

# Is one plus one really greater than two?

A qualitative study on how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting

## **Authors**

Anna Lindell & Ella Ahlborg

## **Supervisor**

Frida Pemer

Master Thesis

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Stockholm School of Economics

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has largely affected businesses around the world, and as a result, employees have worked from dispersed locations and used computer-mediated communication to a high extent over the last two years. The virtual shift has implications for industries that highly depend on their workforce to collaborate, industries such as Professional Service Firms (PSFs). One type of PSF that has gained relatively little attention in research and that relies heavily on teamwork, is that of management consultancies. Considering the research gap, and the rapid reconfiguration of teamwork that the pandemic has imposed, this is an important question to study – both from a theoretical and a practical point of view. Through a qualitative multiple case study, we explore how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting. We apply a theoretical lens inspired by Salas et al (2015a) that has summarized nine critical considerations for teamwork, and extend with literature on team cohesion and psychological safety. Our findings imply that teamwork in management consulting has mostly been negatively influenced by virtual work, and we summarize our key findings in two categories, *impaired team synergies* and *decreased motivation*. With impaired team synergies, we suggest that it has become more difficult to obtain collective intelligence and effective communication virtually. This is mainly due to more individual and siloed work within the teams. As for decreased motivation, we show that the notion of team spirit and belongingness to a team has worsened in the virtual context. These aspects, together with a weaker culture, contribute to a decreased motivation among consultants in the virtual context. With our findings, we contribute with extensions to both the PSF and management consulting literature as well as to the teamwork literature. Finally, we contribute with a conceptual model of virtual work’s impact on teamwork in management consulting.

**Keywords:** professional service firms, management consulting, teamwork, virtual work

**Supervisor:** Frida Perner, *Associate Professor*, Department of Management and Organization

**Examiner:** Katja Einola, *Assistant Professor*, Department of Management and Organization

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## Definitions

Concept	Definition
<b>Team</b>	Teams are a distinguishable set of two or more people who interact, dynamically, interdependently, and adaptively toward a common and valued goal/objective/mission (Salas et al., 2015a).
<b>Teamwork</b>	An adaptive, dynamic, and episodic process that encompasses the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors among team members while they interact toward a common goal (Salas et al., 2015a).
<b>Virtual work</b>	Employees working from dispersed locations and using computer-mediated communication (Raghuram et al., 2019).
<b>Professional Service Firms (PSFs)</b>	Characterized as firms providing custommade and knowledge-intensive services to other parties by highly educated professionals in order to solve a specific problem of a customer (O'Higgins et al., 2021).
<b>Management consultancies</b>	Knowledge-intensive firms (Werr & Stjernberg, 2003) hired by a company for the specialized knowledge and capability that the company lacks. Consultants are hired on a finite time period and provide recommendations of solutions for the problems that are confronting their clients (Christensen et al., 2013).
<b>Team Cohesion</b>	An individual's sense of belonging to a group and sharing a commitment to achieve common goals (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990).
<b>Psychological safety</b>	An individuals' perception about the consequences of interpersonal risks in their work environment. It is made up of presumed beliefs about how other people will respond when for example asking a question, reporting a mistake, seeking feedback, or challenging the status quo (Edmondson et al., 2004).

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Two years have passed since the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). In response to the embrittled circumstances, countries around the globe quickly adopted a broad spectrum of containment measures, from recommendations to stay at home to quarantines of large geographic regions (Bouziri et al., 2020). As a consequence, businesses around the world have been largely affected, many suffering from large financial losses that will take years to recover (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). Nevertheless, companies have been trying to cope with the organizational turbulence by accelerating the use of technology to facilitate work from home. Even though positive aspects of working from home have been witnessed, companies still face many challenges as employees work more in social isolation. For instance, collaboration has been argued to be one of the biggest challenges that companies face when employees do not work together at the office, as well as loneliness and isolation (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). It has been suggested that moving away from in-person interactions to virtual communication imposes costs for collaborative idea generation, and causes collaboration networks to become more static and siloed (Brucks & Levav, 2022; Yang et al., 2022). Due to the novelty of the phenomenon, we do not know how industries that highly depend on their workforce to collaborate to a large extent through day-to-day *teamwork* have been affected by increased *virtual work*, defined as employees working from dispersed locations and using computer-mediated communication (Raghuram et al., 2019).

