

The Productivity Revolution: Your Guide for the Future of Workplace Allocation and the Effects of Working from Home

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Supervisor: Johan Nilsson
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Alexander Kokko (50636)
Henric Malm Casslén (50599)

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Abstract

Remote work is not a new phenomenon, but the global standard up until very recently has been that employees work full time from their offices. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced millions of employees to work from home for an extended period of time, accelerating discussions and strategies regarding the future of workplace allocation and where employees work best. Many companies are now considering using a hybrid workplace model following the pandemic, meaning that employees will shift back and forth between working from home (“WFH”) and working from the office (“WFO”).

In this report, we first collect prior research on the effects of WFH on employees and organizations. Theory suggests that there are a variety of potential upsides and downsides with employees WFH which are related to areas such as productivity, satisfaction and work-life balance. Some studies contradict each other, and most areas addressed contain elements that can be both positively and negatively impacted when working from home.

We then use a qualitative approach and conduct interviews to investigate the effects that working from home has had on eight employees and one manager at a company which acts as a support function to a large Swedish grocery retailer. The interview subjects are asked about their perceived productivity when working from home, their job satisfaction, and the advantages and disadvantages of WFH compared to WFO. The manager is asked questions about how having employees WFO has affected the organization's productivity and the manager's ability to lead a workforce.

We find that interview subjects perceive a variety of advantages and disadvantages related to WFH that affect their productivity and satisfaction. Advantages include increased flexibility and freedom in their schedules, improved work-life balance, and increased efficiency due to fewer interruptions from colleagues. Disadvantages include that it is harder to have creative meetings, that there are communication issues due to it being more difficult to get a hold of coworkers, and reduced social interaction.

Based on prior research and our interview results, we analyse the company's potential to successfully implement a hybrid workplace model and conclude that it is both realistic and that they may benefit greatly from doing so. However, there will be some challenges related to having and leading a hybrid workforce that must be addressed. The tools to address these possible issues are presented as well.

Keywords:

WFH, WFO, hybrid workplace model, productivity, satisfaction, future workplace allocation

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1. Introduction

The current situation created by Covid-19 is unprecedented in modern society and has turned working life upside down for hundreds of millions of people across the globe. Because of quarantines, lockdowns, and household isolation, a large portion of the global workforce have been forced to work from home. With a current trial run of just over a year, it has shown promising results, and might be a viable strategy to increase both workplace and employee productivity. It also has the potential to reduce some of the major costs companies typically incur, such as office rents, equipment & supplies, and travel.

“Every year for the last three years, companies have spent \$3 trillion on technology investments. And what we’re seeing is that productivity isn’t improving, and cost hasn’t been reduced.” - PwC (2020)

A hybrid workplace model, where employees both WFH and WFO, may very well be the productivity revolution that companies have been searching for. According to Forbes (2020), “remote work is here to stay” and, by 2025, it is estimated that 70% of the U.S. workforce will work remotely at least five days a month.

We have studied literature regarding how various factors such as satisfaction, work-life balance, leadership, and culture may affect individual and workplace productivity, both in an office environment and remotely. Haynes (2007) explains that productivity can be affected by many different aspects, it is complex and there is no consensus on one single key performance indicator that can capture the full spectrum of how productive white-collar workers are. To understand it fully, we must apply a holistic approach that captures a more nuanced perspective than the typical definition does, which is the ratio of input to output. This is especially important for service companies in which productivity is difficult to measure.

Our research consists of nine semi-structured interviews with eight employees and one manager at a company acting as a service and support function serving a large Swedish grocery retailer. The company works to develop the retailer’s core offering and business to enhance its profitability and competitiveness. The company is an ideal organization with few employees but extremely high turnover.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argues that “the best (and perhaps even the only good) reason for choosing interviews is that they match the subject matter of interest” and that “we should be for interviews when the subject matter concerns aspects of human experience or our

conversational reality.” He adds that there is a good chance that qualitative interviews are relevant when the research question can be formulated using the word “how”, e.g. *how* something is experienced or *how* it is done. As we believe that all of these factors were applicable to what we sought to investigate, we chose to use qualitative interviews as our method of inquiry.

We identified that there is a research gap in terms of that the majority of prior research is either quantitative or more surface level and does not provide a full picture of the intricacies of a company and its employees that impact the effect that WFH has on them. We found that there was a lack of studies that looked at a variety of subjects simultaneously and how they together affected productivity or satisfaction when WFH as we have done, instead they often covered only how one or a few factors affected these.

Our contribution to research is a qualitative study that focuses on how our interview subjects feel in detail about their experience of working from home and how WFH affects their productivity and satisfaction. Furthermore, we also provide insights into what other companies which are contemplating adopting a hybrid work model should understand beforehand.

Purpose

The purpose of our report is to investigate how employee productivity and satisfaction are affected by working from home compared to working from the office, and how a company implementing a hybrid workplace solution should consider these effects to have as productive and satisfied employees as possible.

In this report, we aim to provide an answer to the following research questions:

1. How is employee productivity and satisfaction affected by WFH compared to WFO?
2. How can a company that is implementing a hybrid workplace model consider the effects on employees that WFH compared to WFO has to maximize employee productivity and satisfaction?

2. Theory

Our theory section aims to provide a theoretical background with prior research related to the topics that we ask our interview subjects questions about during the interviews. The areas that we want to inquire about are either directly about productivity and satisfaction or related topics that we believe will have an impact on productivity and satisfaction. These include creative and innovative contra repetitive work tasks, perceived availability, engagement, and work-life

balance. Theory regarding corporate culture was also added although we were not planning to explore this area when we began our project. This was added due to the fact that many interviewees brought up the subject, and it became evident that this was a very important aspect for the company. The following areas are therefore the basis for our interview questions, as well as the analysis of interviewees answers.

2.1 Creative/innovative contra repetitive work tasks

We are interested in determining whether interview subjects perceive their work tasks to be innovative and creative or whether they are principally repetitive as this may affect how productive the subjects feel when WFH.

According to Hodari (2015), a creative work life requires serendipitous interactions and social relationships, dealing with ideas you do not agree with, and also getting up and moving around. All of the items on this list are more readily checked off at the office, leading him to claim that the office is a vital element for an employee to reach his or her full creative potential. Statistics from studies conducted by Waber, Magnolfi & Lindsay (2014) show that the variety of social interactions occurring spontaneously between employees during a regular workday at the office, such as having lunch with your co-workers or bumping into someone in the hall and conversing with them, leads to greater creativity and effectiveness. One of their studies found that when salespeople at a pharmaceutical company increased their interactions with colleagues who worked in other teams by 10%, their sales grew by 10% as well. Hodari argues that these types of spontaneous and cross-functional interactions, and the subsequent creativity and performance boost for employees, would not be possible had they been WFH.

Moreover, data shows that having a close friend at the office plays the most important role in terms of increasing performance and engagement at work. It is evident from research by Bregman (2010) that people who have a best friend at their workplace are seven times more likely to report that they feel engaged in their work compared to someone who does not. In turn, increased engagement correlates to increases in creativity. Data from Crosswell (2016) indicates that engagement has a strong causal link to innovativeness in all types of organizations. We will investigate how WFH has affected the interview subjects' social interactions, and if they feel that their potential to be creative has been affected in turn.

Related to Hodari's point about moving around is a study by Steinberg et al. (1997) published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine which showed that participants of the Torrance Tests, a common measurement of creative thinking, scored higher after exercising. Because exercise thus appears to boost creativity, it will be interesting to see whether WFH has

led to more or less physical activity among interview subjects, as this may have affected their ability to be creative.

A recommendation that Hinds and Elliot (2021) provide for companies which seek to foster or reinforce innovativeness is to introduce regular company events that stimulate creative engagement. Examples include improvisational activities and educational events that teach employees about collaboration tools which inspire idea generation and brainstorming. We are interested in seeing if the company has done anything similar in order to boost employee creativity while WFH.

2.2 Differences in perceived availability

Useem (2017) discusses availability in his article, “When working from home doesn’t work”. He uses IBM as an example of an early adopter of teleworking given that they had 2,000 remote workers by 1983. However, they recently reversed their work-from-home policy after revenues fell 20 consecutive quarters. Research on which work location is superior is divided and, according to Useem, some studies support WFH as the more productive workplace while others indicate the opposite - proximity boosts productivity. Both WFH and WFO can allow increases in productivity, but it is contextual and depends on the type of work being conducted. Useem’s research suggests that WFH is better for personal productivity, i.e. when an employee does not need their colleagues to complete a task. However, if its collaborative efficiency - the speed at which a group successfully solves a problem - distance appears to reduce productivity, meaning that the office is better suited for these tasks. As Useem puts it: “The short answer is that collaboration requires communication. And the communications technology offering the fastest, cheapest, and highest-bandwidth connection is - for the moment, anyway - still the office.”

Useem (2017) further adds that electronic communications technologies are cheap and instantaneous but, as they demand many person-hours for use, they become expensive and slow. Among the electronic communications technologies, email is likely the least desirable due to the time it takes to communicate a point. The telephone is better, and video affords greater expression.

More recent workplace-communication apps attempt to integrate social cues and informal social connections such as emojis and various communication channels. However, these technologies share a weakness, i.e. employees must actively decide when to use them. MIT professor Thomas J. Allen (1977) studied communication patterns among co-workers and found that the further apart they were, the less likely they were to communicate. It was expected that information technology would flatten the Allen Curve which shows this relationship, but Waber,

Magnolfi & Lindsay (2014) who worked with researchers from IBM, recently found that it has not. It turns out that new technology is mainly used by people to communicate with co-workers they meet often in the physical environment. The power of presence does not have a simple explanation, and it might be a manifestation of the “mere-exposure effect”. As Useem explains: “We tend to gravitate toward what’s familiar; we like people whose faces we see, even just in passing.” Or it might be that the physical environment allows for more spontaneous encounters. Adding to that, Hill, Ferris & Mårtinson (2003) found evidence to support that telework may lead to fewer synergies in companies due to lower availability during regular business hours, less informal learning, weaker organizational culture, and loss of non-verbal communication, all of which may lead to decreased performance at work.

Research conducted by Solingen, Berghout, E & Latum (1998) on software developers shows that there are three phases of an interruption: first, an employee works on a planned activity, then an *interruption occurs*, which leads to *interruption handling* and lastly, the *recovery time* before an employee can continue working on the planned activity. Their study showed that about 15-20 minutes of an employee’s time, which adds up to 1-1.5 hours daily, were spent every time they were interrupted by personal visits, phone calls, and emails, of which 90% of all interruptions were caused by personal visits and phone calls. Those two types of interruptions also call for immediate attention and require more handling, even though only 25% of all interruptions are recognized as urgent. Email interruptions on the other hand, allow the respondent to deal with it when it suits the employee.

Furthermore, these interruptions are usually better formulated compared to personal visits and phone calls. It was also found that the recovery time was primarily a problem when the job task required greater concentration, such as with actual programming work, and less so when it occurred during meetings or documenting. In addition, the study measured if interruptions contained sufficient information regarding the issue that required solving, and their results show that about 90% of all interruptions do not have sufficient information, which leads to more time spent on an interruption than necessary.

2.3 Productivity

To get a better understanding of productivity and what factors may affect it when more people WFH, we employed earlier research and found that there are many different, relevant aspects of productivity that the interview subjects can be asked about, and how WFH has affected these.

