommunicera med dina medarbetare i ditt team?
- Hur använder du dem, har de olika syften?
- Vad är din motivation för att använda dem?
- Hur effektiva känner du att de är?
- Hur påverkar den hybrida arbetsplatsen vilket kommunikationsverktyg du använder?
- Skulle du använda dem annorlunda om du bara arbetade online eller på kontoret?

## Tema 3 Kommunikationsförmåga och förtroende

- Har du någon uppfattning om hur egenskaperna hos kommunikationsverktyg påverkar förtroendeskapande?
- Tror du att personlig kommunikation, som ansikte mot ansikte eller liknande (som videokommunikation), är bättre för att främja förtroende än till exempel e-post? (Kognitivt förtroende - känner varandra bättre, behöver sätta in kognitiv ansträngning) E-post kan också leda till kognitionsbaserat förtroende, men det kräver mer tid, motivation och ansträngning.
- Tror du att e-post eller chattar främjar förtroende? (Om de inte känner varandra lika väl är det bättre att bygga förtroende på det sättet, och om kanalen kan nå flera personer.)

- Vilket kommunikationsverktyg gör det lättare att få kontakt med varandra?
- Är det lättare att med dina underordnade i personlig kommunikation eller videokommunikation än genom text?
  - o Varför, varför inte?
- Vilket kommunikationsverktyg föredrar du att använda om du vill prata informellt med dina medarbetare? Som när ni inte diskuterar arbete.
- Har du konversationer där du diskuterar och uttrycker dina känslor om något?
- Om ja, vilket kommunikationsverktyg föredrar du att använda när du diskuterar känslor?
- När ni hjälper varandra med uppgifter eller liknande, vilket kommunikationsverktyg föredrar du?

#### Avslutande frågor

- Vill du ge någon kommentar om ämnet vi har diskuterat eller något du vill lägga till?
- Har du några avslutande frågor?

#### Version 3 for Employees

##### Introduction

The interviewee will be welcomed to the interview and informed of the background and purpose of the interview as part of a study. Furthermore, the interviewee will be told about the process of the interview and the approximate time (30-60minutes). Most

importantly, the interviewee will be informed of the rights in regards to confidentiality and right to refrain from answering questions or stopping the interview at any time.

#### Background questions

- Could you state your age?
- Could you state your gender?
- What is your position in the company?
- How long have you been working for the company?
- How much do you work from home versus at the office?
- How do you like working in a hybrid method?
- What is the best and the worst part of working in a hybrid method?

#### Trust definition:

Trust is defined as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).

More simply: Trust is when someone is willing to take a risk and be vulnerable by relying on another person to do something they expect them to do, even if they can't control or monitor the other person's actions.

#### Theme 1 Trust general

- Do you trust your manager?
  - o Why, why not?
- What do you feel like they do to achieve your trust?
- Do you and your team know each other well?
- Do you share a strong bond, do you have a sense of belongingness?
- Could you describe an instance when you felt like you trusted your manager?
- Could you describe an instance when that trust was broken?
- Do you feel like your manager trust you?
- Describe an instance when you felt like they trusted you?
  - o When they didn't?
- What do you do for your manager to feel like they can trust you?
- Does the hybrid workplace affect trust?
- Comparing to being face-to-face while being online, does that have a difference?

## Theme 2 Communication general

- Do you feel like you have good communication in your team?
  - o With your manager?
- Which tools do you use to communicate with your manager?
- How do you use them, do they have separate purposes?
- How effective do you feel like they are?
- How does the hybrid workplace affect which one that is used?
- Would you use them differently if you only worked online or in the office?

