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MANAGERS' CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN REMOTE WORKING DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF COVID-19

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Abstract

COVID-19 has introduced a unique challenge for organizational management. Since the Finnish government made a recommendations for organizations to work remotely, many employees had to shift their work from offices to home in the Spring 2020. There is a need for organizations to consider if they should keep working remotely as an option for their employees even after the pandemic and therefore this topic should be further studied.

The objective of this qualitative study is to explore how managers in SMEs have experienced the remote working during COVID-19. This is done by building a theoretical framework from previous literature and comparing it with the questionnaire data gotten from the FutuRemote research project which is concentrating on the disruption of knowledge work caused by the pandemic.

This study aims to answer to following research questions: (1) "What kinds of challenges did managers face when shifting to remote working during the beginning of COVID-19 crisis?", (2) "What did managers find rewarding when shifting to remote working?" and (3) "Which background variables affect the experienced challenges and opportunities?"

The data used consists of the responses of 209 managers working in SMEs located in Finland. The data is analyzed in a thematic analysis which is done by coding the responses with Atlas.ti. The data is divided to 4 main categories and 14 subcategories.

The challenges and opportunities found in this thesis are mostly in line with previous literature. The study confirms that both challenges and opportunities are experienced in remote work related to work-life interface, leadership, communication and working conditions. Some findings can be linked to the special features of the pandemic situation. For example, many workers had their families staying at home which lead to a greater role conflict and even ambivalence in how they perceived the situation.

Keywords COVID-19, leadership, SMEs, remote work

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Tiivistelmä

COVID-19 on luonut uudenlaisen haasteen organisaatioiden johtamiseen – Suomen hallituksen etätyösuosituksen tultua voimaan keväällä 2020 monet työntekijät ovat joutuneet tekemään työnsä toimiston sijaan kotonaan. Organisaatioiden tulee tarkastella tulisiko etätyö pitää mahdollisena työntekijöille myös pandemian jälkeen ja tämän vuoksi aihetta tulisikin tutkia.

Tämän kvalitatiivisen tutkielman tavoitteena on havainnoida, miten pienten ja keskisuurten yritysten johtajat ovat kokeneet etätyöhön siirtymisen COVID-19 pandemian ensimmäisen aallon aikana. Tämä tehdään rakentamalla teoreettinen viitekehys aiemman kirjallisuuden perusteella ja vertaamalla sitä dataan, jota pandemian aiheuttamaa tietotyön murrosta tutkiva FutuRemote tutkimusprojekti on kyselylomakkeella kerännyt.

Tutkimuksen on tarkoitus vastata seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin: (1) "Millaisia haasteita johtajat kokivat etätyöhön siirryttäessä COVID-19 kriisin alussa?", (2) "Millaisia asioita johtajat kokivat palkitsevina etätyöhön siirryttäessä?" ja (3) "Mitkä taustamuuttujat vaikuttavat koettuihin haasteisiin ja mahdollisuuksiin?"

Tutkielmassa käytetty data koostuu 209 Suomessa keskisuuressa yrityksessä työskentelevän johtajan vastauksista. Data analysoidaan temaattisen analyysin avulla, joka toteutetaan koodaamalla vastaukset Atlas.ti:llä. Data jaetaan neljään pääkategoriaan ja 14:ään alakategoriaan.

Tässä tutkielmassa löydetyt haasteet ja mahdollisuudet ovat pääosin linjassa aiemman kirjallisuuden löydösten kanssa. Tutkimus vahvistaa, että etätyössä koetaan niin haasteita kuin mahdollisuuksiakin liittyen työn ja elämän rajapintaan, johtamiseen, viestintään ja työn olosuhteisiin. Osa löydöksistä on yhteyksissä pandemiatilanteen erityispiirteisiin. Monien työntekijöiden perheet esimerkiksi olivat myös kotona, joka johti suurempaan roolien väliseen konfliktiin sekä jopa ristiriitaisuuteen siinä, miten työntekijä tilanteen koki.

Avainsanat etätyö, pk-yritykset, COVID-19, johtaminen, koronavirus

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1 Introduction

1.1. Background and motivation

At the end of 2019 a new coronavirus was identified in China. It was not long until the virus started to spread outside China's borders and already in March 2020, the World Health Organization announced that this virus, COVID-19, could be characterized as pandemic (World Health Organization 2020). The first case of coronavirus in Finland was reported on 29 January 2020 (Yle uutiset 2020). The situation was new because of the serious and easily spreading nature of the virus. In addition, there was no clear policy on how the government, organizations and individuals should react to the alarming situation.

As Tourish (2020) puts it: COVID-19 is a crisis that reaches all areas of life – it is a crisis in the spheres of health, economics, society and politics. As probably no organization has been preserved from the crisis, it has also introduced a challenge for organizational management. There has been a demand for rapid action and decisions on how the work can be reorganized. Therefore, the issues of change and crisis management surface.

Although remote work has been a topic of recent years and the amount of work done remotely has been increasing, the decision to work remotely has been voluntary in most cases. Thus, the biggest change to the phenomenon here is the obligation for many workers to shift their work from offices to home. Another remarkable feature of this change is the fast pace of it. According to the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2020), the amount of work done remotely increased by 656 percent during the Uusimaa lockdown between 28 March 2020 and 15 April 2020. This demonstrates the drastic effect of this transformation for Finnish working culture.

The remote work recommendation seems to be a long-term solution since the current recommendation by the Finnish Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is running until further notice and will not be reviewed sooner than in the summer of 2021 (Finnish Government 2020). Studying the phenomenon is crucial not only because of the need to describe this current situation but also since the question asked will be if the

working practices learned during the pandemic will be retained even after there is no coercive need to do the work remotely. If the "new normal" in organizational life seems a good alternative for the former, traditional, style of working, this should be considered.

Remote work, also known as telework, according to Cambridge dictionary means "the practice of an employee working at their home, or in some other place that is not an organization's usual place of business". Although remote working and its effects on the worker and their work have been widely studied in general, the COVID-19 situation constitutes an interesting possibility to compare this available knowledge to the reality in a burgeoning and unexpected crisis. For managers, the situation has introduced challenges and possibilities not only as individual workers but also as leaders of the subordinates and their work.

The topic of this thesis is chosen since it is a unique and interesting issue for the research in the field of information systems science. COVID-19 has wide impacts on the whole business world and might also act as a precedent which makes organizations prepare themselves for future crises. In addition, this situation might start a new era of working life which is not bound to any particular time or place. Since remote working is not tied to any specific place, it could make working more flexible and respond to different needs of the workers. I am very interested in change management and particularly in how changes are experienced by employees and, in the other hand, how people could be managed in best possible way in order to succeed in implementing the changes. Therefore, this topic meets my personal areas of interest in addition to the scientific needs.

This thesis is done as a part of the FutuRemote research project. The FutuRemote team "together with Business Finland and participating companies study how knowledge workers have adapted to remote work and explore opportunities for developing new products and services." (FutuRemote 2020) The project concentrates on the disruption of knowledge work caused by the pandemic. The data used in this thesis is collected by the research group. The focus of this thesis is in analyzing qualitative information on how managers have experienced the situation.

1.2. Research scope and objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to increase understanding on how managers reacted to the rapid need to make a throughout change in organization's operations by shifting to remote working. The intention is to find the most common challenges and rewarding matters that managers have faced – not only in their own work but also related to leadership. This can be done by reflecting on earlier literature on remote work and change management. In addition, the thesis will focus on finding out if this unique situation of COVID-19 can be linked to the prior research in related themes.

This study combines the leadership and personal perspectives since the managers might also mention similar challenges and opportunities than their subordinates.

This thesis aims to answer to the following three research questions:

Q1. What kinds of challenges did managers face when shifting to remote working during the beginning of COVID-19 crisis?

Q2. What did managers find rewarding when shifting to remote working?

Q3. Which background variables affect the experienced challenges and opportunities?

The purpose of question three is to find out which background variables might cause how different respondents have experienced the situation.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

After this brief introduction to the topic to be researched, the most common theories and empirical findings of remote working and remote leadership and their sub-topics will be discussed in a form of literature review. The aim is to introduce the central concepts that will be used for the empirical part. A theoretical framework to be used in the analysis part is constructed in the literature review and reviewed at the end of the chapter. Before analyzing the data, the methodology chapter will explain how the study was conducted and how the data was collected, outlined and analyzed.

The main contribution of this thesis will be identified by analyzing the qualitative data. After that the discussion chapter follows, and the findings will be compared with the wider academic context provided in the literature review. Finally, the main findings will be summarized and linked together in a form of brief conclusion together with the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research on the topic.

2 Theoretical background

The objective of this chapter is to illustrate the phenomenon of remote work and introduce issues that have been studied related to it, in a form of literature review. This chapter starts by introducing the concept of remote work, also known as telework, and then concluding the existing theories around the sub-issues such as the connectivity paradox, work-life balance and change management. This chapter will build a ground for making comparisons between the data analysis and existing literature. The theoretical framework will be constructed at the end of this chapter.

2.1. Remote working and virtual teams

The development of information and communication technologies have made it possible to take more flexible ways of working into use. Knowledge work is not tied to any particular place and time anymore. One of the determining features of remote work is the existing distance between co-workers. This distance has both negative and positive effects. Although there is a physical distance between workers, the connection can still be kept through the usage of adequate ICTs. (Leonardi et al. 2010)

There are different advantages in working remotely instead of working at the office. As Leonardi et al. (2010) state, one of the main reasons for someone to want to work remotely is the aim to better manage the competing demands of work and home life. Grant et al. (2013) summarize the benefits of remote working in that it can increase productivity, enable more flexibility by less restrictions in working, and even reduce stress and result in greater well-being.

The negative effects of remote working stem from problems in communication within the physical distance and the blurring of work- and non-work life. (see Hertel et al. 2005, Waizenegger et al. 2020, Felstead & Henseke 2017) Also the significance of the location is emphasized in the research of remote working – due to Grant et al. (2013), home is usually seen as a restorative place which can change when the working life is brought to the home. They also state that working from home can lead to interrole conflicts when a person tries to flexibly switch between home and work roles.

According to Baruch (2000), working remotely has several effects on the individual. It can influence an individual's identity, skills, role demands and role outcomes. What comes to the role demands and outcomes, the worker has different kinds of priorities and relations to both work and family sphere which leads to effects on for example attitudes and felt stress. These changes again affect the worker's identity – how they think of themselves. Because of the different demands of remote work related to working from the office, it also requires developing new types of skills and attitudes towards space and time. (Baruch 2000)

Järvenpää & Leidner (2005) handle virtual teams through the feeling of trust. They found that the virtual teams that felt trust, were able to better handle uncertainty and the anticipations of the virtuality. Iacono & Weisband (1997) also studied trust in virtual teams and found that the trust is built in continuous interaction between the team members. Thus, the trust relies on the communication of the team and this communication should be mostly work-related in order for the team to be effective. This trust may be intensified by substituting the work-related communication with social communication. They also highlight that building trust requires both initiating and responding behaviors from the team members (Iacono & Weisband 1997). The communication in virtual teams will be handled more in detail in the following chapters.

The positive and negative impacts of remote work are mostly related to communication and the work-life interface. Their role in the challenges and opportunities of remote working will be introduced in the following paragraphs after a brief introduction to existing literature on remote working in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1.1. Remote working during COVID-19

Some research have already been made on remote work during COVID-19 (see Waizenegger et al. 2020, Ajjan et al. 2020, Nguyen 2021, Wang et al. 2020, Toscano & Zappala 2020, Tokarchuk et al. 2020, Carillo et al. 2020). During COVID-19, knowledge workers are widely forced to work remotely. This brings in the problem of needing to adapt to working from a home environment that might not be suitable for it (Waizenegger et al. 2020). This issue became emphasized during the validity of the Emergency Powers Act when schools were closed, and they were carried out remotely. However, the situation appeared differently for everyone depending on their circumstances and characters – for

example, a worker with school aged children faced quite different challenges than a worker living alone.