2.3.1 How is productivity measured?

According to Haynes (2007), productivity for white-collar workers who work with many different tasks requiring creativity can be difficult to measure by a single key performance indicator, and it is common practice to link individual performance to organizational performance. Haynes (2007) also concludes that productivity should be measured using several tools, should be evaluated on multiple levels, and organizations should employ a research approach with questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. This all-inclusive strategy can capture more aspects of productivity than the regular definition can, which is the ratio of input to output. Haynes refers to the proposal by Hadi (1999) that suggests productivity measures should include three different parts:

1. Quantifiable and tangible measures
2. Indirect measures, i.e. staff turnover, health & well-being at work etc
3. Organizational measures such as teamwork and creativity

Even though Hadi's proposal does not specify or test exactly which measures should be included in the three different parts, the framework is supported by Natchtum (1999), who conducted a study on Swedish management consulting firms, and Haynes has collected research regarding suitable measures. It is also explained that perceived productivity can be used as a surrogate for actual productivity, which can be difficult to identify in a service context (Haynes, 2007).

2.3.2 Has your productivity changed when WFH?

Van der Lippe & Lippényi (2019) study the influence of co-workers WFH on individual and team performance. They conclude that employees WFH are interrupted less, and that the increased freedom and flexibility resulting from WFH is likely associated with higher productivity. But they also conclude that there are negative effects of WFH, such as when working together at a distance becomes more problematic if employees cannot exchange important information with each other and, if more employees work from home, the individual performance of the employee will decrease. Therefore, it is important to consider how employees WFH influence the performance of others.

Garner (2020) revealed that "American adults have had their mental health negatively impacted because of stress linked to the pandemic". Also, the same trend is evident in the UK. He explains that there are three ways in which working from home is detrimental to our mental health. First, people feel more alone without the necessary support they need. The sudden lack of physical connection can leave workers feeling like they have nowhere to turn when they are

stressed or anxious. Secondly, when adapting to WFH, employees may feel the temptation to work longer hours and, for those who do not have a home office setup, there is no disconnection between office life and free time. Thirdly, there are fewer opportunities for informal catch ups, and digital meetings can trigger fatigue and leave participants feeling disconnected. To counter the negative effects of working from home, Garner suggests new policies that are adapted to the new working environment, such as mandatory 10-minute breaks or meeting free days each month.

2.3.3 Do you feel as engaged WFH?

We wanted to examine how the level of engagement was affected when employees started to work from home and what factors may affect their level of engagement. Therefore, we looked into what research has found on the topic.

According to Hickman & Robinson (2020), job flexibility engages remote workers which drives performance. It is argued that building engagement is a strategy to improve business outcomes and improve key performance indicators in organizations. Engaged employees record 41% fewer absences, 40% fewer quality defects, and 21% higher profitability. Hickman & Robinson also found that workers require physical meetings given that these affect engagement levels positively - the optimal engagement boost occurs when employees work between 60-80% away from the office. According to their research, employees who work out of the office are more likely to strongly agree that they have a best friend at the office and that they have opportunities to grow and learn more. These results show that employees who work more off-site will not experience a decline in their engagement levels, and that their productivity improves. However, there are differences between employees who work remotely part-time and those who work remotely 100% of the time. In addition, different job functions also play a role in determining how engaged and productive employees are.

Further, Hickman & Robinson (2020) also conclude that companies which do not meet employee needs will have difficulties competing on the labour market given that it will be more difficult to retain employees. It is the most-talented, least-engaged workers who are most likely to seek a different job, this is reasonable because they have job opportunities elsewhere and because they lack attachment to their current employer. At the same time, employees' value greater work-life balance and wellbeing when considering a new job. Accordingly, job flexibility is an important factor to consider when organizations seek to attract and retain talent in the future, while also reducing costs. Additionally, they found that government agencies that ended their

teleworking arrangements led to increased sick leave and vacation requests, experienced no increase in productivity, and caused 67% of employees to consider quitting their job.

2.3.4 What do you need to be productive?

As we are in the so-called information age in which the work environment is becoming increasingly digital and employee needs are transforming (Attaran, Attaran & Kirkland, 2019), we wanted to know how their needs are transforming and what employees now need to perform their jobs and be productive.

According to Attaran, Attaran & Kirkland (2019), industrial productivity has seen a massive increase in the 20th century, while most organizations have only seen a marginal increase in workplace productivity. At the same time, the world is changing and the amount of digitized data is increasing exponentially while resources available to employees to manage the increase have scarcely improved. For example, employees waste about 12% of their time searching for information, which translates to more than 30 days a year per employee. Furthermore, significant numbers of employees state that less than half of the information they need is searchable, searching is time-consuming and frustrating, and searches for internal information are not successful most of the time. Therefore, companies should consider information as an organizational resource and a competitive advantage in a globalized economy as it has enormous effects on employee productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability.

Attaran, Attaran & Kirkland (2019) argue that workplaces should provide their employees with consistent, consumer-like user experiences that help them perform this new type of “information work”, and that there is a greater need for organizations to adapt the tools and resources employees need. Business leaders also have expectations that their digital workplace solutions should empower employees to reduce cost and increase efficiency, regardless of platform or location. This is crucial as the new generation of employees will also have higher expectations regarding digitally-driven work experiences that are personal, real-time, collaborative, mobile-enabled, and that exploit consumer-oriented technologies. If companies cannot meet the increasing demands of the new generation, employees will become more likely to quit.

2.4 What do you need to be satisfied?

Organizations strive to have satisfied workers, as this may influence organizational performance. This is the thinking among managers and researchers who have found a link between job satisfaction and organisational performance. As Napoleon Bonaparte put it: “The effectiveness of

the army depends on its size, training, experience and morale, and morale is worth more than all the other factors together” (Bakotic, 2016).

Bakotic has conducted research to explore the link between job satisfaction and organizational performance and to determine whether there is an empirically provable relationship between the two variables as well as the direction and intensity of the relationship. Prior research is divided but suggests that there is indeed a link between the two. Bakotic concludes that there is a statistically significant connection between the two, but it is stronger in one direction - namely that job satisfaction does affect organizational performance. It is also proven that organisational performance affects job satisfaction, but detailed analysis indicates that such direction is weaker.

Bakotic explains that there are many internal and external factors that affect job satisfaction, and the subject is extremely complex. Accordingly, we wanted to explore what it is that affects job satisfaction and organisational performance. To do this we looked further into research conducted by Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) that, with the aid of Herzberg’s theory, explored why satisfied workers tend to be more productive.

Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) argue that it is possible for both leaders and employees to be happy on the job, the key is in how you handle two factors: motivation and hygiene factors. Companies need to understand that there is a significant opportunity for them to invest in employee satisfaction as satisfied employees tend to be more productive and, if they are unsatisfied with their job, organizations risk losing them to other companies. This will affect the bottom line when allocating resources to recruitment of new talent and costly retraining of new employees. This study builds on Frederick Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory that employee satisfaction has two dimensions: “hygiene” factors (dissatisfiers) and motivators (satisfiers). Herzberg’s study was conducted by asking interview subjects two questions:

1. Think of a time when you felt especially good about your job. Why did you feel that way?
2. Think of a time when you felt especially bad about your job. Why did you feel that way?

Herzberg concludes that if hygiene factors are mishandled or absent in the workplace, it leads to dissatisfaction among employees. The hygiene topics he identified are related to an employee’s environment such as company administration policies, supervision, salary, working conditions, and interpersonal relations. On the other hand, motivators create satisfaction by fulfilling individual employee’s needs connected to meaning and personal growth. Motivators are related to work itself, achievement, recognition, advancement, and responsibility. According to Herzberg, it is the “hygiene” topics that need to be addressed first, as without them, employees would be

unhappy and the risk of losing them increases. After these topics have been addressed you should move on to the motivators to create an environment where employee satisfaction and motivation are enabled. Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) provide the following explanation and solutions to the hygiene topics and what creates motivation in motivators.

“Hygiene” topics:

Company and administrative policies: To ensure that employee dissatisfaction does not increase due to the frustration of complicated policies, an organization’s policies should be clear, fair, applied equally to all, and made easily accessible for the entire staff. If there is already a policy in place, you should consider updating it with staff input, or compare your policies to those of similar practices to evaluate if your policies are too strict.

Supervision: To decrease dissatisfaction in the area of supervision, you should make wise decisions when hiring supervisors or promoting employees, as the role of a supervisor requires good leadership qualities, and the ability to use positive feedback. If a supervisor does not possess enough of those skills, organizations should teach them.

Salary: As Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) states: “The old adage ‘you get what you pay for’ tends to be true when it comes to staff members”. Even though salary is not a motivator, employees expect to get a fair wage, and if they do not, they will be unhappy at the workplace. Organizations can consult with updated salary surveys to determine if their salary and benefits are competitive, and they can also review their salary and bonus policies to make sure that they are clear.

Interpersonal relations: One part of the satisfaction of being employed is that people have social connections at work. Organizations can foster camaraderie and teamwork by giving employees a reasonable amount of time for socialization at work and by not allowing inappropriate behaviours such as offensive comments.

Working conditions: The last hygiene topic relates to the working environment and it has a tremendous effect on employee pride and the work that they do. Therefore, companies should invest in facilities and equipment that are up to date. It is important that the office is not overcrowded as this can contribute to tension, and even a nice chair can bring great joy.

Motivators:

Work itself: Perhaps one of the most important motivators is to help individual employees believe that their tasks are meaningful and that their job is important. Companies can do this by emphasizing that contributions made by employees result in positive outcomes for customers and the company. Making a big deal out of important tasks, even if they are ordinary, show your

employees that they are indeed important. However, if you find tasks that are truly unnecessary and can be removed, they should be.

Achievement: One premise inherent in Herzberg's theory is that most human beings want to do the best they can. Organizations can help them by placing them in positions in which they can use their talents to succeed. Employees should be given clear, achievable goals and standards in combination with regular, timely feedback on how they are performing at work.

Recognition: Every individual appreciates being recognized for their work-related achievements. Employee success does not have to be monumental before the recognition they deserve is given. If it is observed that employees are doing something well, companies should take the time to give them sincere praise. This can be done by writing a note of praise, publicly thanking them, or giving them a bonus if it is appropriate.

Responsibility: If employees have ownership of their work, they will be more motivated to do their jobs well. This requires that companies give employees enough freedom and power to perform their tasks so that they feel like they have responsibility for them. When employees develop their skills, companies should find opportunities to add meaningful and challenging work tasks, or perhaps even extend employee freedom and authority.

Advancement: Loyalty and performance should be rewarded with advancement opportunities. If there are no promotable positions available for a valuable employee, companies can consider giving them a new title that represents what the employee has achieved. And, when it is possible, you should support employees if they wish to pursue further education, which will make them a more valuable employee afterward.

2.5 Home work environment

We also want to gain an understanding of how the home work environments of the interview subjects are set up. This includes whether they have any distractions at home and a description of their workstation, including what furniture and tools they use. The long-term effects of ergonomics on work have been known to science for a long time. Evidence collected by Fernandez (1995) shows that good workplace ergonomics have numerous benefits, including increased productivity, job satisfaction, morale, work quality, and improved employee health. Unsurprisingly, the lack of good workplace ergonomics has the opposite effects.

2.6 Work-life balance

Another topic that we wish to investigate is how WFH has affected employees' work-life balance. Research by Chimote & Srivastava (2013) shows that there is a wide variety of benefits for employees who have a good work-life balance, as well as for their employer. From the

organizational perspective, organizations whose employees have a good work-life balance have lower employee turnover and absenteeism, increased employee loyalty and retention, and improved productivity and company image. From the employee perspective, the benefits of improved work-life balance are increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, improved health, and greater autonomy.

2.7 Leadership

The shift to employees WFH has most likely led to some leadership challenges for company management. We sought to inquire about the types of challenges that this creates, what challenges management will face in the future if the company implements a hybrid model in which employees shift between WFH and WFO, and how management may face these challenges.