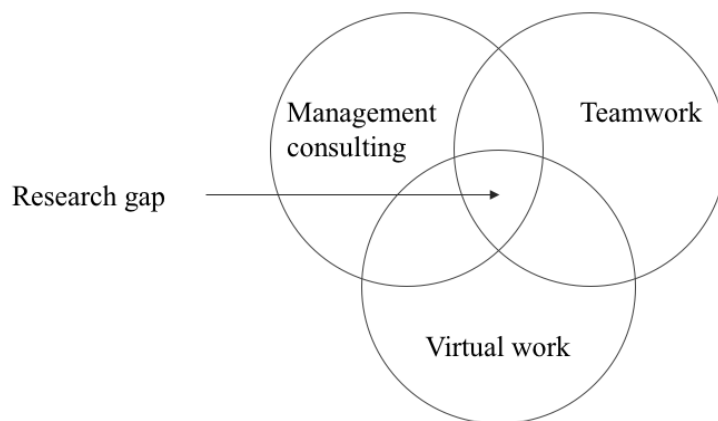
One group of companies that highly depends on its workforce's knowledge and skills to serve their clients is *Professional Service Firms* (PSFs) (O'Higgins et al., 2021). In PSFs, collaboration is important for the quality of output and performance (Gardner & Valentine, 2015). There are many different types of PSFs (von Nordenflycht, 2010), but one that has gained relatively little attention in research, compared to law and auditing firms, is *management consultancies* (O'Higgins et al., 2021). Management consultants work in project teams to identify specific problems and come up with targeted solutions for external clients (Klarner et al., 2013). To deliver this, management consultancy firms consciously compose project teams that include different competencies and levels of expertise (Werr & Stjernberg, 2003), hence the dependency on teamwork. Despite being a successful and resilient industry, it is notable that a limited amount of research has been conducted on management consultancies in general (Bronnenmayer et al., 2016), and even less on teamwork within management consulting in particular. This raises questions of how the team dynamics in management consulting firms have been affected by the novel circumstances of large scale virtual work, since collaboration is at the core of the industry.

Ultimately, we aim to explore how the virtual work context has impacted teamwork within management consulting.

## 1.2 Previous Research and Research Gap

In recent times, PSFs have received increasing attention in research from management and organizational science scholars. The increased attention is largely explained by the critical importance of PSFs to the modern knowledge economy (Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021). However, most of the research that has been conducted has focused on Classic PSFs whereas research focusing on Neo-PSFs, including management consulting, has received less attention (O’Higgins et al. 2021). While previous research on management consulting has mainly focused on knowledge creation (Hansen et al., 1999; Haas & Hansen, 2005; Taminiou et al., 2009), competition (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Coulter & Coulter, 2003), and consulting teams’ relation with clients (Klarner et al., 2013; Jang & Lee, 1998), teamwork within management consulting project teams have received very limited attention. Teamwork in other academic contexts, however, is a well-researched area (Tuckman, 1965; Delice et al., 2019; Seers, 1989; Salas et al., 2015a; McGrath, 1984; Silva et al., 2014). As COVID-19 has accelerated the shift to virtual work, research on positive and negative aspects linked to virtual teamwork has arisen (Berry, 2011; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020; Webster & Wong, 2008; Driskell et al., 2003; Lee, 2021). However, research on virtual teamwork in management consulting in particular, is limited.

Ultimately, despite the heavy reliance on people and teams for *management consultancies*’ success, a lack of research prevails in the relation to teamwork in general, and how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting in particular. This gap, which is illustrated below in **Figure 1**, is what we aim to explore and hopefully fill with our findings.



**Figure 1.** Illustration of the research gap for the purpose of this study

### 1.3 Purpose and Research Question

Considering the existing research gap, this thesis aims to investigate virtual work's impact on teamwork in management consulting. The scope of the study covers the *internal project teams* of management consultancies, and excludes the relationship with clients. Furthermore, we will focus on individuals' perception of teamwork. To get a nuanced view of the area, a qualitative multiple case study has been conducted. To analyze the empirical data, we build on Salas et al.'s (2015a) heuristic of teamwork and complement with the concepts of team cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Salas et al., 2015b) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson et al., 2004). By doing so, we aim to bring new insights to the research field while still anchoring the analysis and discussion in well-grounded research. Based on this, our research question is stated as follows:

***How has virtual work impacted teamwork in management consulting?***

### 1.4 Expected Contribution

With our study, we aim to contribute with both theoretical as well as practical implications. Firstly, we hope to contribute with valuable insights within the fields of PSFs and management consulting, where extant literature has a limited focus on teamwork. Secondly, we aim to contribute to the teamwork literature with insights on how the virtual context has affected teamwork in management consulting. Finally, we aim to contribute practical insights to the management consultancy industry, by proposing how to mitigate challenges and leverage on opportunities that arise as teamwork is conducted in the virtual context.