Another specialty that the pandemic situation has brought to remote work is the need to adjust to a situation where all the members of a household might be at home around the clock. Also, for many families the situation was that, apart from doing their own work, the parents needed to supervise their children on their schoolwork during their work days since many schools were closed during the first wave of the pandemic (Anderson et al. 2020). The presence of the family at home during the workday led to significant distractions for some of the workers and also to them not considering the remote work a good solution (Nguyen 2021). Ajjan et al. (2020) also highlighted this in their study – the special issue in remote working during COVID-19 is the special situation of not working with the colleagues but rather with the family. They also found that there are differences between the genders on how workers have experienced the situation – females experienced less control over time and lower level of technology utilization than males. This difference was even bigger for workers with children living at home. Another finding by Ajjan et al. (2020) was that workers with children living at home experienced more conflict on remote working.

Ahrentzen (1990) found that although the remote workers in his study mentioned some activities that they did while working, supervising their children was not one of them. However, during the pandemic supervising the children in between working has been mandatory for some workers (Wang et al. 2020). Wang et al. (2020) found that the role conflict was a particularly great challenge for working parents during the COVID-19 pandemic since the schools were shut down and the parents needed to handle multiple roles at the same time at home.

On the contrary, for someone living alone the experience might be quite different. For workers living alone, remote work, especially during the pandemic, meant fewer face-to-face interactions, which again might lead to loneliness. Wang et al. (2020) found in their study that this was a significant challenge for some because of the advice to evade non-essential physical gatherings made them feel lonely and unsatisfied. Also Toscano & Zappala (2020) studied how the feeling of social isolation during the COVID-19 situation affected how individuals perceived working remotely. They found that social isolation

affected negatively how remote work was experienced – both on how individuals perceived it and how productive they were in their work. They also found that the concern of the coronavirus had an influence on how remote work was perceived – the negative effect of isolation on how a worker experienced the remote working was less significant for workers that were not so concerned.

Tokarchuk et al. (2021) found in their study that the experience in remote working during COVID-19 has been mainly positive. Managers were also fairly satisfied with the situation and saw that remote work should be considered in the future as well. However, the study suggests that managerial training is needed in order to adopt the new ways of working. Also the role of managers' motivation to lead remotely is emphasized. (Tokarchuk et al. 2021)

Carillo et al. (2020) studied what affects employees' adjustment to remote work. They found the main factor to be the professional isolation – for example the lack of informal relationships with colleagues and lack of feedback from their managers. Other important factors were the sufficient physical and mental conditions for remote work, stress and, surprisingly, increased workload (Carillo et al. 2020). Nguyen (2021) found that the experience in remote work during COVID-19 improves when the worker gets more familiar with this form of working. Not all workers had experience in working remotely before the crisis.

Overall, although not much research has yet been done in remote working during COVID-19 pandemic, some aspects of it have already been studied. The distinctive features in the situation include the challenge of everyone in the household staying at home (see Anderson et al. 2020, Nguyen 2021, Ajjan et al. 2020) and the feelings of isolation (see Wang et al. 2020, Toscano & Zappala 2020).

2.1.2. Communication in remote work

One of the components of working that changes most in remote working compared with traditional type of working is the communication. Since the work does not happen in the office, there is a need for setting up meetings remotely, which again changes the nature of communication. Studies also suggest that the overall amount of communication decreases when switching to remote working. When the character of communication changes at the

same time, it may lead to misunderstandings and therefore greater conflicts. (Hertel et al. 2005)

One of the things that affects communication most is the decreased amount of ad hoc communication – as Waizenegger et al. (2020) state, this has a negative impact on knowledge sharing in a team. These spontaneous communication situations are reduced because of the need to facilitate conversations through ICTs instead of just walking to the next room or shouting to the next table. This can lead to a situation where the communication is only about formal knowledge-sharing instead of bilateral conversations, which in turn may also lead to challenges in developing relationships between the workers. Dambrin (2004) and Konradt et al. (2000) found in their studies that conversations that occur in remote work are mainly motivated by work, which leads to decline in so-called coffee break conversations. Although the lack of spontaneous conversations might have negative impacts, it can also increase efficiency and free more time for completing tasks (Waizenegger et al. 2020). Continuous interruptions are the negative side of ad-hoc communication taking place in the workplace since they can lead to challenges in concentrating on the work itself.

Dambrin (2004) found in their study that both formal and informal communications decreased in remote work. They also note that remote working requires more efforts in maintain effective communication and that the type of communication changes from two-way conversations to one-way communication. Tan et al. (2000) have proposed a communication technique for virtual teams for trying to tackle these challenges. It is built on three stages: small talk, infinite container and laser generation. The first stage includes informal chats and giving basic information about oneself. The purpose of this is to make the communication more open. The second stage is about forming everyone's individual communication preferences for the team – it includes listing the best practices and sharing team members' mental models to one another. In the last stage, team members share their earlier experiences. Finally, the communication norms can be constructed for the team. It is important to keep these norms continuously in mind.

One negative impact of remote work that has to do with the lack of communication is the feeling of isolation. McNaughton et al. (2014) discovered that remote work has an impact on the development of relationships between the workers. Tavares (2017) also emphasized

in their study about remote work's effects on the individual's health that working remotely prevents workers from developing personal relationships with their colleagues, which in turn can lead to the feeling of isolation. Mann & Holdsworth (2003) found in their study that the negative impact of loneliness was eminently apparent within remote workers and was the most frequently mentioned negative emotion related to remote work.

Leonardi et al. (2010) introduce the concept of the connectivity paradox. The term is used to describe the paradox that exists between the reasons that employees usually choose to work remotely and the actual effects it has on work. This phenomenon is related to the concept of distance. While working remotely brings the physical distance between the worker and the office, in practice it can lead to a situation where the worker is expected to be continuously available and at others' disposal through the use of ICTs. Several studies suggest that the physical distance of a remote worker might be compensated by managers and co-workers communicating with them more than they would without the distance. This creates the paradox since the reasons for many to decide to work remotely is the possibility to work without being continuously distracted (Leonardi et al. 2010). Also Wang et al. (2020) found in their study that some individuals felt exhausted from the need of being continuously available – some felt like they were always required to be ready to answer for their colleagues' references.

The connectivity paradox might lead to a situation where the remote worker tries to increase the distance to the office by the help of ICTs. Leonardi et al. (2010) suggest that this might be done by either disconnecting or dissimulating. Disconnecting refers to the remote worker for example turning off his or her ICTs to be able to achieve the desired effects of working remotely without distractions. Dissimulating can be done by using the features of ICTs, such as changing the Skype status to "occupied". The aim is to increase the distance that managers and colleagues are trying to decrease.

To conclude, the greatest challenges in communications in remote work include the decreased amount of overall communication (see Hertel et al. 2005), decreased amount of ad hoc communication (see Waizenegger et al. 2020 & Dambrin 2004), feelings of isolation (see McNaughton et al. 2014, Mann & Holdsworth 2003) and the connectivity paradox (see Leonardi et al. 2010).

2.1.3. Work-life balance in remote work

Work-life balance as a term can be defined in multiple ways. Kalliath & Brough (2008) defined the phenomenon in six different ways. One way to see it is as multiple roles existing at the same time. This approach suggests that the insistences from non-work life may spill over to work life and thereby also affect the individual's wellbeing at work. The same thing happens in another direction. The second definition sees the balance as an equity between the two roles. The third one approaches the theme from the viewpoint of satisfaction within the different roles. Another way to see the balance is from the perspective of changing priorities – the importance of a role can vary between different situations. The fifth approach to the balance is seeing the different roles as a relief instead of a conflict. The last definition of work-life balance presented by Kalliath & Brought (2008) is to see it as a control between the roles, emphasizing that the individual is able to control the weight of each role.

Also Zedeck and Mosier (1990) have been studying the work-life balance and categorized five main theories in how work-life and non-work life affect each other. The spillover model suggests that there is a link between those, in a way that they can have an influence on each other, either negative or positive. From a positive perspective, happiness in the work sphere can lead to happiness at home but, on the contrary, it is also possible that for example work stress may be carried out to family life. The second main model is called compensation theory. It suggests that the things one sphere is lacking can be made up in the other. This theory can be further divided into supplemental compensation and reactive compensation. Supplemental compensation refers to a situation in which the inadequate positive experiences in work are achieved in family life, whereas reactive compensation occurs when deficiencies in work are compensated in non-work activities. For example, rest from exhausting work to recover is an example of this.
(Zedeck & Mosier 1990)

The fourth model used by Zedeck and Mosier (1990) is called segmentation theory. The theory suggests that it is possible to succeed in either work or non-work life without it having any effect in the other – it assumes that the two spheres are totally separate and independent from each other and they represent different kinds of values and needs. The next model is called instrumental theory, and it is the opposite to segmentation theory since

it introduces a dependent relationship between the two spheres in which, for example, success in work leads to satisfaction in family life. The last model that Zedeck and Mosier (1990) use is conflict theory. Conflict theory describes a different kind of reliance between the two spheres since it suggests that success in one sphere demands sacrifices in the other. Since there are demands in all spheres, an individual needs to decide what they want to prioritize. (Zedeck & Mosier 1990)

Felstead and Henseke (2017) suggest that the transition to working remotely can be difficult as finding the balance between work and life is harder when the borders between them are blurred. This might make it difficult to switch off from work and result in pressures from work spilling over to the free time. Therefore, remote working increases the negative spill-overs between the work and the non-work. As Allen et al. (2015) state, work can interfere with family and vice versa. McNaughton et al. (2014) also reported in their study that some of the remote workers had problems with separating the home and work surroundings. They reported that the home environment offered temptations for distraction from the work. Another problem they reported was that family members of the remote workers had difficulties with considering the home as a workplace.

Grant et al. (2013) suggest that remote working has been a solution for issues in finding work-life balance. They say that it has been so especially for the workers who need to contemplate their family arrangements and for people with some kinds of health issues. Working remotely can also save time for different activities by reducing the time spent for commuting. Dimitrova (2003) found that many remote workers valued the higher level of autonomy to schedule their work – they could more freely fix their timetables to serve their individual situations depending on for example their family situations on top of their own preferences. Tavares (2017) emphasized in their study that working remotely freed time from commuting and that this time could be spent with family. Furthermore, in this way remote work could enhance the work-life balance of an individual. However, Tavares (2017) mentions that this can also act as a disadvantage since remote workers tend to work long hours. Ammons & Markham (2010) also emphasized the possibility of longer hours in remote work because the continuous reminders of work in the home environment could lead to putting more hours in the work.

Konradt et al. (2000) found in their study that the experiences of the remote workers they studied were rather ambivalent regarding the time management issue. Although many saw remote work as an advantage for time management resulting from the autonomy that made it easier to coordinate between family- and work life, and thereby allowed them to fully concentrate on their work, the others found that working from home added some new distractions for them, for example, by their children or in a form of technical issues. This could lead to a situation where the work spilled to evenings and weekends. (Konradt et al. 2000)

Also Dimitorva (2003) found this ambivalence in their study since removing the boundaries of the timing of the workday also led to longer working hours. In addition, whilst leaving the office can usually act as a sign of ending the workday, thinking about the work can still continue if the sign is only switching off the computer (Dimitrova 2003). Grant et al. (2013) state that as home is usually seen as a place for restoration, it might have negative effects on workers' well-being if they mix both work and home activities in the same place. Also, Baruch (2000) found in his study that the working hours grew in 48% of the examined cases when opting to work remotely.