Knight (2020) highlights a number of challenges that are related to having a co-located team in which some employees are in the office and some work remotely. These include employees lacking clarity on the applicable worker guidelines and rules as well as the risk of creating an “us versus them” mentality between those who work mostly from home and those who work mostly from the office, particularly if employees are treated differently based on where they are working. There are also potential communication, coordination, and team-engagement issues that are common among teams who are geographically distributed, as it is harder to be in sync when all employees are not gathered at the same location.

Davey (2013) provides a list of recommendations on how managers can lead a hybrid organization to avoid some of these issues. One of these recommendations is to create and establish clear expectations. She advises having explicit discussions with employees about “how and when you’re going to communicate, who has access to what information, who needs to be in which meetings, and who needs to be in on particular decisions.” There should also be an agreement on what norms there are for communicating, and set guidelines for when to use certain communication channels.

Hill & Lineback (2011) states that when managing a hybrid team, building an equitable and fair workplace is more complicated. They say that leaders must put practices in place that counteract the tendency to have a “proximity bias”, i.e. an assumption that those who are WFO are being more productive than those who are WFH. The way Davey (2013) recommends that managers solve this issue is to emphasize inclusion. One of her suggestions is to establish the ground rule that, irrespective of whether some people are together at the office, all team meetings should take place over Zoom or Teams, as it is equalizing when all meeting members participate through the same medium. This is an inclusive solution since hybrid meetings can be sub-optimal

for those who are not physically participating, as there can be side chatter in a room, and it is easier for physical participants to focus on each other than those who are participating digitally.

Davey also recommends prioritizing with flexibility in mind. Her suggestion is to hold a “huddle meeting” at the beginning of the week where the most important work that needs to get done is prioritized. Following this, the manager can discuss deliverables that would be beneficial for employees to complete if they have the discretionary time. This way, flexibility is built into the system as employees can focus on important team-related tasks together when everyone is available during regular office hours, while being able to work on individual or lower priority work whenever they see fit.

2.8 Culture

Many companies have unique corporate cultures that have developed organically over time and provide them with certain strengths and advantages. We seek to gain an understanding of the type of culture the company has and how it has been affected by employees WFH. We also want to investigate how working in a hybrid model may affect the corporate culture, and what can be done to make adaptations and counteract potential problems.

According to Howard-Grenville (2020), what makes office life meaningful for many is that it helps sustain organizational culture, which she describes as “the largely taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that underpin how people work together.” She goes on to say that these are harder to both feel and maintain when employees are working crouched over their kitchen table, and that office exodus risks diminishing company culture unless leaders take action to support it.

The author provides a list of recommendations for managers who seek to ensure that valued aspects of their corporate culture survive. The first one is making culture visible by calling it out. Howard-Grenville says that going forward, it will be increasingly important for managers and leaders to acknowledge and call attention to the aspects of their company culture that are on display and why they matter, as employees will work more remotely, and practices will therefore be more difficult to observe. The second and third applicable recommendations are using disruption to bolster the cultural core, and welcoming modifications to the culture. The big change of employees no longer working full time from the office may alter the corporate culture, but this does not have to be detrimental to the company if it can be modified in a way that benefits a company using a hybrid work model.

Hinds and Elliot (2021) write about how WFH need not dilute your corporate culture. Similarly to the manner in which remote work is described by Howard-Grenville as a threat to culture, Hinds and Elliot say that “research shows that our ability to connect meaningfully to

others is less satisfying when we're not physically present and that shared understanding is harder to establish and more likely to suffer from "drift" as we spend time apart." They explain that the absence of shared context, such as body language or sharing a meal together, dilutes the multitude of signals that help convey culture. One way the authors propose countering these threats is for an organization to reach out to employees more frequently, and to be clear about the meaning and purpose of why they are doing this. By sending out new and stronger signals, leaders can reinforce company culture.

The authors use the company Slack as an example for how you can introduce and adjust new hires to the company culture when work is being conducted remotely. Slack flew all of their new employees to their San Francisco headquarters at which they participated in a week of educational sessions with executive leaders and teammates, including discussions of the cultural norms and values that are important for the company. It will be of interest for us to see how new employees are integrated into the corporate culture, and how this can be done efficiently going forward when employees are not always present at the office.

3. Method

Most of the guidelines and information we gathered relating to designing an interview study, conducting an interview, and then transcribing and analysing it was sourced from the books *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2019) and *Doing Interviews* (2009) by Kvale & Brinkmann. These books articulate the methodological and philosophical approach to validity in qualitative interview research.

We created an interview guide containing 11 main questions, each of which had approximately 2-5 follow-up questions to be conducted in a semi-structured manner. The follow-up questions were designed to allow the interview subject to give us a more detailed and nuanced explanation of their reply to the main question and describe their experience. The questions which did not directly address the subject's productivity or satisfaction were related to factors that we theorize, based on our research and literature, may influence these two areas. As we sought additional insights from a managerial perspective, we created a separate interview guide for the subject with a managerial position which covered the same general topics.

The first main question we wanted to investigate after asking interviewees what role they had and what their work tasks were, was if their work required them to be creative/innovative or if their work was mainly repetitive. We then continued by asking how much one-on-one contact they had with their manager and their co-workers, both formal and informal. This was followed

by asking how much they had worked from home since the beginning of the pandemic. After that, we wanted to know more about productivity. This area was separated into two main questions, first how productivity is measured on the work that they do, and secondly how they perceive that WFH has affected their productivity. Then interviewees were asked about their work environment at home and how they perceived that their work-life balance had changed. To summarize these parts and give interview subjects an opportunity to tell us more about what positive and negative aspects they perceived that WFH has, we asked them what the benefits and disadvantages they had experienced when WFH were. We also wanted to know more about what interviewees needed to be productive and what they needed to be satisfied at their workplace, and therefore asked them outright about what they needed to achieve this. For the last main question we asked employees to imagine themselves in a post-pandemic scenario, and asked them what they thought their preferred work allocation between WFH and WFO would be. Finally, we ended each interview by asking the interview subjects if they had anything else that they wanted to add, to ensure that we had not missed inquiring about something that was important to the interviewee. As we discovered through the interview process that company culture was an important aspect for many employees, we added a main question where we asked the interview subjects to describe the culture and how it affects them.

As mentioned, the questions we asked the subject with a managerial position were quite similar to the ones we asked employees. However, these questions were both about the manager and the manager's perception of the employees. For example, the manager was not only asked about how his/her productivity was affected by working from home, but also how he/she perceived that the employees productivity had been affected as well. One question was completely unique for the manager, which was how his/her ability to lead and organize his/her team had been affected by employees WFH. We also had a unique additional question for one of the interview subjects who worked with the company's finances and was knowledgeable in this area. The interviewee was asked if and how the company's financial results had been affected by employees WFH.

To ensure that the questions we created for the interviews were properly understood, we conducted three test interviews. All test subjects worked at different companies, two of them were employees and one was a manager. This enabled us to test both of our interview guides. No changes to the employee interview questions were made given that the outcome of these tests was uncontroversial, although some of the questions for the manager were revised and some questions were added after the manager gave us some valuable insights and raised points that we had not yet considered.

The interviews were conducted via video call due to the current pandemic restrictions in Sweden. This allowed us to read the interview subject better compared to an interview conducted by telephone, as we could see their facial expressions and body language when they replied to the questions. If a respondent seemed uncertain or gave an unclear response to a question, we either rephrased the question, asked them to clarify, or asked them if our interpretation of their answer was correct. This was to ensure that there were no misunderstandings and that what we later transcribed was an accurate portrayal of what the subjects intended to say when replying to our questions. The interviews were conducted in Swedish as this was the mother tongue of our interview subjects, and we therefore believed that they would be able to understand and answer the questions better, and explain themselves more accurately and in greater detail.

After the interviews were concluded and recorded, we began the transcription process in which we translated the interview dialogue into English. We made a conscious effort to keep the translation as close to the Swedish source material as possible to avoid the risk of altering the meaning of any replies through the translation process. However, the interview subjects sometimes used informal language, slang terms, or Swedish expressions that were not directly translatable into English. In these cases, we took certain liberties in the translation process, while at all times striving to preserve the meaning of these terms or phrases as much as possible.

In supplementation of our employee interviews, we were allowed to examine three internal surveys taken by employees at the company over the last one and a half years. The employees answered questions quite similar to some of the ones that we asked them, with the exception that they did not go into as much detail. Many of these questions were related to differences between WFH and WFO, and what advantages and disadvantages the employees experienced when WFH. The main reason this material was useful to us was that the vast majority of the employees had taken all three surveys, which meant that their results were representative of the workplace as a whole. As we conducted only nine interviews, it was valuable for us to cross check and compare our interview results with the company's own surveys, to see if our results seemed to be representative of the entire workplace or if we engaged with any interview subjects whose replies constituted anomalies or outliers that would have skewed our view of the general opinions within the company.

Although none of our questions were particularly sensitive or controversial, we nonetheless anonymized both the company and the interview subjects in this report. This was to ensure compliance with GDPR guidelines and, importantly, to see to it that all of our interview subjects felt like they could speak openly and honestly without concern for being identified based on the report.

4. Results

4.1 Creative/innovative contra repetitive work tasks

When asked if they would describe their work tasks as requiring them to be innovative and creative or if it consists of similar and repetitive tasks, no interview subject replied that their work was principally repetitive. The majority of interview subjects stated that their work was predominantly innovative, while two interview subjects described it as roughly a 50/50 split between innovative and repetitive tasks.

It is important to keep in mind that no two interview subjects had the same work tasks, and most of them worked in completely different areas. For example, a subject working with finance described his work as requiring him to be innovative in that he must constantly make new decisions based on ever-changing global financial markets, while an interview subject who works with PR for the company described her work as innovative given that much of the PR work is forward-looking and proactive and accordingly involves a substantial amount of idea generation. Both of the subjects who described their work as a mix of the two had several assignments, some of which were repetitive and some of which were innovative. Another interview subject who also worked with finance explained that he often worked on management cases that required him to be creative, while another part of his job includes writing financial reports which is a very repetitive task. The other subject, who works in the knowledge centre of the company, said that her role as an administrator contained many repetitive tasks, while her mission to bring new and relevant knowledge to the company's retailers called for her to be innovative.

4.2 Differences in perceived availability

The perception among interview subjects of how available their co-workers are when they need to contact them differs. This matter was raised during the interviews in a variety of questions, even though they were not specifically asked about the availability of their colleagues. One interview subject mentioned that there is a new barrier to making contact with colleagues. Rather than walking past someone's desk, they have to send a message digitally or send a Microsoft Teams meeting invite and wait for contact to be established. According to this subject, this creates time lags and bottlenecks in information flows. The subject also mentions that the quality of output remains the same, but the journey there is not as enjoyable in light of the fact that spontaneous contact with co-workers vanishes. A second subject adds that people are more difficult to reach because they are not available to the same extent as when they are present in the office. For example, when people do not answer their phone, they sometimes do not return the

call, which can be frustrating and delay work tasks for lack of obtaining the necessary information from someone. As the subject described it: “Everything related to information logistics takes longer now”. Furthermore, the subject adds that he does not feel like the company has made any particular effort to improve this problem but, at the same time, it does not occur so frequently. Another subject mentions the fact that people are hesitant to reach out to others if they do not have anything concrete to discuss, and that the occasions during which this was possible vanish when employees WFH.