## 2 Literature Review

*The purpose of this study is to investigate how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting. With this section we therefore aim to outline what previous literature on the topic has suggested. By doing this, we increase the understanding of the studied phenomenon, while also illustrating the prevailing research gap where we aim to contribute with new theoretical extensions. This section consists of previous literature on PSFs (2.1), management consulting (2.2), teamwork (2.3) and virtual teamwork (2.4).*

### 2.1 Professional Service Firms

PSFs are characterized as firms providing custommade and knowledge-intensive services to other parties by highly educated professionals in order to solve a specific problem of a customer (O'Higgins et al., 2021). Evident by its definition, PSFs remain highly dependent on their professionals and their respective knowledge and network, where human and social capital is of high importance (O'Higgins et al., 2021). Scoped within the term PSF, a wide variety of companies such as law firms, accounting firms, management consultancies, and advertising companies are included. Following a taxonomy of different PSFs developed by von Nordenflycht (2010), four categories of PSFs are depicted: Classic PSFs, Professional Campuses, Neo-PSFs, and Technology Developers. The three main characteristics of PSFs are knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and a professionalized workforce. Classic PSFs, such as law firms and accounting firms, are defined as industries that fulfill all three conditions. Management consultancies, however, belong to the third category of Neo-PSFs. This category is also defined by knowledge intensity and low capital intensity, but lacks the requirement of a protected and regulated profession with clear norms and requirements like lawyers and accountants (von Nordenflycht, 2010).

PSFs have received increasing attention in research from management and organizational science scholars which is much explained by the critical importance of PSFs for the modern knowledge economy (Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021). Up until now, much research on PSFs have been conducted globally, where one-third of the research has been conducted in the European market.

Investigating the previous research within the PSF space, four areas seem to have received more attention than others: Human resource management (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021; Vaiman, 2008; Kühn et al., 2016), Knowledge creation (Lahti & Beyerlein, 2000; Werr & Stjernberg, 2003; Haas & Hansen, 2005), Governance (Harlacher & Reihlen, 2014; Empson & Chapman, 2006) as well as client-related concerns such as reputation and trust (Walsh et al., 2015; Hausman 2003). Since PSFs derive their competitive advantage from their people and human capital (Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021), different aspects of human resource management (HRM) have been well documented in the literature. A deep understanding of how to effectively manage and retain professionals is critical since a loss of these would result in the deprivation of unique organizational competencies as well as valuable client relationships (Vaiman, 2008). Also, for many PSFs, competition on the input (labor) is

more important for the growth and survival of the firm than the actual output (service). PSF employees often possess unique experience and a personal brand enabling client relationships on their own making them extra attractive to retain. A primary concern for PSF employers is therefore attracting and retaining superior people which consequently puts pressure on high salaries and working conditions (Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021). Even though Sokolov & Zavyalova (2021) concludes that PSF firms use complex HRM systems paying strong attention to e.g. employee training, development, and monetary rewards, they still argue that some practices seem either under-researched or underdeveloped, pointing out non-monetary rewards as such an area.

In addition, collaboration has served as a recurring theme in research related to PSFs (Heirati et al., 2016; Liedtka, 1996; Cromwell & Gardner, 2020). Previous research has demonstrated how collaboration promotes collective outcomes and generates performance benefits for teams, units, and organizations including better quality deliverables and satisfied customers (Gardner & Valentine, 2015). Additional research that has focused on teams within PSFs has highlighted the importance of effectively leveraging seniors' expertise in teams of more junior professionals (Malhotra & Morris, 2009) as well as emphasizing team commitment to facilitate knowledge sharing (Swart et al., 2014). However, even if collaboration has been widely documented in the PSF academia, research on teamwork is not as investigated.

Research has mainly targeted Classic PSFs where firms within Law, Engineering, and Accounting have received extra attention. However, research on management consulting firms still has not picked up the pace (O'Higgins et al., 2022), which justifies further research within the field. Thus, we do not know to what extent the findings from research on Classic PSFs are applicable to management consulting.

## 2.2 Management Consulting

Global management consulting companies are commonly discussed as the archetype of knowledge-intensive firms (Werr & Stjernberg, 2003). Their primary assets are human capital and their fixed investments are minimal. Management consultants are usually hired by a firm for the specialized knowledge and capability that the firm lacks. Consultants are hired on a finite time period and provide recommendations of solutions for the problems that are confronting their clients (Christensen et al., 2013). According to Visscher (2006), the majority of consultants consider their work highly situation-specific. Most consultants tailor their actions to the kind of project, the contingencies of the process, the demands of their clients, and a wide range of other factors. These contingencies, which are thought to be essential for good consulting work, cannot be covered by a fixed series of steps, which implies that consulting processes are often uncertain and can be difficult to predict. To solve complex client problems, brainstorming and problem solving are central parts of management consulting projects (Creplet, 2001; Adesi et al, 2015), and most tasks are performed in team settings (Kerr & Murthy, 2004).