Ammons & Markham (2010) emphasized the need of remote workers to set boundaries in order to gain the desired consequences from working remotely since answering to the interruptions at home could end up in more stress, decreased efficiency and consumed time. The work-life balance within remote working includes the issue of role conflict. While working remotely may enable workers to more flexibly change between different roles, it can also lead to distraction and conflicts (Allen et al. 2015). The role conflict arises from the need to deal with the different roles that the worker possesses in home and work both in the same environment. However, although working remotely can lead to greater role conflict, it can also reduce it if working at home is managed successfully (Ammons & Markham 2010).

There have been some studies on how different background variables, for example demographics affect what kind of influence remote work has on individuals' work-life balance. For example, Azarbouyeh and Naini (2013) studied the effect of age, gender, educational background, work experience and work position on how remote working affected the quality of workers' work life, and they did not find a significant effect on any

of these. Then again, Raisiene et al. (2020) found that men experienced the remote working during COVID-19 more negatively than women. They also found the same thing with age – older workers found more negative aspects in remote working than younger ones. However, they state that these differences were not dramatic. Sangeetha (2020) also tested the co-occurrence between gender and work-life balance but found no significant differences.

All in all, the main challenges related to work-life balance in remote working include the blurred borders between the two spheres (see Felstead & Henseke 2017, McNaughton et al. 2014), overworking (see Grant et al. 2013, Baruch 2000, Dimitrova 2003, Tavares 2017, Ammons & Markham 2010) and role conflict (see Allen et al. 2015). Remote working also has advantages on the work-life interface for example in the form of better time management (see Dimitrova 2003, Konradt et al. 2000, Tavares 2017).

2.1.4. Working conditions in remote work

Sangeetha (2020) found that many remote workers faced network issues that affected their remote working. Also Belanger et al. (2001) have evaluated the importance of technologies in remote working. They found communication technologies to be especially important for remote workers' effectiveness and satisfaction on their work. The technologies available for remote work affect how successful a remote work setting is, and therefore the adequate technological tools for remote work should be considered by managers (Belanger et al. 2001). It is also important to separate information systems and communication technologies from each other since their results in remote work differ – information systems affect more the productivity and performance of a remote worker whereas communication technologies' effect is on the work satisfaction. It seems that remote workers often have more adequate information systems than communication tools (Belanger et al. 2001).

Bayrak (2011) emphasizes the importance of having adequate IT support in remote work. He sees that a proper training, an integrated network to any computer in the office and a continuous one-to-one IT support are needed for efficient remote work. It is vital that the worker can remain effective and tackle the possible technical challenges quickly as they occur. (Bayrak 2011)

One of the disadvantages of working in an open office includes the disturbance cause by the noise. Bandury & Berry (2005) found in their study that even 99% of the respondents on their study found the typical office noises researched in the study disturbing. Working remotely might act as a solution for this challenge if the background noises are not as disturbing. However, working from home can also create challenges caused by working conditions – one aspect that can weaken when transiting to working from home has to do with ergonomics. Buomprisco et al. (2021) highlight the health risks arising from having a bad posture in remote working. Remote working is also linked with for example lower rate in physical activity and longer periods of work without breaks. These can even lead to musculoskeletal disorders (Hoe et al. 2021).

To conclude, the available technologies and IT support affect how well remote work can be performed (see Belanger et al. 2001, Bayrak 2011). When it comes to the working environment, working from home can help in the challenges with noises in the office but at the same time have negative effect on ergonomics (see Bandury & Berry 2005, Buomprisco et al. 2021, Hoe et al. 2021).

2.2. Leadership

COVID-19 has introduced a unique challenge for leadership. It has affected how both organizations and their workers should be led. Since COVID-19 is a crisis that has changed the daily operations of organizations, this topic will be looked at through the themes of change and crisis management. After this, the remote leadership will be looked at more in detail – not being able to meet the subordinates daily creates challenges for leadership in for example the issues of communication and supervision.

2.2.1 Change and crisis management during COVID-19

As Gill (2003) states, management and leadership are in the core when change occurs. The challenge with COVID-19 related issues has been the pace of the change – there has not been time to plan how the change will be managed and how to prepare the organization for the change in advance. This is particularly challenging since, as Gill (2003) states, the common reason for change management to fail is insufficient planning and control caused by focusing too much on the goal and too little in the steps towards it. It may also fail because of the lack of knowledge related to the change, which might have been the case

with switching to working from home in organizations that have not had the possibility to working remotely before the COVID-19 situation.

Sirkin et al. (2005) have listed four key factors in change management – duration, integrity, commitment and effort. They claim that organizations tend to worry too much about the time put on the change process. They suggest that the main focus should not be on the duration of the project but on the frequency of the checkpoints during the process. The most effective way to react to new gaps and risks is by reviewing the change process often enough. The second key factor, integrity, is about the executives chosen for carrying out the change process. The best people should be used for this and concentration should be on the management of the change teams. (Sirkin et al. 2005)

The third factor introduced by Sirkin et al. (2005) has to do with commitment, which falls upon both change executives and the workers that need to deal with the change itself, for example by taking new ways of working into usage. They claim that the commitment shown by the executives is essential for the commitment of employees. This is mainly a communication issue – executives should put the focus on communicating about the change to employees if they want them to commit to it. The last key factor has to do with effort –since the workers are usually already fully employed, they do not have extra time for carrying over the change. This can lead to resistance to change. Sirkin et al. (2005) suggest that no one's workload should increase by over 10 percent and that the managers should decide if they want to take the time from their subordinates' daily tasks or to bring in new, provisional workers. (Sirkin et al. 2005)

When it comes to COVID-19, Thielsch et al. (2020) characterized how it differs from other crises in the crisis management teams' perspective. The first features are duration and scope – it is not known how long the crisis will last and it extends to many different spheres of life. The dynamics of the crisis are also different – although the pandemic started with many changes at the same time and then settled, there is a possibility for new peaks and waves. The novelty of the change is also different from many other crises since the different threats that the pandemic includes are not so well known or understood. The COVID-19 crisis affects the change management teams also on an individual level since it affects everyone's personal life in some way. The last special feature is the vague political

and legal framework. New policies are constantly made by governments and even the basic rights can be restricted by applying emergency laws. (Thielsch et al. 2020)

Thielsch et al. (2020) also explain how the special characteristics of COVID-19 crisis affect the work of crisis management teams. One of these is uncertainty. The great uncertainty naturally affects the decision-making of the teams since the results of the decisions cannot be predicted. The uncertainty can be seen on three different levels: on the lack of knowledge on the virus itself, but also on the fact that the teams were not prepared for the situation and uncertainty on how politics, media and stakeholders would react to the situation. The crisis management teams also need to change the way they work – they need to turn to virtual teams without earlier experience on it. (Thielsch et al. 2020)

Alves et al. (2020) found in their study that the bigger companies with more experience in crisis management were able to learn from earlier crises and develop a crisis management strategy based on them during the pandemic outbreak. They also found that these companies were able to recover from the crisis. On the contrary, although they found the smaller companies flexible in their reaction to the crisis, these companies with less resources did not form an official crisis management plan. Also Eggers (2020) has noticed the same issue – more flexible decision-making acts as an opportunity for SMEs during crises but at the same time the lack of resources is a challenge for them.

2.2.2. Leading remotely

Leading remotely may require more time from a manager. Downes (2020) found in their study that leading remotely takes more effort from a manager than leading in the same location with the subordinates. The managers felt that they needed to do more intentional leading – for example in the form of building culture, making the norms for communication and socializing the subordinates. Managers also needed to tackle the challenge of the work happening non-simultaneously caused by the distance and communication technologies that hamper short and spontaneous communication. The managers need to be up to date with different communication channels which also increases their workload. (Downes 2020)

Basile & Beauregard (2016) have made suggestions on how remote workers should be led. Their first suggestion is to give the employees proper training on effective remote working.

For boundaries between work and home they suggest four different strategies – physical, time-based, behavioral and communicative strategies. Physical strategies include creating different physical environments for work and non-work. Time-based strategies have to do with scheduling the work and could be achieved by settling a daily meeting or some kind of responsibility, for example getting the children home from the kindergarten, for each day during the time that workday should end. As a behavioral strategy they suggest logging off from the computer or turning off the work phone. The last, communicative, strategy includes for example communicating the worker's expectations on the level of noise during their workdays in the household for their family. They also suggest that allowing the employees a greater autonomy over their workday in remote work would empower them to find out the most suitable boundaries between work and home for themselves.

When it comes to communication between a manager and a subordinate, the role of feedback is highlighted in the research on communication in remote working. Downes (2020) found in their study that managers are aware that there is a bigger chance for miscommunication when working remotely and these misunderstandings might be more difficult to notice. In their study they found that the managers were concerned about the recipient of information missing the context. They also felt like it was more difficult to recognize if a subordinate was feeling unhappy with their work (Downes 2020). Bayrak (2011) emphasized the importance of specifying how the tasks should be completed in remote work – not being able to meet face-to-face can make it more difficult for the manager to detect if the subordinate fully understands the task that is being communicated. This also means the need to communicate the tasks more recurrently.

Bergum (2009) suggests that the decreased amount of communication in the remote working may also negatively affect the amount of feedback given to the subordinate working remotely. He also emphasizes that the role of feedback is bigger in remote working than traditionally. McNaughton et al. (2014) also found in their study that some remote workers felt that they got less feedback from their supervisors when working remotely. Besides feedback, the overall recognition gotten from managers decreased. Dambrin (2004) found that the amount of communication in remote working diminishes more between the subordinate and the manager than between colleagues. Sangeetha (2020)

found that the remote workers felt like the continuous communication with the employer enhanced their relationship.

Daniels et al. (2000) suggest that socialization should be taken into account when managing remote workers. They also suggest that some of the barriers in communication between subordinates and managers could be tackled by full use of ICTs. From the manager's viewpoint it can be difficult to estimate how much communication is needed with subordinates (Dambrin 2004). What makes this even more difficult is the demand for a balanced situation in which a subordinate does not feel left out but on the other hand does not feel micromanaged (Dambrin 2004). Also getting to know one's subordinates requires more effort from the manager in remote work – for example in the form of setting up more one-to-one meetings with them (Downes 2020).

Dimitrova (2003) studied the supervision of subordinates' work in remote work. They found that the autonomy of a remote worker was at a surprisingly low level. Several different supervising mechanisms were found in their study – apart from formal rules also informal conventions and peer-pressure were used. The character of the job affected the types of supervision, for example remote workers with routine tasks submitted reports of their work and had more formal rules whereas teleworkers with less routine tasks had more autonomy over their work. Another important finding was that direct observation was not a significant type of supervision for any of the observed groups. Altogether, Dimitrova (2003) did not find any significant difference in how the subordinates were supervised in remote work related to normal work.

Also leaders' effects on virtual team's effectiveness have been studied. Pierce & Hansen (2008) found in their study that the streaks of a leader can have a notable effect on the effectiveness of a team. The major point in their study is that this effectiveness is mediated by perceived trust in the virtual team. The characteristic of a leader, such as being open and emotionally stable, can affect subordinates' feeling of trust on them and then be mediated into effectiveness (Pierce & Hansen 2008). The study also suggests that virtual leaders' value is not in direct outcomes of the team but rather in the trust they awake in team members (Pierce & Hansen 2008). Also Guthrie (1997) emphasizes the role of trust in remote lading – remote work requires managers to trust their subordinates and focus on the results of the work. This means focusing on the big picture.