Some interview subjects responded that availability is higher when working digitally. As one interview subject described it: “When people are in meetings that are not physical, they seem to have more energy afterward and respond faster to messages”. A second subject said that, because he and his colleagues have become more digitally mature, it is now quite easy to quickly gain access to people via Teams-chat and set up a meeting. This was compared to the time before employees started WFH, when people principally emailed each other, which took more time in terms of getting a response. The experience of another interview subject was that everyone she works with is available and has been the last year. She added that sometimes people are out on a walk while they are talking on the phone, but that there is a higher acceptance for this behaviour nowadays and that it does not affect the quality of the meetings.

4.3 Productivity

4.3.1 How is productivity measured?

All of the interview subjects say that their output is difficult to measure due to the nature of the work they perform and their company structure. In most cases they simply do not have sufficiently tangible output that it can be measured. However, halfway through the interview process, we discovered that there are goals and bonus incentives in place that employees strive to achieve, established every year. Each employee has approximately 10 or more of these goals, of which 2-3 are based on individual performance or output while the rest are collectively achieved within specific units or the company as a whole. These goals vary in terms of their manner of achievement, e.g. a collective goal is the ability of members of a department to work together which in turn, can be difficult to measure precisely. An example of an individual goal is one in which the employee in question strives to influence x number of stores to implement a certain campaign and, if this target is achieved, that individual receives a bonus. If x+y number stores implement the campaign, then a higher bonus could be negotiated. Thus, some bonus-related goals are nuanced in terms of the level of their achievement, while other common measurements were binary, i.e. the employee either delivered the result or did not.

The interview subject in the managerial position adds that employees also have two other measurements that are used on a monthly or quarterly basis. Firstly, there is a comprehensive business plan established by the company board every autumn for the following year. All employees in the organization are involved in creating the business plan, and this plan also includes a list of tasks that employees should perform. In follow-up meetings with employees, they are graded on a colour scale that depends on the extent to which an employee has accomplished their task(s). “Green” means that they have reached their target, “yellow” means that the target is not reached but that the employee is well on their way, and “red” means that they have not reached their target. Secondly, there are other monthly measurements which pertain predominantly to people who work with the company’s economy and finances. These measurements relate to certain days of the month when a task is due, meaning it is either on time or it is not. To verify that everything is going according to plan in terms of these deadlines, the employees have regular check-ins with their manager in which the project’s completion status is continuously updated. We also asked the interview subjects if any of their goals or performance measurements have changed when WFH. It was concluded that none of the measurements changed for the employees when work shifted to a digital environment.

The manager also has a certain set of goals and measurements tied to her performance. However, she explained that these goals are even less concrete than some of the employee goals. The interview subject is responsible for certain business planning areas with set timeframes and is also involved with assignments which recur annually. These goals and expectations are established and evaluated with the CEO, but the management team can also evaluate and revise expectations during their quarterly “prioritization meetings”. Through these, the expectations on management can be revised and updated as the year goes on - a difference between employees and management.

4.3.2 The learning curve

Before the pandemic, the company focused a great deal on face-to-face interactions in the physical environment and possessed little to no expertise working in a digital environment. One employee mentioned that digital meetings were almost frowned upon.

Our study indicates that an adjustment was necessary for everyone at the company in confronting the new circumstances and that there was an initial shortage of knowledge as to the manner of operating exclusively in a digital environment. Many employees who were interviewed, including the manager, explained that productivity initially fell.

The view of one subject was that it initially felt like it was a “mini-vacation”, as there was uncertainty about what would happen, and a sense that WFH would only be temporary and last a few weeks at most. Initially, the freedom of being at home led the subject to a point at which other activities served as a distraction from work for a brief period, but there was a quick recognition that work needed to be prioritized once again. Two other interview subjects both explained that the company needed time to adapt. Following the initial fall in effort and productivity, the company invested in a fast-paced training course for employees which allowed them to get “back on track”. Over time, employees adapted and learned how to work efficiently in this new environment. As one interview subject described it: “Setting up meetings and having everybody on board goes faster now...”, partly because of the proper training and partly because of newly acquired experience. A year later, the output produced varies amongst employees. There is a perception amongst some employees that productivity is higher than it was before the pandemic, while others perceive it to be at roughly the same level and some perceive a decline in productivity. Overall, however, the company’s view is that the employees are currently achieving the required output.

4.3.3 Did your productivity change when you started to work from home?

As mentioned, at the start of the pandemic, there was an upward learning curve for employees and management alike and a great deal of uncertainty about how to move forward. Following the implementation of educational investments, productivity increased, but the manager notes that productivity has not been constant during the last year. There are periods of varying duration in which employees feel uninspired and fatigued due to lower levels of social stimulation - a concern raised by several employees. One employee states: “I have actually felt pretty bad from a psychological perspective from time to time when working from home, and I can feel drained of energy”. Another employee adds: “...I am not as happy working from home, it is detrimental to the way I feel”.

However, some factors increase productivity, with a common reference to the fact that there are fewer interruptions now. As one interview subject puts it: “Yes, it sounds awful because it is a lot nicer to see your co-workers, but it can also decrease efficiency. So it's kind of a balancing between efficiency and the social aspect, and currently I prioritize efficiency to make my life run smoothly”. Another interview subject noted an extreme increase in productivity due to the fact that WFH is so efficient due to the absence of disruptions. She stated that she accomplishes literally twice the amount of work she usually does. She described the main source

of interruption at the office as repeated questions or requests to join meetings which, in turn, disrupted her workflow and resulted in her taking more time to complete tasks than necessary.

The perceptions of other interview subjects were that they had experienced various levels of improved productivity. The perceived improvement in efficiency was especially appreciated by the interview subjects who were parents of younger children, as it allowed them to plan their days better and spend more time with their family.

It is the experience of most interview subjects that there is a trade-off between increased productivity and a decline in social interaction when WFH. Another factor that influences the productivity of some subjects is that they do not have access to a private space at home where they can work undisturbed. Several of them do not have adequate space at home for an office, and some do not even have room for a proper work desk. One subject said that some assignments are easier to do from home while some require specific tools such as dual computer screens or a keyboard with extra number buttons to which they have access only at the office.

4.3.4 Do you feel the same level of engagement WFH?

In order to reach a potentially more nuanced conclusion regarding productivity, we also asked if the interview subjects feel the same level of engagement in their job while WFH. One subject answered: “No, I don't, it is not the same at all”. Another employee said that the engagement he feels in his work is dependent on social connections and exchange of information with others, which is lacking when WFH. Another subject said that she felt the same level of engagement as before, and that a factor contributing to this was that she could now listen to the music she wants or the radio while working. One employee said that his engagement is the same as before because he now has better access to outside stakeholders via digital channels. Another subject adds that engagement could be improved by organizing more social activities digitally, given that some individuals are invigorated by these interactions, even though the company has already invested in means to increase these interactions. In general, with a few exceptions, it appears that engagement levels returned to normal as employees became accustomed to and discovered certain benefits of WFH. Several employees said that they believe that their level of engagement will increase further when restrictions ease up given that they will be able to socialize more with their co-workers notwithstanding that they work from home more.

4.3.5 What do you need in order to be productive?

When interview subjects were asked what they needed the most in order to be productive (which applied both to working at the office and from home) we received a wide variety of responses,

some of which were common to the subject's and some were unique for certain individuals.

These needs included:

- Variety in the work process and tasks that are performed
- Challenging work tasks
- Stimulating assignments
- Time to reflect on assignments
- A good workstation with good ergonomics
- Access to the right equipment
- Good internet connection, functioning technology, and IT-support
- Training for using digital work tools - especially when WFH
- Having peace and quiet while working with few interruptions
- Leadership with clear guidelines
- Access to informal meetings and quick access to relevant information
- Social interactions and social stimulation
- Appreciation and recognition from colleagues
- Coffee and snacks to maintain energy levels
- Energizing walks

The most commonly mentioned needs were related to the work itself, the working environment, access to the right equipment, and other aspects that boost energy levels. Many employees made reference to different aspects of the work itself, e.g. some employees felt as though the work was less stimulating and that they were not challenged by the work tasks WFH. On the other hand, some aspects of work were better WFH, e.g. there is more time to reflect on work and there is an opportunity to work undisturbed for longer periods of time. Two interview subjects who have different roles in the company said that the workstation and the tools they have access to are very important as the work is easier to perform with a well-equipped workstation.

One of the subjects explains that she needs access to the right digital training and IT support to work productively from home, which she has received from the company and to which she currently has access. The same employee also says that it is difficult to know if you're doing the right things when you are more isolated, she needs clear guidelines from management and affirmation from the company that she is accomplishing what she is supposed to do.

Another employee explains the same phenomenon as he needs confirmation and appreciation for the work he does as a confirmation that his output is high quality and that he is on the right track.

Another need was access to information, with some interview subjects explaining that information flows were better WFO because colleagues were more accessible in that you could simply walk up to them in the office to address an issue quickly. One employee also raised the point that they do not have the same access to informal meetings at which different cues and

information were available, and this applies mostly to external communication, but also internally. Yet, mention should be made of the fact that some interview subjects explain that information flows are better now because they use electronic messaging more frequently and reply more quickly than when people WFO.

Some additional aspects that increased productivity for some interview subjects included having a park nearby in which to stroll during breaks and to have access to coffee to maintain energy levels. Furthermore, social stimulation boosted productivity, especially for subjects that identified themselves as extroverts.

4.4 What do you need to be satisfied in your workplace?

Interview subjects were also asked to describe what they needed in order to be satisfied with their workplace. These requirements included:

- Variation in the processes and work performed
- Possibility to contribute to a larger effort
- The opportunity to effect change and development in the company
- Access to decision-makers
- Regular contact with management
- Management's trust and not to be micromanaged
- To have independence and control over work
- To have ownership and control over time
- Not always working at the same location
- Learning from the entrepreneurship of store owners
- Social interactions
- Pleasant colleagues and strong relationships with them
- Fun at work
- Creation of the workplace together with colleagues
- Engagement in the workplace and with colleagues
- The company of talented people
- Confirmation and appreciation
- Inspiration/energy from interactions with colleagues
- Lunches & other activities add some satisfaction
- Life-balance
- Competitive salary (secondary need)

The most commonly referenced needs to be satisfied in the workplace - at home or at the office - related to the work itself, the flexibility of workplace allocation, and social aspects. Some interview subjects mentioned that they required variety in their work and challenges, they do not want to do the same repetitive work, and this need is usually satisfied at the company as they generally have many different and intellectually stimulating work tasks.

One interview subject mentioned that the more challenging work tasks have disappeared, and that the company does not actively search for these opportunities during the pandemic

because these assignments often require meeting people in person. The tasks he used as examples included interviewing a Minister and being in charge of seminars for politicians in Parliament. Because these assignments have disappeared, he does not feel as stimulated given that he does not have to push himself as much and is working at less than maximum capacity.

Another common theme relates to the flexibility of workplace allocation. Many of the interview subjects enjoy the additional scheduling freedom that WFH allows them. Even the subjects who are more pro-office state that they appreciate flexibility, and they would be dissatisfied if the company reverted to full-time work from the office. Several employees specifically point out that they not only desire flexibility in terms of in- or out-of-office days, but also flexibility in choosing the number of daily hours allocated to WFO. Having this option/flexibility would increase their satisfaction further.

Social aspects play a major role in satisfaction in the workplace. As many subjects explain, there is significantly less social interaction between co-workers when everybody is WFH and restrictions are in place. All of the subjects mention the fact that social aspects are important to their satisfaction with their workplace in that they contribute to a better sense of well-being in a variety of ways including, for example, chatting with a co-worker by the coffee machine, engaging in an activity together, or receiving praise from colleagues.