Investigating previous research on management consulting, knowledge (Hansen et al., 1999; Werr & Stjernberg, 2003; Haas & Hansen, 2005; Wang et al, 2013, Anand et al, 2007) is a recurring theme. Early research distinguished the difference in knowledge-sharing between companies with standardized services versus companies selling tailor-made solutions. As for the latter category, management consulting included, knowledge is shared mainly through person-to-person contacts (Hansen et al., 1999). Pointing light on innovation, Taminiau et al. (2009) claims that the most fruitful route to innovation within consulting firms is through informal knowledge sharing. A second recurring theme in the management consulting literature is competition, trust and relationship management to clients (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Coulter & Coulter, 2003). Looking into this field, scholars suggest that competition in the management consulting market takes place on different grounds than in other business sectors. Glückler & Armbrüster (2003) claim that competition in management consulting is not driven by price or measurable quality but rather experienced-based trust or “networked reputation”. Trust has also been documented as a key factor when establishing long-term relationships between business suppliers and their clients in service industries such as consulting (Coulter & Coulter, 2003).

When narrowing down the scope to teamwork in management consulting, we see that much focus has been pointed toward teams in relation to clients (Klarner et al., 2013) or the commitment of the actual client team members themselves (Jang & Lee, 1998). However, a less significant amount of research has been conducted on the topic of teamwork *within* management consultancies, focusing on project groups. When searching for teamwork and management consulting on Scopus<sup>1</sup> (“teamwork” AND “management consulting”), only three results are displayed. When doing the same exercise but for team dynamics (“team dynamics” AND “management consulting”), no results were displayed, once again indicating a research gap yet to be explored. Also, most research on the topic has been conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, implying that little is known about what has changed during and post the pandemic. This gap further motivates additional research into the field.

Based on the research gap on teamwork in the management consulting industry, and with a novel context of virtual work, we find it interesting to further explore what has been researched in terms of teamwork. This is what we aim to do in the following section.

### 2.3 Teamwork

Over the past few decades, various team researchers have developed frameworks to illustrate the unpredictable course of team dynamics. However, due to the fact that teams are constantly and dynamically ever-changing in regards to their processes, tasks, and context, this is a difficult task (Delice et al., 2019). For instance, Tuckman’s theory about the four developmental stages of small groups (forming, storming, norming, and performing) is thought of as important for the team literature as it explains that all types of teams go through certain

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<sup>1</sup> Scopus was our main search engine as it provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of extant research that has been peer-reviewed, within the fields of e.g. social science, art and humanities (Elsevier, 2020).

phases (Tuckman, 1965; Delice et al., 2019). Other examples are McGrath's input-process-output (I-P-O) model, where process signified how members are able to combine efforts and knowledge to complete a specific task (McGrath, 1984). Furthermore, with the emergence of shared leadership and self-managed teams, scholars gained interest in member to member relationships. As a sub-dimension to the social exchange theory LMX (leader-member exchange), Seers (1989) proposed the concept of TMX (team-member exchange), steering the focus from the vertical leader-follower relationship to a more horizontal member-to-member approach. TMX is a way to assess the reciprocity between a member and the peer group. This is measured through the member's perception of his or her willingness to assist other members, to share ideas and feedback, and in turn, how readily information, help, and recognition are perceived by other members. It has been shown that there are positive relations of TMX with individual job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, but also that TMX is negatively correlated with turnover intentions (Banks et al., 2014).

Another interesting aspect of teamwork that has gained interest from scholars, is the concept of team spirit, sometimes referred to as "group spirit" or "esprit de corps" (Silva et al., 2014). Silva et al. (2014) outline concepts related to the notion of team spirit from previous literature, and two perspectives emerge. The first perspective evaluates individual feelings of fellowship within the team. Under this perspective, team spirit is often used interchangeably with that of team identity, the part of one's self-concept deriving from membership in a social group (Shapiro et al., 2002). The second perspective focuses on how groups build a collective ethos towards which the individual members show commitment. This has been explored through concepts such as team cohesion, which can be defined as an individual's sense of belonging to a group and sharing a commitment to achieve common goals (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), but also through the notion of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999).