In sum, it can be seen that leading remotely requires more from the leader (see Downes 2020, Bayrak 2011). In addition, the communication between the leader and subordinates endures (see Bergum 2009, McNaughton et al. 2014, Dambrin 2004, Sangeetha 2020). However, the character of a leader can have an effect on how their team's work is performed remotely (see Pierce & Hansen 2008, Guthrie 1997).

2.3. Framework for the study

Previous literature is summarized in Table 1, which is used as a framework for constructing the empirical part. It is also used to compare the literature with the findings of the empirical part.

Table 1: Summary of previous literature on remote work and related issues

Construct	Impacts	Source
Communication	Negative:	
	- Decreased amount of overall communication	*Hertel et al. 2005*
	- Decreased amount of ad hoc communication	*Waizenegger et al. 2020, Dambrin 2004, Konradt et al. 2000*
	- Impact on development of relationships, feelings of loneliness	*McNaughton et al. 2014, Wang et al. 2020*
	- Connectivity paradox	*Leonardi et al 2010*
	Positive:	
	+ Decreased amount of spontaneous communication	*Waizenegger et al. 2020*
Work-life interface	Negative:	*Felstead & Henseke 2017, McNaughton et al. 2014, Grant et al. 2013*
	- The borders between work and non-work life are blurred	
	- Role conflict	*Allen et al. 2015, Wang et al. 2020*
	Positive:	

	+ Handling both spheres at the same time	*Grant et al. 2013*
Time management	Negative: - Lengthened work days	*Baruch 2000, Raisiene et al. 2020*
	Positive: + Saved time	*Grant et al. 2013, Tavares 2017*
Remote leadership	Negative: - Leading takes more effort	*Downes 2020*
	- Uncertainty	*Thielsch et al. 2020*
	- Decreased amount of given feedback	*Bergum 2009, McNaughton et al. 2014*
	- Harder to find the balance in the amount of communication	*Dambrin 2004*
	- Challenges in supervising subordinates' work	*Dimitrova 2003*
Working conditions	Negative: - Inadequate information systems	*Belanger et al. 2001*
	- Poor ergonomics	*Buomprisco et al. 2021, Hoe et al. 2021*
	Positive: + Less background noises	*Bandury & Berry 2005*

3   Methodology

The research methods and reasons for choosing them will be discussed in this chapter. The aim of this chapter is to introduce how the data was collected and outlined and furthermore, how it was analyzed.

3.1. Research approach

The objective of this study was to observe the experiences of managers in remote working during COVID-19. The data needed to reach this object was gotten from the questionnaire collected by FutuRemote research project. Responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire were used since they allowed the respondents to bring out their experiences freely. Also the background variables of the respondents were used in this study so that the respondents could be grouped and the responses of those groups could be compared. The used background variables include gender, age, number of children and previous experience on working remotely.

The approach chosen for this research is qualitative. Due to Sofaer (1999), qualitative methods can help in constructing rich descriptions of the researched phenomena by better taking the context of the events into account. They can also help in finding patterns. According to Black (1994), qualitative research allows us to understand the strength and nature of different variables by taking a holistic perspective. He continues that qualitative methods can be used either combined with quantitative ones to enhance the quantitative study or they can be used instead of quantitative ones, especially in complex situations when it is more valuable to answer to the question of "what" instead of "how often".

3.2. Data collection and outline

The data used in this thesis is collected by the FutuRemote research team during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic. The data was collected by conducting an online questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire were collected between the end of March and beginning of April 2020. During that period, the Finnish government had taken the Emergency Powers Act into usage, which meant for example turning to remote teaching in schools and restrictions on the size of public events (Parliament of Finland 2020). Also, the

travel restrictions between Uusimaa and the rest of Finland was on from 28 March 2020 to 15 April 2020 (Yle Uutiset 2020).

The dataset as a whole consists of several quantitative questions and two qualitative open-ended questions. The open-ended questions are used in this study and they are the following ones:

1. *What has been the most challenging in your work during the Covid-19 (Corona) crisis? Think broadly about your individual work as well as your collaboration with your colleagues or balancing work-family issues.*

2. *What has been the most rewarding in your work during the Covid-19 (Corona) crisis? Think broadly about your individual work as well as your collaboration with your colleagues or balancing work-family issues.*

The dataset consists of a total of 5460 respondents, so an outlining had to be made in order to make it manageable. Therefore, the data used was limited to managers working in small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs. SMEs in this case include companies that have less than 50 paid employees. Another criterion for outlining the data was the country where the respondent works – it was limited to the respondents working in Finland since the COVID-19 situation was in different phases in different countries during the time when the data was collected so the data would not otherwise be comparable. By taking these things into account, the data could be limited to 195 respondents.

3.3. Data analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was used for analyzing the data (King & Brooks 2019). Thematic analysis focuses on finding patterns and recurring themes from the data. It is widely used in qualitative research since it creates sets of elaborate and unstructured data that needs to be communicated in an understandable manner. The thematic analysis process always includes two steps: qualifying the themes and structuring them in larger groups. (King & Brooks 2019)

Analyzing qualitative data is more a creative process than mechanical or technical. The qualitative data analysis includes three steps: finding patterns, figuring out what these patterns could mean and finding possible meanings in the data. (Esterberg 2002)

Coding the qualitative data was done to organize the written data (Basit 2010). Since the data was collected beforehand, the most suitable way to analyse the open-ended questionnaire data was to code the answers into different categories. As Esterberg (2002) states, coding the data is the initial phase in making sense of the data. The coding process should not be limited to the pre-established codes but instead the process should be let to reveal some prospective imports (Esterberg 2002). Therefore, the coding process should start by developing ideas on what could be found in the data which will later be followed by refining the codes (Esterberg 2002).

Conducting the analysis started by manually coding the collected data. Coding was done in order to find patterns – different respondents may struggle with same kinds of challenges and find the same things rewarding (Esterberg 2002). The coding was done by putting answers in different categories with Atlas.ti version 8.4.4, a qualitative analysis software. Choosing the most relevant categories was done both before and during the analysis. The predetermined themes were chosen on the basis of findings in earlier research but they were also formed during the analysis phase to make sure that the chosen themes were appropriate for the data. There were 4 main themes and 14 subthemes. Coding the data under these themes was made in order to be able to organize the data by finding the most significant factors in remote working during the first wave of COVID-19.

In total there were 367 quotes coded to different themes. Some categories were bigger and included a great number of the respondents while some of them were smaller but still linked several responses. Most of the quotes were related to either work-family interface or communications inside the organization. It was also found that some of the respondents found only challenges in remote working and others only opportunities. The questions in the questionnaire that were used in this analysis were open-ended and non-leaning which might have led to the situation where people with different experiences on remote working responded to them.

The coding process started deductively – the intention was to make a codebook based on the theoretical framework before getting to know the data itself. The basic idea of deduction is that the study should be based on the theory (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). However, conducting a research in a strictly deductive manner is inadvisable in many cases (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). In this case, not all quotes could be coded on the basis of prior knowledge, and therefore it was necessary to add some codes during the coding process. Therefore, deductive and inductive approaches were combined to find the best possible categorization for the quotes on the basis of both the earlier knowledge and the empirical data. In this way, the research process can evolve. The following first-class codes were deductively decided and they included 326 quotes:

- *Work-life interface:* Changes in balancing between work and non-work life in remote work. Time management – saved time in for example commuting or on the contrary lengthened work days.
- *Leadership:* Challenges and opportunities related to leading in general and to leading subordinates.
- *Communication:* All communications related; for example quotes about the changed amount or character of communication. The feelings of better or worse connection with others.

After dividing the quotations into the three main categories, 41 quotations were left without a category. These quotes formed a fourth first-class code that was decided inductively:

- *Working conditions*: Challenges and possibilities related to ICTs and ergonomics in remote work.

When it comes to second-class codes, work-life interface was divided into two categories deductively:

- *Concentration:* The changes in ability to concentrate on work in home compared to working at the office.
- *Time management:* Saved time from commuting to office or lengthened days.

After that there was a need to make a category for the rest of the quotes related to work-life interface. They could be categorized as following:

- *Work-life balance:* In general, the ability or disability to switch roles and to balance between work and non-work.

Leadership was deductively divided into the following two categories:

- *Communication with subordinates:* The challenges in finding the right amount of communication, challenges with giving enough feedback.
- *Reorganizing work:* Challenges (and opportunities) in changing the ways of working.

After the two second-class categories, there were 33 quotes under the code without a category. The quotes could be inductively divided into following two:

- *Fast change:* challenges and opportunities coming from the pace of the change: fast adaptation into the situation by finding the solutions or feeling of chaos in the organization.
- *Leading remotely:* Feeling of succeeding or failing in remote leading in general.

Communication could be divided into four second-class categories deductively based in literature:

- *Lack of meetings:* lack of social, face-to-face interaction.
- *Information sharing:* inadequate of ICTs in information sharing in everyday work.
- *Lack of ad hoc meetings:* lack of spontaneous communication, for example so-called coffee table conversations.
- *Increased number of meetings:* More time of a workday spent in remote meetings since they don't require transitions from place to place.

From the inductively found category, working conditions, could be found the following two second-class categories:

- *ICTs:* Good adaptation or unsuitability of the ICTs in remote work.
- *Ergonomics:* Challenges with ergonomics in working remotely, resulting from insufficient tools.

After the data was coded to different categories, Atlas.ti was used for constructing a cross tabulation to show the co-occurrence between different background variables and mentioned challenges and possibilities. The background variables used were the age, gender, number of children and previous remote working experience of the respondent. The age was chosen since different generations might have different attitudes towards working remotely. The effect of gender on how remote work is perceived has been studied

before. The number of children is important since it affects how many people there are at home while the respondent is working remotely in the studied period. The last used variable, previous experience in remote work, was examined since it affects how familiar the respondent already is with this form of working. The most interesting co-occurrences are then shown in the form of tables.

The co-occurrence between the experienced challenges and possibilities and the background variables were looked at in form of percentages. The percentages were calculated since the different variable groups are of different sizes and therefore just the numbers cannot be tabulated. The data was looked at as groups instead of individuals – the mentioned challenges and opportunities of a group were aggregated and then the number of challenges or opportunities were divided by this number.

3.4. Research process evaluation and ethical concerns

Eriksson & Kovalainen (2015) have introduced the criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. This criteria includes the reliability, validity and generalizability of the study.

The research design of this study has been opened in this thesis and is consistent through the research process so that another research could end up in same results. Thus, this study can be seen as reliable. When it comes to validity of a qualitative study, the term is used more to confirm that the report is correct rather than confirming that the findings are certainly true (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015). The data has been coded and the findings of this study been constructed with keeping the theoretical framework in mind and thus analytic induction has been used.

Generalizability refers to being able to bring the findings of the study into a wider context (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015). The limitations of this study are mostly related to the generalizability and they are introduced in chapter 6.3. The findings of this study are mostly built on theoretical framework which makes them more generalizable but the research design also leaves space for new ideas.

The ethical concerns are discussed in the basis of criteria by Eriksson & Kovalainen (2015). When it comes to participation in the study, participating to the questionnaire used for this study was completely voluntary. With respect to anonymity, the name of a participant was not asked in the questionnaire. Any individual respondent cannot be identified in the study and only the most relevant background variables were taken into this study.

4 Results

This chapter represents the results found in the qualitative data analysis. The chapter is divided in the basis of different themes that have repeated in the empirical data. Since the language of the responses varied between Finnish and English, I use Google translate for rough translations and then modify them when using the quotations from Finnish responses.

First, the challenges and opportunities that remote work during COVID-19 had for managers are presented. The ambivalence in the responses is then examined. Finally, the effect of background variables in the answers is examined.