### Theme 3 Communication capabilities and trust

- Do you think how you communicate with each other (employees and leaders) affect trust building?
- Do you think that certain characteristics of communication tools affect trust building?
- Do you feel like face-to-face communication or similar (like video communication) is better for fostering trust than let's say email? (Cognitive trust – know each other better, need to put in cognitive effort) Email can also lead to cognition-based trust but it requires more time, motivation and effort.
- Do you feel like email or chats foster trust? (If they do not know each other as well then, that way of building trust is better and also if the channel can reach multiple people.
- Which communication tool makes it easier to connect with your leader?
- Is it easier to connect with your leader face-to-face or video calls than through text?
  - o Why, why not?
- Which communication tool would you prefer to use if you would like to informally talk with your leader? Like when you are not discussing work.
- Do you have conversations when you discuss and express your emotions about anything with your leader?
- If so which communication tool would you prefer to use when you discuss emotions?
- When you help each other with tasks or similar with your leader, which communication tool would be preferred?



### Finishing questions

- Would you like to give any comment on the topic we have discussed or anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any final questions?

### Version 3 för Anställda

#### Introduktion

Den intervjuande kommer att välkomnas till intervjun och informeras om bakgrunden och syftet med intervjun och studien. Dessutom kommer den intervjuande att informeras om processen för intervjun och den ungefärliga tiden (30-60 minuter). Det viktigaste är att den intervjuande kommer att informeras om deras rättigheter och att konfidentialiteten kommer att hållas och att de har rätt att avstå från att svara på frågor eller avsluta intervjun när som helst.

#### Bakgrundsfrågor

- Kan du uppge din ålder?
- Kan du uppge ditt kön?
- Vad är din position i företaget?
- Hur länge har du arbetat för företaget?
- Hur mycket arbetar du hemifrån jämfört med på företaget?
- Hur gillar du att arbeta i en hybridmetod?
- Vad är det bästa och sämsta med det?

Förtroende definition:

Mer enkelt uttryckt: Tillit är när någon är villig att ta en risk och vara sårbar genom att lita på en annan person att göra något de förväntar sig att de ska göra, även om de inte kan kontrollera eller övervaka den andra personens handlingar.

### Tema 1 Förtroende

- Har du förtroende för din ledare/ chef?
  - o Varför, varför inte?
- Känner du och ditt team varandra väl?
- Delar ni en stark gemenskap, har ni en känsla av samhörighet?
- Kan du beskriva en situation när du kände att du litade på din ledare/ chef?
- Kan du beskriva en situation när det förtroendet bröts?
- Känner du att din ledare/ chef litar på dig?
- Beskriv en situation när du kände att hen litade på dig?
  - o När de inte gjorde det?
- Vad gör du för att din ledare/ chef ska känna att de kan lita på dig?
- Vad tror du de gör för att uppnå ditt förtroende?
- Påverkar den hybrida arbetsplatsen förtroendet?
- Jämfört med att vara ansikte mot ansikte med att vara online, har det någon skillnad?

### Tema 2 Kommunikation

- Känner du att du har god kommunikation i ditt team?
  - o Med din chef/ ledare?
- Vilka kommunikationsverktyg använder du för att kommunicera med din chef/ ledare?

- Hur använder du dem, har de olika syften?
- Vad är din motivation för att använda dem?
- Hur effektiva känner du att de är?
- Hur påverkar den hybrida arbetsplatsen vilket kommunikationsverktyg du använder?
- Skulle du använda dem på ett annat sätt om du bara arbetade online eller på kontoret?

### Tema 3 Kommunikationsförmåga och förtroende

- Har du någon uppfattning om hur kommunikationsverktygens egenskaper påverkar förtroendeskapande?
- Tycker du att ansikte mot ansikte-kommunikation eller liknande (som videokommunikation) är bättre för att främja förtroende än till exempel e-post? (Kognitivt förtroende - man lär känna varandra bättre, behöver göra kognitiv ansträngning) E-post kan också leda till kognitionsbaserat förtroende, men det kräver mer tid, motivation och ansträngning.
- Tycker du att e-post eller chattar främjar förtroende? (Om de inte känner varandra lika bra kan det vara bättre att bygga förtroende på det sättet, och om kanalen kan nå flera personer)
- Vilket kommunikationsverktyg gör det lättare att få kontakt med varandra?
- Är det lättare att ansluta med din ledare ansikte mot ansikte eller genom videokonferens än genom text?
  - o Varför, varför inte?
- Vilket kommunikationsverktyg föredrar du att använda om du vill prata informellt med din ledare? Till exempel när du inte diskuterar arbete.
- Har du konversationer där du diskuterar och uttrycker dina känslor om något med din ledare?