Several interview subjects state that they are invigorated by these interactions and one of them adds that her satisfaction increases when she feels excited to go to work. Another subject goes into depth about how social interactions generally relate to satisfaction. “I can’t socialize with my friends if I wanted to, we can’t go out for drinks anymore. And that factor also affects this evaluation, I simply don’t meet any other adults except my wife...”. It is not only social aspects of work that play a role when evaluating his satisfaction: If more socialization outside of work were allowed, he could meet other adults and feel more satisfied. Yet, he also says that, even with fewer social interactions, he is still more satisfied today WFH relative to when he WFO because it is less stressful to leave the kids at day-care, he does not need to commute to the office during rush hour, and the life balance is better.

4.5 Home work environment

We inquired about the interview subjects’ home work environments, asking if they had their own home office or desk space. The responses varied in this context, with most answering that they did not. Some interview subjects did have a home office, and the remaining subjects had some sort of middle option. For example, one subject said that he and his partner had made a makeshift

office space in their bedroom that they took turns using, while the other person worked from the kitchen.

Following this initial question, the subjects were asked if there were any common interruptions or disturbances in their home work environment. Several people answered that there were none, some crediting this to living alone, meaning that there was no one else at home with whom to share a workspace or who was a source of interruption. Two subjects replied in the negative even though they did not live alone, but both of their spouses had jobs that required them to WFO, leaving the interview subjects free to WFH without interruption. One of these interview subjects had two children below the age of 10 but, because they were both at school all day, they did not interfere with the subject's work.

Among those who answered in the affirmative, a common explanation related to having other people at home while they were working. One interview subject moved several times recently and initially had issues working with his partner at home. The same subject then had the same experience when living with friends. In order to deal with the many distractions created by his spouse and two small children at home, one interview subject opted to occasionally lock himself in his bathroom to work undisturbed.

Nonetheless, there are examples of people who worked at home in the company of someone else but perceived no disruption to their work. For example, one subject lived in a small apartment with her partner. Because he was busy writing his dissertation, it worked smoothly. She observed, however, that it would not have worked if he had been working and was involved in as many meetings as she was. The interview subject who used a bedroom office space also said that his partner's presence did not disrupt his work and taking turns between working in the bedroom and the kitchen worked smoothly. Aside from other people, the list of potential disturbances was not extensive. Examples of these included neighbours doing construction, or taking the opportunity to run errands.

In the context of asking about the interview subjects' ergonomic set up at home, we asked them if their employer had provided any support in this regard. The level of awareness of what resources were available to them varied a great deal. Some interview subjects stated that they had not inquired about what they could obtain either because they had what they needed in their home office or because they did not feel like they needed anything.

The most common response was that they were able to borrow an office chair to take home. Several people had not availed themselves of this opportunity because of their limited living space and the size of the office chair - one subject had taken one home but returned it after one week because it took up too much space. Other items that employees could take home

included larger computer screens, wireless keyboards, a mouse, and a computer stand. However, no interview subject was fully aware of all the items that were available to them. One subject remarked that his co-worker had not been allowed to take a chair home in the beginning of the pandemic for reasons that were unclear to him. We also asked the manager if she knew what resources employees could take home. She mentioned the chair and was also aware of what some employees had told us, i.e. that many do not have the room for it at home. She went on to mention the wireless keyboard, the computer stands, and that employees can order headphones from the internal company portal. She also said that they can provide a desk for those who need it because of ergonomic challenges at home, but that they first need to examine whether the employee's request for a desk is warranted. None of the employees we interviewed mentioned that they were aware that they could receive a desk or order headphones.

We then asked the interview subjects whether their home work environments had affected their productivity. The majority of the subjects answered that the environment itself had little to no effect on their productivity or began discussing the difference between WFH and WFO. However, two subjects made the similar reflection that, even though they thought they managed quite well in their current home work environment, they believed that their productivity would improve further by having their own home office. For one of them, the main benefit of having a home office would be that he would not be disturbed as much by his family, and the other interview subject raised the advantages of having all of the resources necessary to perform work gathered in one place.

4.6 Work-life balance

The interview subjects were asked whether their work-life balance had been affected by WFH. The majority of subjects answered that it had drastically improved, while a few said that it was worse or roughly the same.

The subject who felt the most like his work-life balance had deteriorated explained that his stress levels were now much higher. Because his office and his home are now the same place, he felt as though his work life and private life had melded together, causing him to have trouble letting go of work when he was finished for the day. Another subject had initially experienced the same issue but had developed his own method of shutting down in the evenings and disconnecting mentally from being in "work mode". Now, he feels that his work-life balance is the same as it originally was. A third interview subject similarly mentioned that because his work laptop is close by at all times and his job requires him to stay continuously updated on financial markets, he has a hard time letting go of his work when WFH. However, the same subject said

that WFH has allowed him to manage his time better due to the flexibility of working hours, which improved his work-life balance. Accordingly, he felt that the positives and the negatives essentially cancelled each other out.

For the interview subjects who had seen great improvement, the common denominators were substantial time savings on commuting, more time for physical activities, and having more time to spend with their significant other or family. Work-life balance has especially improved for the interview subjects with young children. One of these subjects said that as his children go to school 600 meters from their home, drop-offs and pick-ups are easier than ever, as he does not need to do this in combination with rushing to or from work, and that his work-life balance was at an all-time high. The other parent of young children said WFH has really allowed him to get his “life puzzle” together, as he can take care of his kids when they need him and work when it suits his schedule best.

4.7 Leadership

We asked the manager how having employees WFH had affected her ability to organize and lead people in the workplace. She said that, based on her experience from the last year, she learned that arranging team meetings is more time consuming and that they are also more difficult to manage. She explained that she manages many small teams, and organizing them and getting them together digitally takes longer. She also explained that it is meaningful to have larger meetings occasionally to discuss matters that affect the entire office. Now, it is a matter of ensuring that everyone is engaged and voices their opinion. As she noted, if no effort is made to engage everyone, there is a risk that two thirds of the meeting participants will merely listen and not actively participate or contribute. Because of this, it is her perception that what has been most suitable and worked best is having frequent meetings in smaller groups. She mentions that there are people who disagree that this method is the best and prefer larger meetings where more topics can be covered at once, but that it is very difficult to meet every single person's needs given that there is simply not enough time to accommodate everyone. She adds that, as everyone has become more digitally mature through their experience WFH, it has become increasingly easier to organize people in a digital space with time. One tool that has helped her lead her organization better and allowed her to become more aware of employee needs is an employee survey that has been sent out three times over the last year. Survey questions include asking how employees feel about WFH, how well digital cooperation works within their teams and the company as a whole, if they have the support they require, and also if they have any suggestions for improvement. The

results have allowed the manager to gain better insight into what her organization needs and make changes accordingly.

4.8 Culture

In our interview, we had no questions about corporate culture at the company, but it was raised by an interview subject without solicitation as early as in our first interview when the subject was contemplating the scenario question. He mentioned that if he had learned anything from the pandemic, it was that the office workspace is important. He went on to explain that the company is, to a large extent, a relationship-based company, and the employees have a much stronger culture than the average workplace. The subject explained that you build a culture in the physical environment, i.e. "on site" when people are physically together. He believes that it is hard to build a strong culture digitally when people are WFH, adding that you might be able to maintain parts of a culture digitally, but creating and strengthening culture requires people to do things face-to-face. When asked to describe the culture at the company, the subject said that it is very warm and familiar due to the fact that the organization is quite small, which means that everyone has a fair amount of knowledge and insight relating to what everybody else does.

When another interview subject who works in the financial department raised the matter of culture without prompting, he was invited to elaborate. His explanation was quite similar to that of the first subject. He also stated that the company had a strong culture, explaining that, in a smaller organization such as theirs where employees have a wide variety of assignments, you work together, you contribute together, you help each other and, when this occurs, a culture is established in which everyone has "each other's best interest in mind and believe in each other". The same subject expressed his concern regarding the long-term effects on company culture if employees worked away from the office for extended periods, fearing that it would be detrimental. He believes that when you are not present at the office, you are not as connected to what is going on, and you cannot contribute ideas and views in the same way. He thought that this in turn causes employees to become incrementally more disconnected with time, which diminishes the value of the employee and the company in the long run. Later in the interview, the subject explained that the company relationships with their stakeholders and the other companies they own are built on a significant amount of social contact and interaction. Given that a year has passed without any face-to-face interaction, he believes that these strong bonds that they have built are slowly eroding.

Because several of the interview subjects mentioned the culture at the company, we asked the subject holding the managerial position to also describe the culture and whether they were

taking any steps to maintain it now that most employees are not at the office. She confirmed that the company strives to have a “familiar” culture, and that they introduce this concept to potential employees as early as during the recruitment process. They explain that they have a friendly approach to their co-workers, that they are modest, and that everyone should have their co-worker’s best interest in mind and celebrate one another’s successes.

To maintain the relationship-based and social culture, the company conducted a variety of digital activities. For example, they have convened their quarterly “stormöten” (company-wide meetings) digitally where they have tried to encourage familiarity and social interaction. In the latest meeting, attendees were sent a cheese tray and an expert working with their stores had been brought in to talk about the products. Last fall, they had an activity in which everyone was sent a VR headset and socialized digitally in virtual reality. The manager concluded that this sort of effort appears to be welcomed by employees. She added that they had been working in cross-functional teams also before the pandemic and addressed topics regarding their culture including questions such as “what should we start doing?”, “what should we stop doing?”, and “what should we develop further?”.

4.9 Advantages and disadvantages of WFH

The interview subjects were specifically asked to list the advantages and disadvantages that they connected to WFH. The vast majority of these were raised when they answered other interview questions and have therefore already been brought up in the results above. For the sake of clarity, we have compiled a list that summarizes the pros and cons mentioned.

Advantages of WFH:

- Improved work-life balance
- Time savings during commutes
- Avoiding rush-hour
- Lower levels of stress
- More energy
- More control over time
- Permits schedule optimization
- Facilitates contacting people → They are primed to communicate digitally
- Fewer interruptions → You become more efficient and productive
- Increases flexibility and freedom
- Informative meetings are better online than offline, e.g. check-in & follow-up meetings that are not interactive

Disadvantages of WFH:

- Tasks requiring innovation or creativity are better suited for the office
- Creative meetings work better and are more fun in person
- Fewer social interactions → You become disconnected from the personal lives of co-workers
- Risk of losing focus with no one else around → Less productive

- More difficult to get a hold of people → Time lags, work tasks take longer
- Work and leisure time meld together
- Missing important information due to lack of informal contact
- Distractions at home that disturb work
- Easier to misunderstand each other when communicating through a digital medium
- People who have small living areas do not have sufficient space for an appropriate workspace
- Ergonomic disadvantages can be disastrous for some
- More time spent in meetings, also takes time to schedule
- Hygiene declines, no feeling of urgency to take a shower
- Less stimulation and challenging assignments
- No lunch buffet

4.10 Scenario

At the end of each interview, the interview subject was asked to imagine a scenario in which things have returned to normal and the pandemic is over. We then asked them if they would want to return to working full time from the office or if they would prefer to work full time from home, or if they would prefer a hybrid solution in which they do both. If they answered that they wanted a hybrid solution, the interview subject was asked about their preferred breakdown of WFH and WFO and what would be required from the company and management in order for this to function properly.

No matter how much in favour of or against the interview subjects were of WFH, no subject replied that they would want to work entirely from home or at the office, i.e. all subjects chose a hybrid solution although the details of their preferred work allocation varied significantly. Three people opted for spending most of their work hours at the office, two people were in favour of working mainly from home, and the remainder were somewhere in between with a balanced allocation in mind.