Table 2: Coding criteria

Challenges	Coding criteria	Opportunities
68	Work-life interface	100
56	Leadership	29
48	Communication	26
29	Working conditions	12

4.1. Challenges

The most common challenges of remote work the managers mentioned in their responses are divided into four categories – **work-life interface** in the form of *concentration*, *time management* and *work-life balance*, **leadership** in the form of *fast change, communication with subordinates, leading remotely, reorganizing work* and *supervising subordinates*, **communication** in the form of *lack of meetings, information sharing, lack of ad hoc meetings* and *increased amount of meetings* and, finally, **working conditions** in the form of *ICTs* and *ergonomics* (Table 3).

Table 3: Challenges

Challenges		187
Work-life interface		68
Concentration	Lack of repose at home for example because of family	(35)
Time management	Lengthened workdays	(20)
Work-life balance	Challenges in combining work and life	(13)
Leadership		56
Fast change	Chaos and uncertainty	(21)
Communication with subordinates	Keeping the communication with subordinates at a good enough level	(13)
Leading remotely	Leading remotely in general	(9)
Reorganizing work	Need to reorganize everyone's work in a fast pace	(8)
Supervising subordinates	Challenges in supervising what everyone's doing remotely	(5)
Communication		48
Lack of meetings	Lack of social, face-to-face, interaction	(23)
Information sharing	Challenges in sharing information	(17)
Lack of ad hoc meetings	Lack of spontaneous meetings	(5)
Increased amount of meetings	More meetings because no time for transitions needed	(3)
Working conditions		29

ICTs	Problems with insufficient ICTs	(15)
Ergonomics	Problems with insufficient working facilities	(14)

4.1.1. Work-life interface

68 respondents mentioned that the situation posed work-life interface-challenges for them. These challenges are divided into three categories – concentration, time management and work-life balance.

35 respondents had problems with concentrating on the work at home. Most of the challenges related to concentration were about having to work in the home environment. For 24 respondents this challenge resulted from the situation where other people in the worker's household were also required to stay home because of the pandemic situation – for example the children that were in remote school or asked not to be brought to kindergarten, or in some cases the partner that was also working from home.

 Some respondents even had all their family members at home – for example partner, school-aged children and kindergarten-aged children. Some of the respondents that had difficulties with their family also staying at home also struggled with the so-called role conflict where they had to act in multiple roles at the same time. One respondent mentioned that he did not like having home and work close to each other so working remotely made it difficult to segregate the two.

"The challenge was reconciling family life and work. I don't like bringing work home and close to free time."

Some respondents felt that since their children were shifted to remote school but still needed help in conducting their schoolwork, they had to take the role of a home teacher in addition to the roles of parent and worker. One respondent stated that the multiplicity of roles consumed all her energy.

"Being a home teacher in addition to your own work has increased the burden considerably and the reserves of energy are over at the end of the day."

For nine respondents the lack of repose rose from the demand to simultaneously supervise the children on their schoolwork and concentrate on one's own work tasks. *"The challenge is when my elementary school kids are at home and also in a remote school and especially the first grader really needs a lot of help with the school assignments."* For seven respondents the challenge ensued from the circumstance where parents were asked to keep their children home from the kindergarten if at all possible. The situation required them to entertain their children – to come up for them with something to do and to take care of their needs. One respondent described how the challenge was combining the work that for a big part consists of meetings with taking care of her child's needs.

"Also challenging is fully participating in daily non routine customer meetings (about half of the working) while my 2-years-old child needs quite much routine activities during the day to keep her calm and satisfied (not screaming during meetings)"

When it comes to time management, for some respondents the case was that working remotely made their workdays even longer than they used to be. 20 respondents mentioned longer days as a challenge. This was mainly due to one of the following reasons: either the days lengthened because they could not schedule their workdays like before or because they simply got more work to do due to the ongoing crisis. For some respondents, the problem stems from the physical environment since the work and free time happens in the same place. When they worked from the office, leaving the office was a sign that the working day ended. One respondent also stated that this sign for her was seeing her colleagues leaving the office so now her days lengthened because she did not register the need to end the workday like before.

"Days stretch easily towards surprisingly long. When working at the office, people leaving tend to be a sign for me that I should end the day as well."

When it comes to actually having more work to do, one respondent said that *"The situation has caused extra work and also lengthened the days worked remotely."* Another

respondent described a similar challenge in the following way: *"There has been a lot of work and the responsibility of the solutions is very big."*

For 13 respondents the challenge was about the ability to switch between work and non-work life. Many of them felt like the line between work and non-work was blurred due to everything happening in the same place. For some this led to a situation where the work- and non-work spheres overlapped. One respondent described this overlap: *"The overlap of work and leisure has produced too long days, stress and ergonomic discomfort."* One respondent describes the challenge of the same physical environment for different spheres by stating that he does not like seeing his working tools in the atmosphere where he spends his free time.

"Part of my well-being is separating work and leisure relaxation, and I don't find the situation relaxing when I see workplace computers and materials in the bedroom and kitchen."

Another respondent states that she does not have a separate room for working so spending all her time in the same atmosphere makes her feel like she is always at work. This also stems from the inability to switch between the spheres in the same physical environment.

"Since I do not have a study, it has sometimes felt like I'm at work all the time."

To conclude, the main challenge in the work-life interface was the ability of the leaders as employees to concentrate on their work at home, mostly due to having other persons at home during workdays. This also created challenges of taking several roles at the same time. Another challenge was lengthened workdays resulting from having more work or challenges in scheduling the day. The weaker ability to switch between work and non-work was also seen as a challenge.

4.1.2. Leadership

56 challenges related to the leadership were mentioned in the data. The leadership-related challenges varied a lot – some were mostly about organizing the work, but the others were about understanding subordinates' feelings and work satisfaction. Therefore, leadership-related challenges are divided into five different categories: fast change, remote leading in

general, reorganizing work, supervising subordinates, and communication with subordinates.

21 respondents mentioned the fast pace of the change as a challenge. This was mostly due to the feelings of chaos and uncertainty in the work or the overall situation. This category is therefore divided into two categories: chaos and uncertainty.

Ten responses fit under the category chaos. This category is strongly related to the leadership-aspect. One respondent says that she has had work in managing the chaos of having continuous challenges in the organization to answer to and this has also made it mandatory to put back many earlier plans.

" The challenge has been managing chaos – I am in charge of the staff and communications. Curve balls come from both areas all the time. There has not been enough time to respond to everything that lies ahead. Many longer-term plans have had to be postponed."

Respondents also felt like there were many things that needed to be changed simultaneously – as one respondent described, the problem for her apart from making the decisions also included communicating forward the continuous changes – *"There were many issues to be resolved at once and the solutions had to be communicated to the different parties quickly."* One respondent even said that switching to remote work was done at such a fast pace that some of the tools needed for working were left at the office. *"Fast transition to telecommuting. Some of the unfinished business and their materials had to be left in the office."*

11 respondents mentioned uncertainty as a challenge. The uncertainty was felt about the future of the organization, the whole field, one's job or even the whole world's situation. One respondent described her anxiety by stating that her challenge was handling the uncertainty she has about the future of the organization and that this uncertainty also spilled over to work itself in a negative way.

"The uncertainty caused by corona about the future of the company and the chaos caused by the uncertainty that has had a disruptive effect on the work."

Another respondent expressed how he was worried about the situation in the wider sphere: on the national level instead of only organizational. The worry was about the state of the economy and the actions of the decision-makers of the country.

"Anxiety about the complete stagnation of the economy. The management of the neglectful situation in Finland and thus the incorrectly sized actions."

Some of the responses on leadership were about leading remotely in general. Some of these responses were in a simple form – for example *"I belong to the management team of the organization and leading remotely is challenging"*. One respondent also stated that *"Acting as a manager remotely is from ass."* One manager mentioned the issue that his subordinates worked from the office whereas he was working remotely. He decided to also work one day a week from the office in order to better manage his subordinates. These kinds of arrangements needed to be done to conform the needs of the subordinates.

The challenges with communicating with the subordinates remotely were mentioned 13 times. Many of those citations included the worry about how the subordinates are feeling in the situation and how it has affected the working atmosphere. One respondent describes how the challenge is making sure that everyone is feeling good without seeing them physically and to know if there is something that could be done to make the remote working more adequate for the subordinates.

"Being sure that employees are feeling positive and united without seeing them physically and that all unnecessary obstacles for effective work are removed from the team."

One respondent also mentioned that continuously supporting and motivating her subordinates made it more difficult to complete her own work tasks when supervising her nine subordinates took more time than it did before.

"The most challenging thing has been to be a supervisor when the work tasks of some of the team members have changed considerably. I spend a lot more time supporting and motivating team members (I have 9 direct subordinates), etc. This in turn makes it difficult for me to do my own other (expert) work tasks."

Eight respondents mentioned the challenge of managing the work itself. Shifting to remote work and the other changes that the COVID-19 crisis brought, demanded the managers to reorganize their subordinates' work. One clear characteristic of this challenge was the pace in which the reorganization needed to be done and implemented. One respondent stated that the problem was in the need to implement imperfect changes because of the pace of the change.

"It was also necessary to create new arrangements for coordinating everyone's work - I think there are still shortcomings here."

Five respondents said that they had challenges with supervising their subordinates. One respondent stated that *"One can no longer know what the other is doing or what has not been done."* The issues with supervising include both what the subordinates are doing and how well they are doing their tasks. These problems also stem from the situation where the subordinates' tasks required them to work in the workplace whereas the manager worked remotely. One respondent mentioned that his work included supervising construction sites and supervising them remotely was a challenge.

"Remote monitoring of construction sites is only partially possible."

To conclude, the pace of the change was widely seen as a challenge for leadership due to feelings of chaos and uncertainty. Also communicating with subordinates remotely was challenging, mainly from the uncertainty in knowing how everyone was feeling. Also reorganizing the work towards remote working and finding ways to supervise the subordinates' work were seen as challenges.

4.1.3. Communication

When it comes to communication, 48 challenges were mentioned related to it. The challenges related to communication can be divided into three categories: lack of meetings in general, lack of ad-hoc meetings and, on the contrary, the increased number of meetings.

23 of the mentioned challenges in communication were about the **lack of meetings.** This category includes both missing social meetings in general and meeting the work-related

stakeholders – meeting both colleagues and clients were mentioned. Some of the challenges in communication were due to workers longing for social contacts in the same physical environment. The respondents felt like they could not experience the same kind of connectivity with their colleagues than before the COVID-19 and some of them were even concerned about how this will affect their organisation in the long run – one respondent expressed this in the following quote: *"In the future, I find it challenging how the work community's togetherness will work if the state of emergency continues for a long time."*

Some respondents also expressed fatigue on the social isolation outside the work itself – for example in a form of not being able to attend freetime activities or seeing their close ones. As one respondent stated: *"Not being able to see and socialise with people is eating at me."*

17 responses were about the challenges in information sharing. These included challenges both in how information could be shared in a way that it could be fully understood by the receiver and in the accessibility of the stakeholders. One respondent stated that *"colleagues cannot be reached because they are at distance and not reachable when needed"*. Another respondent described another type of challenge in information sharing – she felt like the problem was not getting the same kinds of information remotely that could be gotten when meeting colleagues face-to-face.

"It is challenging to be separated from co-workers, because you do not get the same information about the events and situation in your workplace as when you meet the co-workers."

Apart from having face-to-face meetings, the lack of ad hoc meetings was mentioned in five responses. This includes spontaneous encounters, for example coffee table conversations. The respondents felt like these kinds of meetings now required more effort: for example, one respondent stated that *"what used to be spontaneously walking to another person's desk now demands planning and structures."* Another respondent was also concerned about the possibility of some people from the work community getting left out from the group when the freer meetings need to be arranged separately.

"Now you need to agree separately if you want to have virtual coffees with co-workers. Part of the group is more easily left out."