- I så fall vilket kommunikationsverktyg skulle du föredra att använda när du diskuterar känslor?
- När ni hjälper varandra med uppgifter eller liknande, vilket kommunikationsverktyg föredrar du?

#### Avslutande frågor

- Vill du ge någon kommentar om ämnet vi har diskuterat eller något du vill lägga till?
- Har du några slutliga frågor?

### Appendix 3. Translation

Participant	Original Quote	Translated Quote
P8	“Jag föredrar i alla lägen ett personligt möte och dels för att det är mycket lättare att få fram sin information där är mycket i kommunikationen som man går miste om i ett videomöte”	” I prefer a personal meeting in every instance, partly because it is much easier to get the information across, in a video meeting there is a lot of communication that is lost ”
P9	“Det tar ju lite längre tid om man inte ses rent fysiskt, håller på att säga att, man äter inte lunch ihop på det viset eller går ut och tar en kaffe så där eller det här småpratet som är bygger relationen”	“It does take longer time if you do not see each other physically, just about to say, you don’t eat lunch together in that way or drink a coffee or have that small talk that builds that relationship”
P10	“Jag att det går i alla fall nästan lika bra att man man då bokar in en tid och kopplar upp sig mot på skärm”	“I think it at least works almost as good, that you book a time and connect through the screen”

## Appendix 4. Summary of Themes

	Communication	Description	Illustrative quotes
	derived trust		
Sub-themes	Media of high synchronicity	Face-to-face communication provide visibility and nonverbal communication that makes it easier to trust	"I think it would affect trust building, building if I would have a manager that I would never meet face to face because I- I would probably experience a distance between us somehow so for me it's important to sometimes at least meet in the same be in the same room and talk to each other" (P6)
	Reciprocal relationship building	Building a relationship, meaning talking informally, about emotions and helping each other is easier face-to-face but can be done in other ways	"I prefer that when it comes to important stuff like salary and stuff then I want to meet her in person but other but other stuff we can just have a meeting like this but important meetings yes I want to have a face to face meeting" (P7)
	Communication strategy	Managers noticed that the lack of communication from their employees could lead to broken trust	"You can see that when you reach out to them during the day if they're working remote they don't reply within a reasonable time and this has been actually up for discussion a lot because you have a lot of freedom and responsibilities in the role but all I require is that you keep me informed so if you basically, if you say that okay I have to leave the my home office for a couple of hours during the day to do something else that's fine, but I want to know because if someone asks me where is this person I want to be able to respond that we have an agreement" (P3)

	Non-communication	Description	Illustrative quotes
	derived trust		
Sub-themes	Support trust-building	Employees trust their managers due to their availability	<p>"I feel she is supportive I mean if I reach out to her I I'm I'm certain that she will get back to me and there have been examples I mean I, if even if in the evenings we have both been sitting working late with like invoicing or whatever, we have actually I know she asks me if there's something I can do and when I've had some questions we have just connected a few minutes and she hasn't been like we can but you will have to solve it by tomorrow or something so she's very, if there's a need she is supportive and available I would say" (P6)</p>
	Situational trust-building	Other factors like policy or system at the company can lead to trust	<p>"I think she trust me uh especially if we work with oppin and that's a system where we put our work in and we have to put our work in there so if I work 8 hours she will see you what I have done in my 8 hours uh if I haven't done it, well then she will also know so in that in that part I think she she trusts us and in our work or otherwise she will bring it up in one to one or yeah on other occasions" (P7)</p>