Even among the interview subjects who had a similar preference for work allocation, the details of how they suggested it would work in practice were quite different. For example, the two subjects who voiced the strongest preferences for mainly WFO had opposing opinions on whether the times when people should be present in the office should be firmly established or not. One of them stated that it was important that the allocation was *not* fixed, and that flexibility was important, while the other wanted there to be fixed days during which everyone must be present at the office. This was to ensure that your co-workers are present when you are and avoid situations in which people are WFH on different days. This subject and one more were the only two who specifically stated that they wanted set days on which everyone was present at the office. However, this interview subject also said that there should be flexibility on the days where

office presence is not mandatory, and that people could then choose for themselves where they want to work those days.

The third subject who had a strong preference for being at the office also raised the importance of flexibility. She stated that, although she would definitely like to return to the office, she would not want to return to the traditional scenario of being in the office 08:00-17:00 every day of the workweek, preferring to have more freedom with her time and how to allocate it. Another interview subject expressed his concern that, if management's leadership is excessively authoritarian going forward and they are too stringent about the amounts of time that people must spend at the office, people may take the opportunity to switch jobs to a workplace that is more flexible in terms of the WFH and WFO allocation.

The interview subjects who were the happiest WFH both suggested a 2/3 split, i.e. two days a week working in the office and three from home. Like the subject who stated that she did not want to have to be present in the office 08:00-17:00, some of the subjects who preferred a balance did not propose a certain division of days and, instead, explained that they would like to have the option to work from the office part days when their presence was important and then be able to perform independent tasks from home.

On the topic of what is required from the company in order to make a hybrid solution work, several interview subjects mentioned management's involvement in ensuring that it functions well. One subject voiced the concern that there is a certain risk involved in a hybrid solution given that management may be inexperienced leading a workforce that alternates between WFH and WFO. He went on to say, however, that he believes that management has benefited from practice this last year in managing a workforce that WFH, but that it may still take some time to adjust in light of the fact that a hybrid solution would be a new scenario entirely. He stated that the attitude of management regarding this work solution was the most important and, if a manager or superior likes the hybrid concept, they will adapt faster and have an easier time handling it. Several interview subjects mentioned that thoroughly explained guidelines from their employer will be important in ensuring that, in order to reduce potential confusion and ensure that work continues smoothly, everyone at the office has a clear view of what is allowed and what they are supposed to do.

We asked the interview subject in the managerial position if she thought that employees would want to work exclusively from home/the office or prefer a mix of the two, she said that she believed most people would prefer a mix and that their ideal was probably a 50/50 split, which is an accurate estimation based on an average of the preferred allocations of all interview subjects. She further noted that their management team is discussing this subject and how they should go

about taking all aspects and employee expectations into account. After considering the internal capabilities and needs of the company, the manager thought that a 60/40 division (three days at the office and two days at home per week) would be a reasonable starting point. She said that she thought it would be difficult to have set days where everyone has to be on location at the same time, and emphasized that there was a need for flexibility from management on that matter. Furthermore, the manager stated that when reviewing their yearly schedule, there are some periods that are better suited for remote work while other periods require employees to be in the office to a greater extent, so the amount of time employees need to be present at the office may vary depending on this.

The manager also said she believed that they would become more flexible regarding when the workday starts, as it is stressful for many employees to take their car or public transport to work during rush hour and that this is unnecessary unless they have something important scheduled at work early in the morning. She went on to say that they already have this possibility, but she thinks that management needs to establish clearer guidelines for this and make it more flexible in the future.

4.11 Financial question

One subject with a relevant role received a question regarding the financial situation at the company and brought up a potential future issue regarding the working conditions and who should pay for what. The subject said that it will be interesting moving forward as employee costs related to the home office have increased while organizations will probably spend significantly less on the office. At the same time, the government has made it clear that employees will not be able to take tax deductions for equipment purchased for a home office as organizations are allowed to do. This may create tensions if employees expect the company to pay for home office equipment and the company declines to do so.

4.12 Internal employee survey

When comparing our interview results and the internal employee survey results, we found that they correspond and that there were no outliers or anomalies. In this comparison, we concluded that there are several opinions that the majority of the employees in the organization appear to share. The most common overall is that creative meetings are more difficult to conduct digitally, that launching new projects is more difficult while WFH, and that people can work with fewer interruptions from home which leads to higher productivity. Furthermore, social interactions have declined which many regard as negative, and some people feel uninspired when WFH. In addition, several employees have thoughts and questions about how workplace allocation will

look in the future for the company. Most employees want to have greater flexibility in terms of when they have to be at the office going forward, while also having an office at which to work.

5. Analysis & Discussion

5.1 Creativity/innovation vs repetitive work tasks

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that all of the employees perceived themselves as being engaged in mainly or partly innovative work tasks. Furthermore, several subjects said that it was detrimental to their creativity to work from home, and that they found that creative meetings and brainstorming sessions were more successful when they were conducted at the office. Some subjects also mentioned that they were inspired by spontaneous meetings with co-workers in the workplace, something which does not occur when WFH. These experiences are in line with most of the conclusions from Hodari (2015) and Waber, Magnolfi & Lindsay's (2014) research, as it appears that maximizing employee creativity is impeded by the lack of face-to-face interaction and spontaneous run-ins when employees work from home.

As the company will use a hybrid work model, there will be abundant opportunities for spontaneous social interactions at the office, even if reduced. If management decides that there will be one or more days a week on which office attendance is obligatory, these days would be most suitable for creative meetings, brainstorming sessions, or starting new projects requiring any type of idea generation. If the company has no obligatory physical presence days, the meetings could still require employees to come to the office in a scenario such as "everyone should be here 14:00-15:00 for the creative meeting" or similar. To reap the benefits of the creativity and efficiency boosts that employees receive from socially interacting with each other, management may consider encouraging employees to interact socially with each other even when working remotely, e.g. through optional digital lunches or coffee breaks, or by encouraging employees to contact their co-workers spontaneously via Teams if they have a sudden idea that they want to discuss.

Given that several employees stated that the engagement they felt while working is dependent on social interaction with their co-workers, Bregman's (2010) conclusion that friendships in the workplace lead to increased levels of employee engagement appears to be applicable to the company. In light of the fact that Croswell (2016) has shown that there is a positive relationship between employee engagement and innovativeness, it will be important for the company to keep organizing social activities and encouraging friendliness in the workplace to maximize engagement, and, thereby, innovation as well.

Given that Steinberg et al. (1997) showed that creativity increases after exercise, and many of the interview subjects stated that, due to the time that WFH freed up, they have significantly more time to take walks and engage in sports, employee creativity at the company may actually increase in this regard. Therefore, the company may wish to consider encouraging people to maximize the use of their flexibility when working remotely and encourage them to get out and get moving. This might also contribute to counteracting the reduced creativity from lack of co-worker interaction on days when employees work from home.

The recommendation provided by Hinds and Elliot (2021) to introduce regular company events that stimulate creative engagement is also a way for the organization to ensure that innovation and the company does not decline because employees are WFH. The aforementioned event in which employees were sent a VR-headset and created a personal avatar and interacted with their co-workers in virtual reality is a particularly creative example of one of these activities. This shows that the company is more than capable of crafting creative social events for their workers, which is something that they will benefit from continuing with going forward in their office environment as well.

5.2 Differences in perceived availability

As was evident from our results, the availability aspect is nuanced, and it is perceived differently among employees. The largest implication according to some interview subjects is that information flows are not as effective when employees are geographically spread out. This is partly supported by Useem (2017) and demonstrated by the Allen Curve (Allen, 1977). Useem concludes that collaborative efficiency declines when co-workers work from a greater distance because collaboration requires good communication between employees. At the same time, Attaran, Attaran & Kirkland (2019) conclude that employee's digital workplace solutions have not improved, and their current means of digital communication requires many person-hours to use (Useem, 2017). Our results show that the current digital communication systems allow for more frequent misunderstandings, as employees cannot visually analyse whether their co-worker has understood what they discussed by email or a phone call. Furthermore, some employees experience digital communication tools as another barrier when reaching out to their colleagues, it is more time-consuming and not as enjoyable. Waber, Magnolfi & Lindsay (2014) also found that people who interact and see each other frequently are more likely to communicate with each other and this is evident from the fact that some employees continue to regard the office as providing the best communication opportunities, as asserted by Useem (2017).

So, why do some employees perceive digital communication to be superior? We found that there is another aspect of communication that occurs in the workplace, namely that person-to-person communication is not limited to when an employee is “available”, e.g. when going to grab some coffee. It also happens when the cost of getting someone’s attention is higher, e.g. when people are working at their desk and become interrupted, prolonging the time it takes to finish an assignment. Solingen, Berghout & Latum (1998) found that an interruption takes about 15-20 minutes of an employee’s time and personal visits are responsible for many interruptions. After subjects started WFH, they explained that they had more control over when they could be interrupted in their planned activities, as they could mute their phones and work uninterrupted for longer periods, leading to increased efficiency.

This increase in freedom and control over their time was welcomed by some employees, but some felt that it disrupted information flows to a greater extent compared to when they WFO. Hill, Ferris & Mårtinson (2003) found evidence that, when employees WFH they are less available during regular business hours, which may lead to fewer synergies in the company and reduced individual performance for employees who cannot get a hold of their co-workers to the same extent as in the office.

As research suggests (Useem, 2017), communication efficiency is dependent on the communications technologies to which the company currently has access and remains a barrier to seamless communication in a digital work environment. If the workplace seeks to increase overall productivity levels, a solution must be identified in which both collaborative efficiency and personal productivity can thrive. As the company moves toward a hybrid workplace solution, consideration should be given to guidelines and the choice of communications technology to facilitate seamless communication flows while allowing people to work without frequent interruptions in order to improve personal productivity. The company may also want to consider implementing guidelines that state when employees should be available to communicate digitally.

5.3 Productivity

5.3.1 How is productivity measured?

All of the interview subjects state that their work is difficult to measure in terms of productivity, i.e. output they produce. The most applicable measurement of an individual employee’s productivity consisted of the goals associated with a yearly bonus. However, when interview subjects were asked about how productivity was measured, bonus goals were not top of mind. It was not until the 7th interview that a subject took into account the bonus incentives. This is likely due to the fact that the bonus incentives themselves are somewhat intangible and only three of

approximately ten goals relate directly to the individual employee - the remainder are connected to each business unit in the company or performance of the company as a whole.

If the company wants to have a good overview of their operations when transitioning to a hybrid work model, they should first establish suitable measurements so that they are capable of following up on progress and running diagnostics on it. We applied Hadis' proposal as suggested by Haynes (2007) and found the following:

1. They are currently measuring perceived productivity as a surrogate for actual productivity. Evidently, they are measuring productivity where it is possible and perceived productivity where it is not, e.g. influence x number of stores to implement a certain campaign, or ask employees how productive they perceive that they are.
2. They have the potential to use indirect measures. Even though the interview subjects found it difficult to explain how they are being measured, we know from the internal surveys that they gather information about employee health & well-being at work, which can be compared over time and evaluated.
3. They are currently measuring teamwork. We found that they do measure teamwork both with bonus-related goals and in the internal employee surveys.

Overall we conclude that the company is successful in applying holistic measurements that will be helpful when adopting a hybrid work model. We theorize that health & well-being at work measurements will be important for the future as WFH has shown to have a higher risk of social health-related issues.