However, three respondents also mentioned as a challenge the increased number of meetings. These respondents felt that the increased physical distance was compensated by holding more virtual meetings that now took a significant amount of time from the work. They felt like having too many meetings was hard. One respondent said that because there is no need to move places between virtual meetings, they were running continuously through the day.

"Ongoing meetings. When transitions between meeting places are left out, meetings may continue uninterrupted throughout the day."

To conclude, the challenges in communication mostly stem from the lack of meetings in general and, more specifically, lack of ad hoc meetings, such as coffee table conversations. On the contrary, also the increased number of meetings was seen as a challenge for some. Challenges were also experienced on how effectively information could be shared in remote work.

4.1.4. Working conditions

When it comes to more practical issues, some workers found the used information and communication technologies inadequate for their work. 15 respondents mentioned the impractical ICTs as a challenge. These were both about the network connection issues and the poor technological tools. One respondent described the time-consuming characteristic of impractical ICTs as the following: *"I've also had to solve technical problems by myself and that has taken me more time."* One respondent even found the connections so insufficient that she had to continuously log off and on into the computer because of them.

"The inactivity of digital connections (today I've needed to log into my computer already for approximately 15 times because of the connection issues.)"

Ergonomics were the only category that was only seen as a challenge and not as an opportunity. 14 quotes included ergonomics as a challenge. Many respondents felt that the facilities and tools for working that they had at home were insufficient – it could be about

the space used for work at home or about the working tools, such as tables and chairs. Poor ergonomics even resulted in physical pain for some workers: *"Work ergonomics is also challenging, which one was not prepared for at home, leading in pain conditions having increased."* Some workers even needed to manage only with their laptop's screen as a working tool: *"Ergonomics problems, because in teleworking I have to use a laptop with a small screen and small keyboard."*

To conclude, the challenges experienced in working conditions were about inadequate ICTs and ergonomics. The inadequate ICTs hindered the work whereas the challenges with ergonomics caused even physical pain.

4.2. Opportunities

The most common opportunities of remote work that the managers mentioned are divided into four categories – work-life interface in the form of concentration, time management and work-life balance, leadership in the form of fast change and leading remotely, communication in the form of togetherness and, finally, working conditions in the form of ICTs (Table 3).

Table 4: Opportunities

Rewarding		**167**
Work-life interface		100
Time management	Time saved in commuting and the ability to spend more time with family etc.	(67)
Concentration	Ability to concentrate to work	(28)
Work-life balance	Ability to better balance work- and non-work life	(5)
Leadership		29
Fast change	Fast adaptation to the situation	(24)

Leading remotely	Success in remote leading in general	(5)
Communication		26
Togetherness	Everyone working together and supporting each other	(26)
Working conditions		12
ICTs	Taking ICTs into full usage	(12)

4.2.1. Work-life interface

100 opportunities were mentioned related to work-life interface. These opportunities are divided into three categories: time management, concentration and work-life balance.

67 mentioned *time management* as an opportunity. Most of these were about saved hours for example from not having to commute to the workplace. These saved hours also concretely resulted in better work-life balance – as one respondent describes, the remote work has enhanced her well-being in a form of nicer mornings and better sleep since time is saved from the long commute.

"My sleep has become better since I don't have to put on an alarm. The mornings start nicely with a long walk with the dog – longer than I usually tend to have time for during weekdays. My commute is long, so working remotely brings in just over two extra hours a day."

The increased amount of sleep was specifically mentioned by five workers related to this topic. Another main opportunity related to time management was the ability to spend more time with one's family when they were able to spend more time at home with their family members. Both time with one's partner and their children were mentioned. Many felt that this had brought their family closer to each other. One respondent described that her

favorite thing about the situation was having the ability to connect with the family while working at home.

"At home we have gotten a greater connection between family members which is probably the most wonderful thing about this whole awful thing."

28 respondents mentioned concentration as an opportunity. For them working remotely meant better ability to concentrate in their work without continuous interruptions. One respondent wrote that she was able to focus better on her work when the colleagues did not constantly interfere with her work.

"There have been less unnecessary distractions from colleagues so it has been easier to concentrate on one task at a time than usually."

Some respondents mentioned that the better ability to concentrate was especially beneficial when carrying out more challenging tasks that require concentration. Apart from the continuous interruptions in the office from colleagues, many respondents also explained the increased ability to concentrate with the fact that they did not have the same kind of commotion around them that they used to have at the office. As one respondent puts it, since he lives alone, he has good repose at home.

"Repose as I am working alone, no distractions."

The last sub-category, work-life balance, includes the five responses that include the better ability to combine work and non-work life in remote work. One respondent describes that the quality of her life had increased since she had completely gotten rid of the stress and had a better focus on both spheres of life – she even said that she is now happier and has more hours in a day.

"The lack of commutes has given me calmer mornings and evenings, the stress has actually gone away completely. I feel like I can focus more effectively on everything that matters, both at work and in my free time. I am more efficient, happier and more relaxed like this, and feel that now finally there really are a couple of extra hours in a day."

To conclude, the biggest opportunity related to the work-life interface was having more time outside work coming from not needing to commute to the workplace. Also better ability to concentrate was seen as an opportunity – mainly because of the decreased number of interruptions during the day. Some respondents also felt like they could more easily switch between the work and non-work spheres.

4.2.2. Leadership

Opportunities in leadership are divided into two different categories: fast adaptation and remote leading.

24 respondents mentioned *fast adaptation* as an opportunity. This meant for example the ability to react to the situation rapidly so that the situation did not affect the daily operations of the organization. One respondent stated that they had even prepared for the crisis from the beginning of the year and therefore were able to quickly adapt to the situation in a way that many other organizations could not.

"We have been able to react proactively from the outset as we prepared for the crisis from January onwards. When Finland began to move to exceptional circumstances, all we had to do was take pre-agreed measures and not use energy for adaptation and pondering (unlike many other large and small organizations that we have been following)."

Many respondents also mentioned that it was rewarding to succeed in changing the way everyone was working at such a fast pace. As one respondent described, a massive number of workers in the organization needed to shift to remote work and this needed to be and was done at a short notice.

"The fact that we were able to transfer 50 people to remote work who have not worked remotely at all before. And this happened mostly in a few days."

Five respondents mentioned remote leading in general as an opportunity. *"The operations have gone well in exceptional circumstances, good subordinates."* These responses were mostly about success in leading the subordinates although the circumstances had changed.

To conclude, the opportunities in leadership were mostly about the ability to adapt to the new situation and the general satisfaction on how a certain level of leading could be maintained in the situation.

4.2.3. Communication

26 respondents mentioned communications as an opportunity. This category includes the feeling of togetherness and supportiveness in the work community. One respondent stated that although everyone had their own struggles in the situation, as a team they were able to stick together and find new solutions for their customers.

"While everyone has had to do with both their own mental well-being and suddenly learning to work remotely, the entire organization has suddenly been working together, innovating and inventing new ways to serve customers now that they can no longer be seen live. Awesome supportivity and team spirit."

One respondent even said that the cooperation and their work community had improved and another said that their team's bonds had strengthened.

"Improvements in cooperation and communality." / "Our team's bonds have strengthened!"

To conclude, the opportunities experienced in communication were mostly about the feelings of togetherness within the work community and the support gotten from colleagues in the situation.

4.2.4. Working conditions

12 opportunities related to working conditions were mentioned and all of them are about ICTs. For example, one respondent was astonished how they were able to take the existing tools into usage when transferring to the remote work.

"Our digital tools have existed for long but there has been a mental gap for taking them into usage. Now that it is mandatory, we take 100% advantage of them."

For many of these respondents the positive thing with ICTs has been learning to take advantage of the existing technologies. One respondent also felt that it was great how ICTs were taken into usage also for social interaction and not only for work-related meetings:

"*In addition to meetings, the work community has greatly increased the use of Zoom for different kinds of social interactions, such as a virtual coffee room for remote workers.*"

To conclude, the opportunities in working conditions were all related to ICTs. In these responses, the situation requiring companies to transfer to remote working, was a driver for taking the ICTs into full usage.

4.3. Ambivalence within the challenges and opportunities

The data shows an ambivalence in how managers perceive remote working – the same issues are seen both as challenges and opportunities. Ambivalence can be seen within one person – they have found the same thing in the situation both as a challenge and as an opportunity. Ambivalence turns out in the categories of work-life interface, communication and leadership.

Table 5: Ambivalence in different themes

Theme	Amount
Work-life interface	14
Time management	5
Family issues	9
Communication	3
Repose vs meetings	3
Leadership	1
Fast change	1

When it comes to ambivalences within the work-life interface, one ambivalence can be seen in the presence of the family at home in 9 managers' responses. While some individual respondents were happy to spend more time with their family when everyone stayed at home, they also felt that it was a challenge for their work since they were not able to concentrate on their work tasks. For example, one respondent mentioned as a challenge that she needed to combine work and family life when her children were doing their schoolwork remotely, but as an opportunity that she was able to stay at home with them.

"Reconciling work and family life when there are two primary school boys at home whose school work also needs to be taken care of"

"I have been able to be at home with my family."

Ambivalence can also be found in time management. This can be seen in 5 managers' responses. For example, one respondent stated that time management had been challenging for her in remote work and the days had lengthened but at the same time she mentioned as an opportunity that the mornings were more comfortable and that remote work has brought two extra hours to her days since time is saved from commuting to the work.

"Quitting telecommuting in the evenings is difficult and working days stretch."

"My sleep has become better since I don't have to put on an alarm. The mornings start nicely with a long walk with the dog – longer than I usually tend to have time for during weekdays. My commute is long, so working remotely brings in just over two extra hours a day."

In the category of communication, ambivalence can be seen in respondents that see the lack of the social aspect and face-to-face meetings in the work as a challenge but at the same time feel that the possibility to concentrate on their tasks without interruptions by colleagues is rewarding. This means that the absence of social aspects is seen as a disadvantage but also leads to positive effects. For example, one respondent emphasized the importance of belonging in the work community and the social contacts that cannot

now be implemented, but at the same time he stated that it is now easier to concentrate without interruptions.

"In the workplace, doing work and concretely belonging to the work community with its social contacts has its own very important value, which cannot be experienced in remote work."

"Working remotely allows you to do work with fewer interruptions and a better opportunity to focus on some work tasks."

When it comes to leadership, one respondent found the fast change both as a challenge and as an opportunity. She stated that it has been challenging that so many things needed to be resolved and communicated at the same time, but it was rewarding to succeed in resolving the problems quickly.

"There were many issues to be resolved at the same time and the solutions had to be communicated to different parties quickly."

"Together we managed to solve things quickly, organizing into new roles took place instantly and naturally."

4.4. Co-occurrence between background variables and experiences

The effects of background variables are tested with a cross tabulation. The most interesting co-occurrences are shown in the following tables. Background variables might explain why different respondents might see the same things either as a challenge or as an opportunity. The co-occurrences are counted by looking at the different background variables as groups. This means that the percentages are counted by dividing the number of mentioned challenges or opportunities in a specific group by the sum of all the mentions in that group. This was done by looking at the co-occurrences in Atlas.ti and then converting the numbers to percentages.

The first co-occurrence chosen to be analyzed is between the number of children and concentration since this can be seen as an interesting feature in the pandemic situation coming from employees having their families at home. The hassle around the worker could potentially affect how they can concentrate in the work. When it comes to respondent with no children, only 6% of the concentration-related issues were challenges whereas even 94% of them were opportunities. Thus, it can be said that they felt that working remotely acted as an opportunity for their ability to concentrate on their work. In the contrary, 86% of the concentration-related quotes of the respondents with more than one child were challenges and 14% of them opportunities. It can be seen that the situation is almost opposite between the respondents with no children and the ones with more than one child. When it comes to how respondents with one child experienced the ability to concentration, 36% of the quotes were challenges and 64% opportunities.