5.3.2 Has your productivity changed when WFH?

The company experienced a change in productivity at the beginning of the pandemic for two principal reasons. Firstly, there was uncertainty as to how long employees would work from home, with disruptions to regular schedules. For some employees, this meant a reduced workload given the uncertain direction going forward. Others saw an increased workload as the financial markets became chaotic. Secondly, the company was not accustomed to the digital tools needed to work from home, and employee know-how regarding digital tools was inadequate given that they normally work from the office and rarely from home. After employees received rapid training and gained experience using these tools, productivity increased. Currently, productivity has returned to similar levels overall.

However, some subjects state that they are less productive overall, while others claim that they are more productive or just as productive overall. As noted earlier, the initiation of new

projects and creative assignments with others is less effective when WFH, which lowers an employee's evaluation of his or her current productivity. This is also consistent with Lippe & Lippényi's (2019) study of how co-workers WFH can affect other co-workers' performance. But we also found that when employees perform tasks that depend only on themselves as creators, such as writing assignments, they complete an assignment much faster than WFO, which increases the current evaluation of productivity. The logical explanation is that employees can work undisturbed to a greater extent while WFH, which is congruent with findings from Lippe & Lippényi's (2019) study. Accordingly, the evaluation of productivity overall was about the same when employees were asked about differences between WFO compared to WFH.

Some interview subjects, including the aforementioned manager, also shed light on what effects social distance has on long-term employee mental health. The respondents say that there are periods during which they feel fatigued and uninspired, and experienced poorer mental health, which contributed to lower productivity during these periods. One subject says that it is due to the fact that he cannot interact with other adults - interactions he regards as invigorating. Another employee finds it difficult to know if he is putting in enough work, which could also undermine a sense of well-being. Mental-health concerns are evident globally and are consistent with Garner's (2020) findings. To counter the toll of the pandemic on employees, companies can introduce new policies appropriate to WFH, such as mandatory 10-minute breaks or meeting-free days.

5.3.3 Do you feel as engaged WFH?

We found that the overall engagement levels are back to normal, but there are differences among employees given that some of them experience very low levels of engagement when they WFH while others experience a boost in engagement. The boost was found to result from increased flexibility in their everyday life and increased productivity due to the fact that they are not subject to the same disruptions from co-workers at the office. One employee stated that his engagement is dependent on social connections and there are fewer such connections when WFH. From his point of view, this is something that is also considered when choosing which employer can offer the most attractive workplace.

The results of our interviews suggest that a mix between WFH and WFO is the best solution for the company, which is also suggested by research by Hickman & Robinson (2020) according to which it also allows employees to interact face to face. The company is currently considering allowing employees to work from home 40% in the future, while Hickman & Robinson (2020) suggest that the optimal mix is approximately 60-80% WFH in order to optimize engagement. Hickman & Robinson (2020) also say that leaders need to evaluate the

risks of not accommodating employee demands for increased flexibility as remote working becomes more common, given that highly educated workers can switch workplaces if they are not satisfied with the value that is provided to them.

We recommend that the company considers this risk in their evaluation, although 60-80% WFH may not necessarily be the best solution given that there are aspects other than engagement that will ultimately affect productivity and employee satisfaction.

5.3.4 What do you need to be productive?

When asked what an employee needs to be productive, irrespective of whether they are WFH or WFO, we received a variety of replies. We found that employee needs differed depending on the type of job they held and the personality traits of the interview subject. For example, people within finance and economy had a greater need for tools such as dual screens or a keyboard with extra numbers on the side.

Several needs mentioned by the employees were connected to technology, access to information, and access to people within the organization. Some interview subjects made mention of problems when WFH which are similar to those mentioned by Attaran, Attaran & Kirkland (2019), e.g. searching for information is more time-consuming, and searches for internal information are not always successful, which can lead to less effective, frustrating work hours. The study also mentions that these types of barriers may lead to increased dissatisfaction and reduce employee retention, although it may be more applicable to younger generations that embrace workplace technology to a greater extent. However, it will be important to equip employees for success in the future, as it will affect their satisfaction and productivity (Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer, 1999). This is especially true when the company decides to adopt a hybrid workplace model in the future, as the aforementioned technology and access needs will remain relevant given that employees are not WFO all of the time. Accordingly, we suggest that the company invests in digital workplace solutions that are user-friendly in order to reduce time spent on unnecessary work tasks such as finding the right information. Attaran, Attaran & Kirkland's research suggests that employees waste about 12% of their time searching for information, which adds up to over 30 work days yearly per employee that could have been spent on more productive tasks.

Some subjects also explained their personality type as a factor affecting what they need to be productive. For example, subjects who described themselves as extroverts said that what they needed to be productive was connected to social interactions - such as everyday conversations or getting praise from colleagues - which was invigorating and accordingly inspired them to work

more productively. Yet, other interview subjects said that they were more energetic while WFH because they had more time to take walks outdoors and reflect in lieu of walking around the office building. According to the interview subjects, it is the moments where employees gain energy that contributes to higher productivity, and the potential source of that energy depends on their personality traits.

While the topic has not been adequately researched in order for us to draw conclusions, Ogbonnaya (2020) argues that experts have found that personality traits play a role in how WFH affects workers, and our study suggests the same results.

5.4 What do you need to be satisfied?

Employees at the company explained that they need both “hygiene” topics and motivators to be satisfied at their workplace, which is consistent with findings from Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999). Our results show that the interview subjects identified all the hygiene topics mentioned by Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) except *supervision*. The ones mentioned were: company and administrative policies, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions.

“Hygiene” topics:

Company and administrative policies: Some interview subjects raised a concern regarding what future WFH policies the company would establish and how much they would be required to WFO. One of the employees says that there will be a risk that, if the company introduces a WFH policy which is too restrictive, employees will take that opportunity to search for other workplaces that offer more generous WFH flexibility benefits, as employees have grown used to the new way of working. As Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer suggests, the company should observe what policies will become the common practice regarding workplace allocation. If there is a higher risk that valuable employees will leave, the company may want to follow suit on these policies.

Supervision: No subjects identified supervision as a hygiene topic. However, one subject brought up the topic as something they needed to be productive (which we asked in another set of questions). According to that individual, it was not something that would reduce dissatisfaction but, rather, something that would increase productivity. One reason for this could be that the company does not have any so-called “hygiene” issues regarding supervisors working there which, according to Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer’s reasoning, indicates that the company is currently making wise decisions when employing supervisors.

Salary: Salary was mentioned as a hygiene factor. In keeping with Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999), one interview subject explained that salary was not the main motivator as to why they work there but it is naturally something that factors into satisfaction. Another employee at the company said that, because employee productivity is difficult to measure, some bonus policies are perceived as intangible when evaluating the results. This indicates that the company may not have bonus guidelines that are clear enough and should consider revising them according to Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999).

Interpersonal relations: Interpersonal relations were commonly mentioned as a dissatisfier which is especially evident while WFH, since social interaction is limited due to restrictions. However, our results are divided regarding this hygiene topic. Some subjects state that, even without the restrictions, social interactions would be fewer WFH compared to WFO which would raise their dissatisfaction, while others state that their dissatisfaction would decrease.

Working conditions: As the future working environment will most likely not only be in the regular office, the company must decide who should pay for the new home office environment. According to Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999), the working environment has a tremendous effect on employees' pride and the work that they do and may decrease satisfaction if it is not managed properly. One of our interview subjects states it will be interesting going forward because employee costs related to their home offices have increased while organizations will likely spend significantly less on the office. At the same time, employees are not permitted to take tax deductions for their home office equipment. He believes that the topic of who should pay for home offices will be up for debate and may lead to disagreement between organizations and the workforce if employees do not get what they ask for. Accordingly, we suggest that the company evaluate whether the employees have a proper work environment at home to ensure that employees are satisfied and productive and, as Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer mentions, even a nice chair can bring great joy for an employee.

Our results show that the interview subjects identified all the motivators mentioned by Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) except *advancement*. The ones mentioned were *work itself*, *achievement*, *recognition*, *responsibility* and *advancement*.

Motivators:

Work itself: As Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) says, work itself is perhaps the most important factor to create satisfaction. As evident from our results, some interview subjects mention that they want to have a meaningful job and variety in their work, which they had to a

greater extent WFO. However, when restrictions are lifted, given that employees at the company are allowed to have more flexibility with a hybrid work model, we believe that, overall, employees will be more satisfied with their work. According to Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999), organizations should emphasize that contributions made by employees result in positive outcomes for the company. Our results suggest that employees already had that while WFO and there is no reason to believe that that would change when employees WFH more in the future.

Achievement: As regards the *achievement* motivator, one employee mentioned that he is currently not using his full potential and being challenged enough, as some of his more high-stakes usual work tasks are non-existent due to inefficiency to start these new projects without having physical meetings. As with the “work itself” motivator, we believe that this should not be affected when/if the company moves forward with a hybrid work model as restrictions are relieved. However, as Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999) suggest, the company should make sure that its employees are in a position where they can succeed and ensure that they can give their employees timely feedback and clear achievable goals and standards while working from home. There may be a need to find new ways to do this when employees are working from their homes.

Recognition: Some of our interview subjects said that they like to be appreciated and recognized when they had completed a complex assignment and that it is important for their satisfaction levels, as confirmed by Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer (1999). However, the interview subjects observed that, relative to a year ago, there has been a lack of this appreciation during the last year. Accordingly, we conclude that the company should improve the *recognition* factor, as Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer suggests, by taking time to praise employees for their work. To do this successfully in a WFH environment, we suggest that the company consider whether this is possible at weekly, digital meetings.

Responsibility: Some employees mentioned that responsibility could create satisfaction for them in terms of increased work allocation flexibility by which they would get more freedom and also more responsibility for their job. Prior to the pandemic, it was explained as they had “ownership” of the output that they produced. As employees have tried the WFH model and the company has concluded that they are satisfied with employee output, it means that employees are capable of taking increased ownership of their job and remaining productive.

Advancement: It is noteworthy that no interview subject made mention of advancement as a motivator. We postulate that this may be due to a Swedish cultural norm according to which these sorts of motivators are rarely discussed. It may also be because many of the subjects already hold a senior position in the company and their ambition to climb the corporate ladder has already

been fulfilled or they have opportunities to do so. Nonetheless, our study lacks the insights to conclude why it was not identified as a motivator.

5.5 Home work environment

Very few of the interview subjects had a home office. It was very common that subjects said that they conducted their work from something other than a desk and an office chair, with examples including working from the kitchen table on a stool, from a couch, or from a bed. Some subjects appeared to have no major issues with working from a sub-optimal workstation, while others complained about back pain and other ailments caused by how they work from home, with one subject describing their ergonomic situation as disastrous. No matter how little someone complains about working from uncomfortable locations, research such as Fernandez' (1995) has shown that ergonomics play an important role in employee health, their productivity, and the quality of their work. Even the interview subjects who did not complain about a lack of a proper chair or desk may still be affected negatively in the long run, and if they are going to work remotely for part of their workweek for years to come, the detrimental effects of poor ergonomics may catch up to them.

A common theme among interview subjects was that they were not aware of the full arsenal of ergonomic tools that was available to them at work. Management at the company may seek to clarify this matter so that they fully avail themselves of these options. Given that many subjects said that the office chairs they could borrow were too big and clumsy for their homes, management may also want to consider providing employees with smaller, high-quality office chairs for home use. The initial cost of the investments will likely be offset by the benefit good ergonomics will have on their employees and the work performed from home. While employees can order headphones via their internal company portal, providing employees with good headsets and noise cancelling headphones might also be a wise investment to ensure that participants in digital meetings can always hear and communicate clearly and work at home without the distraction of ambient noise created by their family members, outside sources, etc.