Table 6: Co-occurrence between the number of children and concentration

	No children	**One child**	**More than one child**
Concentrating problems	6%	36%	86%
Better concentration	94%	64%	14%

One background variable that is important to be looked at is the previous experience in remote working of a respondent. This is because the ones that have already been working remotely probably are already familiar with it and have had more time to adapt to it. It can be seen from the co-occurrence that respondents that have never worked remotely before the COVID-19 situation have the most challenges when compared to the number of opportunities they have mentioned – 61% of their quotes are challenges and 39% opportunities. It looks like the more experience one has in remote work, the more opportunities related to challenges they mention – quotes of the respondents who had worked two or more days per week remotely before the situation were 49% challenges and 51% opportunities, so slightly more opportunities than challenges. The respondents are divided into four groups on the basis on their previous experience on remote work and the

percent of challenges decreases the more the group has previous experience. This can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Co-occurrence between previous remote work experience and the amount of mentioned challenges and possibilities

	Never	**< once a week**	**One day per week**	**Two or more days per week**
Challenges	61%	55%	52%	49%
Opportunities	39%	45%	48%	51%

When looking at how the challenges factorize, it can be seen that the less challenges one mentions on leadership the more they have previous experience in remote work. 32% of the challenges mentioned by respondents who have been worked remotely less than once a week before the pandemic, whereas the same percent was 27% for respondents having worked once a week remotely and 20% for respondents having worked more than one day per week remotely. When it comes to other challenge categories, there cannot be similar connections between them and the previous remote working experience. This can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Co-occurrence between previous remote work experience and experienced challenges

Challenges	**< once a week**	**One day per week**	**More than one day per week**
Communication	21%	34%	30%
Leadership	32%	27%	20%
Work-life interface	33%	27%	35%
Working conditions	14%	12%	15%

When it comes to opportunities, the more opportunities one sees in working conditions the less experience they have on remote work. 6% of the opportunities in the group having worked less than once a week remotely were about working conditions, whereas the same number for the group having worked one day per week remotely was 3% and for the group having worked more than one day per week only 1%. This might be since many of the mentioned opportunities related to working conditions were about taking the ICTs into more effective usage, which might have happened earlier for the ones that have been working remotely even before the crisis. There is also difference between the experienced opportunities in communication between the ones that have worked less than once a week remotely and the ones that have worked more than one day per week before the crisis – the percentage of communication for respondents having worked less than once a week remotely was 14% and for respondents having worked more than one day per week 25%. When it comes to opportunities related to work-life interface, the percentages are almost the same in each category – 62% for respondents having worked one or less days per week remotely and 65% for respondents having worked more than one day per week remotely. These are looked at in Table 9.

Table 9: Co-occurrence between previous remote work experience and experienced opportunities

Opportunities	< once a week	One day per week	More than one day per week
Communication	14%	13%	25%
Leadership	19%	23%	0%
Work-life interface	62%	62%	65%
Working conditions	6%	3%	1%

The effect of gender is looked at because it has also been previously examined (see Ajjan et al. 2020, Azarbouyeh & Naini 2013, Sangeetha 2020). It can be seen from the data that female respondents have mentioned more challenges related to opportunities than males. However the difference is rather small – 55% of the challenges and opportunities

mentioned by females were challenges and 45% opportunities whereas for male the challenges took 53% and opportunities 47%. This can be seen from Table 10.

Table 10: Co-occurrence between gender and the number of mentioned challenges and possibilities

	Female	**Male**
Challenges	**55%**	**53%**
Opportunities	**45%**	**47%**

More of the challenges reported by males were about communication, even 40% of them whereas the same number for females was 17%. The biggest percentage, 34%, of the challenges mentioned by female respondents were within leadership, whereas 21% of the challenges mentioned by male respondents were related to it. These can be seen from Table 11.

Table 11: Co-occurrence between gender and experienced challenges

Challenges	**Female**	**Male**
Communication	**17%**	**40%**
Leadership	**34%**	**21%**
Work-life interface	**33%**	**29%**
Working conditions	**16%**	**10%**

When it comes to the mentioned opportunities, the biggest percentage for both female and male respondents is related to the work-life interface – 61% for females and 63% for males. The percentages in the opportunities differ less than the ones in challenges. The percentage of working conditions of the mentioned opportunities were the same for both genders, 6%. These percentages can be seen from Table 12.

Table 12: Co-occurrence between gender and experienced opportunities

Opportunities	Female	Male
Communication	18%	10%
Leadership	16%	21%
Work-life interface	61%	63%
Working conditions	6%	6%

To sum up, there was a noticeable difference on how respondents with no children and respondents with more than one child experienced the ability to concentrate in remote work. In addition, respondents without previous experience in remote work found more challenges than opportunities whereas the situation was opposite for respondents having previously worked two or more days per week remotely. When it comes to gender, females mentioned slightly more challenges related to opportunities than males.

5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the empirical findings of this thesis related to earlier literature. The objective is to discuss the similarities and differences between the findings of this thesis and earlier literature on remote work in general but also find how this specific situation differs from it. After that, some theoretical and managerial implications will be drawn. Although this study is not wide enough to advise the managers by the findings of it, some recommendations can be made by combining it with earlier literature.

5.1. Consequences of remote work

The similarities and differences between the earlier literature and the findings of this study will be looked at in this section. These are divided into two perspectives: the personal consequences and the leadership-related consequences of remote work. It will also be looked at which experiences might result from the situation with the pandemic. In chapter 5.1.3., the two perspectives will be combined and summarized.

5.1.1. Personal consequences

Although only managers' responses were chosen for this dissertation, the challenges and opportunities they mentioned were probably quite similar with the ones from subordinates – although they are managers, they also face the same everyday challenges in their own work. The fact that most of the responses were not directly related to leadership is understandable since it was not emphasized on how the questions were framed – the respondents were asked about challenges and opportunities in their work, not in just leadership. The non-leadership results are discussed in this chapter.

When it comes to the challenges and opportunities in the work-life interface, the results of this study were mainly in line with the earlier literature. As found in earlier studies, remote work had both positive and negative effects on time management. This study confirmed the issue of some workers having the challenge of lengthened workdays that was also found by Konrad et al. (2000) and Dimitrova (2003). However, other respondents found that working remotely actually brought more hours into their day – just as Grant et al. (2013) and Tavares (2017) reported in their studies.

Looking at the five theories on how work and life can affect each other by Zedeck and Mosier (1990), the first approach, multiple roles existing at the same time, seems to be dominant in this study. The approach suggests that there is an interrelationship between the work and life spheres – the insistences in one may spill-over to the other. This can be seen in the results of this study. For example, some of the managers in this study felt that their work spilled to their free time since both happened at the same place but, likewise, they had to act as parents and even teachers for their children while they were working. This might even be a typical feature for work-life balance when work is done remotely – it raises the issue of having to balance between the different spheres and roles in the same place.

The role conflict that Allen et al. (2015) introduced and was also raised by Wan et al. (2020) related to COVID-19 situation could also be found in this study – especially in the form of respondents having to act as home teachers or supervisors for their children staying at home during the most severe restrictions. This was actually one of the special features of this situation – the restrictions and recommendations related to children's school or kindergarten clearly affected how the situation was perceived since managers with children had to give attention to them during workdays. When comparing the findings of this study to earlier literature, it can be seen that the role conflict has been a greater challenge during the pandemic than in remote work before it.

Also the implications of remote working on communication were mostly similar to the ones introduced in earlier studies. The negative effect of decreased amount of ad hoc communication found by Waizenegger et al. (2020) was mentioned by respondents of this study. On the contrary, as Waizenegger et al. (2020) stated, less ad hoc communication can also be seen as a good thing since it also means decreased number of interruptions by colleagues. This was confirmed in this study – many respondents stated that they could better concentrate on their work tasks since there were less interruptions. The feelings of isolation and lack of social interaction introduced by McNaughton et al. (2014) and Tavares (2017) were confirmed in this study – respondents missed social gatherings and physical contact. Leonardi et al. (2010) stated that some were annoyed by too much communication from their colleagues or managers, but this was not found in this study – none of the respondents mentioned this as a challenge. Reason for this might be the situation in which everyone in the organization transited to remote working simultaneously

– the situation might have been different if only some workers worked remotely and the others stayed at the office.

When it comes to working conditions, poor ergonomics and inadequate information systems were introduced as challenges in previous research on remote working (Belanger et al. 2001, Buomprisco et al. 2021, Hoe et al. 2021). These same issues were emphasized in the findings of this study, as well as the opportunity of having less noise hindrance which was also mentioned by Bandury & Berry (2005). However, the new finding of this study was the satisfaction of the managers in how existing ICTs were taken into full usage in remote work. This was vital since all possible work needed to be reorganized so that it could be done remotely. That demanded organizations to use their ICTs.

The ambivalence within some respondents' experienced challenges and opportunities is a relatively little studied perspective on how remote work is perceived. In this study the ambivalence perspective was taken into account and quite many ambivalent responses were found. It is interesting to see how one person might see for example the presence of their family at home both as a challenge and as an opportunity. While the family staying at home might be a distraction from the work and cause interruptions, many felt that it was nice to be able to spend more time with them. This specific consideration might also be related to the specific situation of COVID-19 pandemic since it required many families to stay at home. However, ambivalence was also found in aspects that are not only related to the pandemic situation, for example in time management.

5.1.2. Leadership-related consequences

Some respondents mentioned leadership-related challenges and opportunities that they faced in the situation. One of the themes found in the study was that leading remotely in general was challenging. This confirms what Downes (2020) found – leading remotely takes more effort from the leader than leading in the same physical environment. The respondents of this study felt like making sure that everyone was alright and that things would flow like usually took more time and effort from them.

Downes (2020) stated in his study that the managers leading remotely felt that it was challenging to recognize if their subordinates were feeling happy or unhappy. That was also found in this study – some respondents saw this as the biggest challenge in leading

remotely. Also, several studies (see Bergum 2009, McNaughton et al. 2014, Dambrin 2004) found that the amount of communication between the manager and subordinate decreased in remote work and led to less given feedback. These themes were also found in this study. The respondents were worried about how their subordinates felt and they wanted to ensure that the contact was kept with them and there was enough communication towards them. The worries about communication with the subordinates were mostly related to the feeling-aspect.

One of the challenges in leading remotely for the managers in this study was the need to reorganize their subordinates' work, which was not emphasized in earlier literature on remote work. Thus, it can be said that this challenge might have more to do with the special characteristics of the COVID-19 situation than with remote leading in general which might usually take more time to plan and organize. Here the fast pace of the change and the emergent need to transit everyone to remote work made reorganizing the work more difficult by introducing a chaotic situation. There was no time to plan and manage the change process in advance.

The supervision of subordinates' work remotely that was emphasized by Dimitrova (2003) was also mentioned by some managers in this study. Dimitrova (2003) did not find any greater differences on how remote work was supervised related to traditional style of working, but it awoke concern on some managers in this study – they were unsure how their subordinates were performing their tasks. However, this might have been affected by lack of previous experience in leading remotely and lack of tools for controlling the work remotely in a situation where the need to work remotely came unexpectedly. Also, it can be argued if strict supervision is even necessary.

The previous literature in leading remotely was mostly emphasized around negative aspects, but also some opportunities were found in this study. However, these opportunities were mainly related to the COVID-19 situation and the managers being pleased in how quickly their organizations were able to adapt to the situation and the unexpected changes required in it. None of the respondents stated that leading remotely had been easier or more effective than leading the subordinates in the same location with them.

5.1.3. Concluding the comparison

The same themes occur in previous literature and this thesis. The positive and negative features of remote working can be divided into following four categories: work-life interface, leadership, communications and working conditions.

When it comes to work-life interface, the challenges and opportunities introduced in previous literature were mainly the same that occurred in this study – weaker ability to balance between work and life, difficulties in concentrating the work and lengthened days stood out as challenges whereas better ability to balance between work and life and saved hours were seen as opportunities. One thing that was not emphasized in earlier literature but was experienced by the managers in this study was the better ability to concentrate. It can be seen within the work-life interface theme that the same issues can be seen both as challenges and opportunities.

Leadership-wise, only challenges were emphasized in earlier literature. Many of the challenges found in this study were similar – fast change, uncertainty, supervising subordinates and communicating with them were found in both. However, reorganizing work was a new finding in this study. It can be presumed that this challenge raised in the COVID-19-situation which required fast change. Also, the decreased amount of feedback emphasized in the earlier literature could not be found in this study. However, that might have come out if the study was done from subordinates' perspective.

The following challenges within communication can be found both in earlier literature and this study: lack of meetings, lack of ad hoc meetings and information sharing. The connectivity paradox introduced by Leonardi et al. (2010) was not directly found in this study, probably since the workers did not decide to work remotely. In addition, the impact in developing relationship probably was not mentioned by the managers in this study since the remote working had just started before the questionnaire was carried out. When it comes to opportunities, the togetherness probably stem from the crisis situation that everyone had to face.

The challenges in working conditions were related to ICTs and ergonomics both in earlier literature and this study. The biggest difference in this category was the finding of this study that the ICTs were also seen as an opportunity.

Table 13: Comparison between earlier literature and collected data

Earlier literature	Construct	This study
Challenges: - Work-life balance, concentration, long days Opportunities: - Work-life balance, saved hours	Work-life interface	Challenges: - Concentration, time management, work-life balance (68) Opportunities: - Time management, concentration, work-life balance (100)
Challenges: - Fast change, uncertainty, decreased amount of feedback, communication with subordinates, supervising subordinates	Leadership	Challenges: - Fast change, communication with subordinates, leading remotely, reorganizing work, supervising subordinates (56) Opportunities: - Fast change, leading remotely (29)
Challenges: - Lack of meetings, lack of ad hoc meetings,		Challenges: - Lack of meetings, information sharing, lack of

information sharing, impact on developing relationships, the connectivity paradox Opportunities: - Decreased amount of spontaneous communication	Communication	ad hoc meetings, increased amount of meetings (48) Opportunities: - Togetherness (26)
Challenges: - ICTs, ergonomics Opportunities: - Environment	Working conditions	Challenges: - ICTs, ergonomics (29) Opportunities: - ICTs (12)

5.2. Theoretical implications

This thesis has some implications for the research on remote working. This study indicates that there is ambivalence on how remote working is experienced, meaning that the same things can be seen both as a challenge and an opportunity. For example, the same person might feel like having their family in the place where they work is both a positive and negative thing since it allows them to spend more time with their family but also interferes with their work. It was found in this study that the ambivalences can be seen especially in the theme of work-life interface.

It was found in this study that when transiting to remote work, the ICTs that had already been available were finally taken into usage. This was a fairly new finding and could also affect the future of work if the new ways of using these tools could be maintained when working from the office is safe again. The implications of ICTs in remote work could also

be more looked at in general in the research in remote work since it was seen in this study that they play a role on how remote working is experienced. Although the role of ICTs in remote work has been looked at in some studies (see Belanger et al. 2001), the research around it has emphasized the negative effects of inadequate ICTs.

When it comes to leadership, some assumptions drawn from this study can be used as a basis for future research. It can be stated that leading remotely requires more efforts from leader than leading in the same place with the subordinates. Also, managers should emphasize the socialization of the subordinates in their leading.

Reorganizing the work needs to be done when transiting to remote work whenever it happens, although this was emphasized in this study because of the need to transit every work task that was previously done in the office to being done from home. This process needs to be closer looked at since it clearly is a distinctive characteristic of remote work.

5.3. Managerial implications

Some managerial implications can be drawn from this study. First, since there seems to be many opportunities in remote work, continuing it after the pandemic should be considered in organizations. Although this study was affected by the special characteristics of the COVID-19 crisis, also earlier studies on remote work show many opportunities. However, since there clearly are challenges in how for example working tools and communication are functioning in remote work, some development should be made. As Basile & Beauregard (2016) suggest, the employees should be given training on remote work – now that the remote work has become the "new normal" and the chaos of transiting to it has subsided, the training should be taken into consideration. The employees could be taught strategies for keeping their work-life balance at a healthy level.

As one main theme in both previous research in remote working and the findings of this study is communication, the organizations should find ways for improving the preconditions for communications in remote work. Although there seems to be need for more overall communication and conversations that are not motivated by work, the balance needs to be found on the amount of communication. Too much communication can be challenging as well. The lack of spontaneous communication can also be seen as a positive

issue and even be one of the reasons for someone to decide to work remotely (see Waizenegger et al. 2020, Leonardi et al. 2010).

Communication-wise, another challenge that needs to be tackled in remote work is the inadequate communication between manager and subordinate that was also found in this study. Several studies (see Downes 2020, Bergum 2009, Dambrin 2004) have noticed the negative effects of diminished communication and given feedback in remote work. This should be noted by leaders – the continuous communication and feedback should be utilized. However, there is a fine line between having enough communication with the subordinate and the connectivity paradox introduced by Leonardi et al. (2010) – if there is too much communication towards the remote worker, it can be felt as pressuring rather than empowering.

This study proves that workers have experienced remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways depending on their personal circumstances – this is something that should be kept in mind by the management. It also brings out the question of how strict boundaries organizations should draw for remote work – some find that the possibility to choose their working times freely help them to balance between work and non-work, whereas some find it hard to end their workday and their working days tend to lengthen at home.

Finally, it should be noted that if even some of the employees work remotely, it cannot be presumed that if the work can be done remotely, the employee can just take their working tools home and do everything like before. In the contrary, there are leadership-related issues that must be taken into account. Since leading remotely seems to take more effort (see Downes 2020), it also affects how manager's time can be allocated for other things. Apart from the need to give training for employees, also managers need training for being able to succeed in leading their subordinates remotely.

6 Conclusions

The objective of this chapter is to summarize the main findings of this study. This chapter also includes critically considering the limitations of the study and making suggestions for further research.

6.1. Main findings

The COVID-19 pandemic reaches all spheres of life, also the work (Tourish 2020). During the COVID-19 crisis, remote work has been widely adopted to avoid physical contacts and thereby restrain the spreading of the virus. This has brought in the challenge of having to work from an environment that might not be suitable for it (Waizenegger et al. 2020) The purpose of this study was to examine how managers experienced the remote working during COVID-19. This was studied in a qualitative study by using the questionnaire collected by the FutuRemote research group. The data was analyzed in a form of thematic analysis that was done with the help of Atlas.ti. The analysis was then compared to the earlier literature in the related topics.

The findings of this study showed that there are both negative and positive sides in the situation. Four larger themes could be found by analyzing the data in the challenges and opportunities experienced by the managers studied. These are work-life interface, leadership, communication and working conditions. The largest category was work-life interface, which includes for example time management and worker's ability to concentrate. The same issues were also found in the previous research on remote work. The findings from previous studies could also be divided in these same themes. The findings in all the four themes were mostly in line with the theoretical framework built for this study, but also new things were found. The COVID-19 situation brought in the issue of the fast need to transit to work remotely and the recommendations to keep children at home from school and kindergarten, and these matters affected how remote work was experienced.

When it comes to challenges in remote work during COVID-19, the biggest category found in this study was about the work-life interface. Those challenges were mostly about the lack of repose coming from other household members also staying at home and the

managers even having to supervise their children during the work days, having longer days at work and not being able to easily switch between the work and non-work spheres. The second category was about leadership-related challenges, which included challenges with the demand to make the changes at a fast pace, leading remotely in general, finding out how the subordinates were feeling, and also reorganizing and supervising their work. The communication-related challenges were mostly about the lack of meetings, and especially ad hoc meetings, effective information sharing, but also the increased number of meetings. The final category, working conditions, included challenges with ICTs and ergonomics.

Moving on to opportunities in remote work during COVID-19, they were divided into the same categories as the challenges. The opportunities related to the work-life interface were about having more hours for non-work activities, and better ability to concentrate on work and to balance between work and life. When it comes to leadership, opportunities were found in ability to quickly adapt to the situation and succeeding in remote leading in general. Communication-related opportunities were about feelings of togetherness and being supported by others in the work community. Finally, taking the ICTs into more effective usage was reported as an opportunity with working conditions.

Ambivalence within one person's responses and the differences between background variable groups was also studied. Apart from the finding that the same themes can be found both as challenges or opportunities for different respondents, ambivalence could be found also in responses of a single respondent. This could be found in the presence of family at home, time management, the pace of the change and the lack of meetings. When it comes to background variables, differences were found for example between the number of children and the ability to concentrate and previous remote work experience and the mentioned challenges and opportunities.

6.2. Limitations and further research

This study has some limitations that need to be taken into account. The limitations start from the manner that data was collected – due to Simon & Goes (2013), questionnaires have the challenge that unlike in interviews where follow-up questions can be made, in questionnaires the responses are limited to the specific questions asked. Another limitation to them is that the busiest workers might not have any extra time to answer the

questionnaire, which might be an especially harmful limitation for this study if their experiences cannot be included in the study. (Simon & Goes 2013)

One of the limitations of this study is that although only respondents working in Finland were taken into account, the location inside Finland was not taken into account. This might be problematic since the situation with the virus has not been different only between countries but also within one country – during the time when responses were collected, the infection rates were far worse in Uusimaa than in other regions. The fact that only Finland was studied also means that the findings might not be sustainable to fully generalize them to another country.

Another limitation of the data is that the questionnaire was not designed to answer the managerial issues in the situation. Although the research questions are not specifically about the managerial aspects, studying them was one motivation of this study so these issues had to be searched from the bigger data. Furthermore, although it was easy to separate managers from other respondents, the managers could be at different levels in the organization. This was not taken into account in the analysis.

It would be interesting to collect responses to the same questionnaire also now that the remote work recommendations have been on for a year. The findings might be different now that everyone is used to the situation and organizations have had time to adapt to it and develop their facilities for working remotely. Also, the responses might be different during times when there are no recommendations to keep children at home while working remotely. It could be also beneficial to study large companies and how leading remotely differs in them compared to SMEs that have been studied in this thesis.

Another aspect that rose from the analysis of the data in this study was the ambivalence within one person's experiences in remote work. It would be interesting to further study this issue and see why one person felt the same thing both as a challenge and an opportunity. Looking at the background variables more in detail could also shed light on this issue.

When it comes to leadership-aspect, further study could be made by making more in-detail and structured study on the topic. It would also be important to find ways to tackle the

challenges with leading remotely. Apart from studying remote leadership in the context of COVID-19 crisis, more research needs to be done also about leading remotely in general.

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Appendix A: The most important background variables of the questionnaire respondents

		N	%
Gender	Male	79	37,8%
	Female	127	61%
	Prefer not to say	3	1,44%
	Total	209	
Age	27-40	34	16,3%
	41-50	81	38,8%
	51-60	81	38,8%
	61-69	13	6,2%
Household	Single person	20	9,6%
	Two person	85	40,7%
	Three person	44	21%
	Four person	47	22,5%
	Five person	10	4,8%
	never	34	16,2%
	< once a week	103	49,3%
	One day per week	45	21,5%

Remote working before COVID-19	Two days per week	15	7,2%
	Three or four days per week	6	2,9%
	Five or more days per week	3	1,4%