5.6 Work-life balance

For most of the interview subjects, work-life balance had improved significantly when WFH due to the newfound flexibility and freedom. Many of the benefits tied to WFH that referred to by interview subjects were in line with those listed by Chimote & Srivastava (2013), such as improved health, reduced stress, and increased job satisfaction. The fact that the interview subjects recognize these benefits will likely mean that the company will also benefit - e.g. from increased output and loyalty - from having employees who feel like they have a good work-life

balance. The improved work-life balance that a hybrid model will provide for most employees - relative to when they were working full time at the office - should therefore be mutually beneficial for the employees and the company as a whole.

However, not all interview subjects shared the same view on the effect that WFH had on work-life balance. One subject perceived the decline in work-life balance even after growing accustomed to WFH. It is accordingly likely that there are other employees in the organization who feel this way, even if they are a minority. One readily available solution to help these employees is to simply allow them to work from the office as much as they desire.

In the same way as compelling people who prefer WFH to WFO will have negative effects on the company, so will telling people that they must WFH on certain days. The principal reason the subject who experienced a deterioration in work-life balance was that the line between work and free time became blurred and thus caused more stress: the company could alleviate the problem with recommendations to counteract this experience, e.g. management could arrange an informational session at which employees are given tips on how to properly disconnect from work when their workday has come to an end. Employees could also give each other useful advice during this session, such as the subject who had learned to disconnect by turning off all of her work-related technology and putting it away after a certain hour in the evening.

5.7 Leadership

Managing a hybrid workforce that is in and out of the office throughout the week will be a major change and a new challenge for management. Experience leading employees who WFH will most likely ease the transition, but the hybrid model that is going to be used going forward is a novel situation that will require adjustments. The company will most likely face some of the challenges of having a hybrid workforce enumerated in Knight (2020), such as the risk of employee uncertainty regarding the rules applicable to their work allocation, or the creation of a divide between those who prefer to be at the office and those who opt for WFH.

To resolve any potential uncertainty issues, the company can follow Davey's (2013) recommendation and set explicit guidelines for how the hybrid solution is going to function, preferably before it is implemented. Both the company's employees and management appear to be aware of the importance of this, as several interview subjects at the company answered that clear guidelines from management would be required to make the hybrid model work, and the manager mentioned that management would have to be clear on what rules apply to manage employee's expectations. If the company's guidelines for WFH and WFO are properly established and explained to employees before they start working using a hybrid model, including

how they are going to communicate and the rules for office presence, confusion and/or potential disappointment due to unrealistic expectations can be avoided.

To resolve the complications of building an equitable and fair workplace when managing a hybrid team mentioned by Hill & Lineback (2011), company management may want to follow Davey's (2013) recommendation to emphasize inclusion. For the company, continuing to have a large percentage of meetings in a digital format even for employees who are present in the office can help ensure that all employees work under the same conditions for inclusion in the discussion and benefiting from equal opportunities to voice their opinions irrespective of their work location. Management can also encourage employees who are in the office to always include their digital co-workers and keep them up to date. For example, if two team members are discussing a work-related matter in the office and the third member is WFH that day, they should get that member on a call immediately to ensure that they are not excluded from any decision making.

Davey's suggestion related to prioritizing with flexibility in mind should be particularly easy to implement for the company as they already have large planning meetings on Mondays at which the prioritization of tasks can be raised. The flexibility allowed by this method can enable employees to keep enjoying the freedom they experienced when WFH that so many interview subjects mentioned.

Finally, individual employees principally consider their own needs, while managers must think about the needs of the entire organization. The manager mentioned that it has been difficult to satisfy everyone in terms of the frequency, size, and length of meetings when employees have been WFH, and it is probably going to be impossible to satisfy every employee with the specifics of the hybrid solution. There will be lessons to be learned when the company switches to the hybrid model, precisely as when the company switched entirely to WFH. One way that the company can learn and adapt to employee preferences as quickly as possible is to conduct regular surveys in which employees can voice their opinions, especially hybrid work when this can be done at company meetings. Also, the anonymity of surveys allows employees to be more frank in their answers, as some employees may not otherwise raise complaints directly to their co-workers or superior. This way, the manager will receive continuous and accurate updates about how the organization is acclimatizing to the hybrid solution and make changes accordingly.

5.8 Culture

The company culture appears to be a great asset for the company. The interview subject in the managerial position and several other subjects described it as being familiar and trust-filled due to the size of the organization and their work in cross-functional teams - something from which the

company will benefit going forward. When the hybrid model work begins, employees will no longer be at home all of the time. This means that the risk, as one subject expressed it, of the culture slowly eroding should diminish. However, employees who spend significantly less than a 100% of their working hours at the office may still experience negative effects on the closeness they feel to co-workers and the organization as a whole.

As Howard-Grenville (2020) states, what makes office life meaningful for many is that it helps sustain organizational culture. So what can the company do to ensure that they maintain and keep building their company culture when their workforce has a hybrid work allocation? One option is to utilize the tools that Howard-Grenville provides for managers who strive to ensure that valued aspects of their workplace culture endure.

For example, after a task has been completed by a cross-functional team at the company, a manager may use the first tool - making culture visible by calling it out. In this case, the manager might remind their team that they were successful because of how close knit the group is and their understanding of what each person can contribute from their area of expertise given their familiarity with each other. By announcing what the culture has done to help employees reach a goal together, they are reminded not only of the culture's existence, but also its value.

The second and third tools, using disruption to bolster the cultural core and welcoming modifications to the culture, can also be used by management at the company. Holding onto the strength of the familiarity at the company will undoubtedly be important going forward, particularly in light of the fact that maintaining this culture will help the organization avoid becoming socially disconnected when remote work increases. However, given that the hybrid work model will entail significant changes to how people are used to working, there may be cultural components that must be created or cultivated to ensure that this set up works optimally. For example, as employees are more dispersed and may not always be present in the office when their co-workers are, keeping each other up to date on developments and providing each other with important information will be more important than ever to ensure smooth information flows. Accordingly, it may be valuable for the company to incorporate this onto their current culture. As there is already a high level of familiarity and closeness within the organization, adding a cultural emphasis on frequent, regular, and clear communication should not be too difficult in practice.

To prevent the dilution of corporate culture when employees are working more from home, management may take the advice of Hinds and Elliot (2021) and reach out to employees more frequently while being clear about the meaning and purpose of doing so. If the company seeks to strengthen their familiar culture and prevent the drift described by Hinds and Elliot that can occur when their employees spend more time apart, it may consider arranging regular digital

social events in smaller groups each week, e.g. “remote coffee breaks”, to ensure that team members continue to interact with each other socially even when away from the office.

As one of our interview subjects stated, integrating new employees into the workplace might be a bigger challenge when people are working in a hybrid model, and the new employees are not in the office with their co-workers during all of their work hours. As the manager we interviewed explained, potential employees are introduced to the company’s core values and culture as early as in the interview process. To strengthen the introduction and integration into the culture further, the company may benefit from doing something similar to what Slack had done in the example used by Hinds and Elliot. For example, new hires might be required to spend their first weeks or month of employment WFO to familiarize themselves faster and get to know their co-workers when they are present at the office. Also, management could hold educational culture seminars to ensure that new hires are rapidly inducted into the company’s familiar culture.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of our report was to investigate how employee productivity and satisfaction are affected by working from home compared to working from the office, and how a company implementing a hybrid workplace solution should consider these effects to have as productive and satisfied employees as possible.

Our results show that the vast majority of interview subjects enjoyed a wide variety of benefits when WFH, including increased flexibility and freedom in their schedules, improved work-life balance, and increased efficiency due to fewer interruptions from colleagues. Many interviewees also experienced that meetings that were not creative in nature could be held more efficiently digitally. Some interview subjects also experienced that they had more energy left, reduced levels of stress, and many felt that they made significant time savings from not having to commute. These factors also increased employee productivity and satisfaction in most cases. There were also some downsides of WFH however, such as it being harder to have creative meetings, that there are communication issues due to it being more difficult to get a hold of coworkers, and reduced social interaction which was the biggest and most commonly mentioned downside. Some employees also mentioned that it became difficult to separate work from leisure time, that they are less stimulated when WFH, and that subpar ergonomics had a negative effect on them. These factors instead often had a negative effect on productivity and satisfaction. However, this downside related to decreased social interaction was strongly enhanced by unique circumstances - working entirely from home and the added social distancing restrictions put in

place during the pandemic. When restrictions are lifted and the hybrid model is implemented, social interaction will increase significantly for employees. Accordingly, a hybrid workplace model has the potential to provide the company and its employees with the best of both worlds. Employees can enjoy the flexibility and freedom that they value so highly while still being able to socialize with their colleagues at work, and management will reap the rewards of a workforce that is more satisfied and productive due to being able to work from the location that suits them the best and pleases them the most. The downside of having creative meetings while WFH can be solved by having these in the office, and the occasional communication issues can be avoided by clear guidelines from management related to phone and computer etiquette and when people should be available.

The future will present challenges for management given the fact that leading a hybrid workforce is a novel situation and will require acclimatization. Issues include catering to the needs of as many employees as possible without pandering to any given individual, ensuring that the workplace remains inclusive and everyone has equal opportunities, and preserving the corporate culture in this new era. Yet, we believe that, as long as management is aware of the risks involved and the solutions available to them, they can counteract these risks and overcome potential issues.

Another challenge will be finding the right balance between WFH and WFO. Allowing either too little or too much flexibility and freedom for employees in terms of choosing where they want to work comes with a certain amount of risk. If there is little to no flexibility, employees who have learned to value the benefits of WFH may become frustrated with the rigidity of their company and may instead choose to work for an employer who offers more freedom. If employees instead have near unlimited freedom, employees may choose to work more and more from home to the extent that they lose their personal connection to their co-workers and the company. This, in turn, might cause the erosion of their attachment to their current workplace and accordingly lower the commitment barrier and facilitate a switch to another company that offers perceived advantages. There is no magic ratio of work allocation for every company that will make every employee happy but not unattached. However, through trial and error and adapting to how the organization responds, the company has the potential to find a balance that benefits the company and employees alike going forward.

7. Limitations and future research

Although we believe that other organizations and researchers can gain insights and knowledge regarding the effects and implications WFH has on companies, their employees, their managers, and the potential effects of implementing a hybrid workplace model, it is difficult for us to apply the specifics of our analyses to draw any industry-wide conclusions. This is due to the fact that we examined only one company whose unique structure and culture played a role in our recommendations, some of which may not work equally well or be applicable to organizations that are fundamentally different from the company we examined.

In terms of potential future research related to this matter, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study at a large number of companies in different industries and of varying sizes. By doing so, researchers may identify “universal truths” (if any) in terms of insights regarding WFH and hybrid work models and identify the aspects that are highly contextual to the type of organization under examination.

The pandemic enabled us to investigate the effects of a company used to WFO switching entirely to WFH, thereby allowing us to compare various advantages and disadvantages perceived by employees of these ways of working based on their new experiences. However, Covid-19 has brought with it extremely unusual circumstances that influenced the way interview subjects answered some of our questions. The greatest downside by far associated with WFH mentioned by interview subjects was reduced social interaction inside and outside the workplace. It is likely that the replies would have differed had the subjects WFH but still had the ability to meet their co-workers and other friends at will. Accordingly, had we conducted this study at a company that had switched to WFH under more normal circumstances, our results would likely not be the same.

Furthermore, a large part of our analysis is related to the potential the company has for implementing a hybrid model and what affects this will have on the organization. As the company has not yet begun hybrid work, there remains – notwithstanding that we have tried to keep it as closely based on our findings and prior research as possible – considerable speculation involved in this prediction. However, as thousands of companies worldwide will likely imminently implement a hybrid workplace model, upcoming years will see substantial research on the diverse effects of hybrid work and provide additional valuable evidence and insights.

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