Salas et al. (2015a) saw the need to summarize critical factors regarding the topic of teamwork, which resulted in a paper offering an overarching, practical heuristic of the most critical considerations for teamwork. It is one of the few papers that have made an effort to compile existing literature on the topic of teamwork. It is suggested in the paper that the teamwork "map" is yet to be fully theorized, tested, and understood. For instance, it is encouraged to further explore new contexts such as virtual work and its influence on core processes.

In sum, there has been quite extensive research on the topic of teamwork over the past decades. However, as outlined previously, little has been researched in the area of management consulting. In the next section, we outline what previous research has suggested about virtual teamwork, which will help us nuance our analysis.

## 2.4 Virtual Teamwork

Townsend et al. (2000) characterize virtual teams as "groups of geographically and/or organizationally dispersed coworkers that are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish an organizational task". This type of computer-mediated communication can be argued to be different in various ways from

traditional face-to-face communication, and perhaps most significantly because the communication typically is asynchronous instead of synchronous. This changes the patterns of work, decision-making as well as relationships between the individuals involved in the work (Berry, 2011).

There are several potential benefits for companies that work in virtual teams, e.g. optimizing teams with the best talent available regardless of physical location and reducing the time, money, and stress that otherwise is spent on traveling between sites (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Furthermore, in a study by Webster & Wong (2008), it was shown that virtual team members were even more satisfied with their projects than members of co-located teams. This could be explained by e.g. better access to distributed experts, more freedom to manage their work tasks, and a better work-life balance.

However, there are also a variety of challenges that arise with teamwork in a virtual setting. In a literature review by Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020), factors and challenges impacting distance collaboration are outlined. First of all, awareness and motivation may be hindered in a distance setting. The difficulty with maintaining awareness of collaborators' work progress in remote locations without being able to casually "look over their shoulder" is a significant challenge to collaboration. Moreover, awareness tends to be boosted when co-located workers have casual encounters and unplanned conversations, which remote workers miss out on. Motivation could also become lacking since it has been observed that people tend to work harder when they are not alone (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Trust is another challenge for geographically dispersed teams. Pinjani and Palvia (2013) define trust as "the level of confidence exercised among team members", and according to previous work, trust is the key variable that is crucial for all aspects of collaboration. However, it is more difficult to establish and maintain in dispersed teams, for instance, because there are difficulties in having in-depth personal interactions (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Prior work has also identified team communication as one of the most fundamental challenges with virtuality. Communication in virtual teams is a key predictor of for instance enhanced performance and higher commitment. In co-located and physical collaborations, information communication, such as coffee talks, occurs every day. These exchanges often occur after meetings or during unplanned encounters by the coffee machine or in the hallway, and they have profound effects on collaboration. In contrast, in virtual teams, the communication is often more formal and focuses more on work-specific issues. Spontaneous and informal communication has been proven to foster the feeling of being part of a cohesive team as well as support the provision of feedback (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). During physical interactions, group members can see another's nods and gestures, they can observe eye contact, facial expressions, and postures, as well as hear others' tone of speech. These types of contextual cues provide important information about the individual with whom one is interacting, and groups whose members are distributed apart may lose some of these communicative capabilities (Driskell et al., 2003). Also, virtual team members tend to initially share less information than teams working in a face-to-face setting. Thus, team members may

have a weaker shared understanding of needed outcomes, which may have negative effects on performance outcomes (Berry, 2011).

Face-to-face communication plays an important role in collaboration and has been described as being crucial or indispensable, in particular at the beginning of projects when there is a possibility to create a lasting bridge across geographical, temporal, and socio-cultural distances (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

#### 2.4.1 Virtual Leadership

It has been suggested that managing virtual teams is more complex than managing co-located teams. Effective management of virtual teams requires knowledge and understanding of the underlying principles of team dynamics regardless of the time, space, and communication differences between physical and virtual environments (Berry, 2011).

Leading virtual teams poses several challenges for project managers and team leaders. One of the big challenges for leaders is communication. Traditional project environments enable leaders to communicate and implement projects with team members located in the same physical location using face-to-face meetings as the primary method of communication, but virtual management poses challenges to this. Furthermore, a common challenge for leaders is to monitor and control the project, from delegating work to tracking progress and deadlines, but also handling conflicts that may arise. Virtual project managers face the challenge of not actually seeing or knowing what the virtual employee is doing at any one particular time. Furthermore, other virtual leadership challenges may arise such as technological challenges, setting goals, maintaining motivation, maintaining respect, and lack of understanding of the organization's larger vision and mission (Lee, 2021).

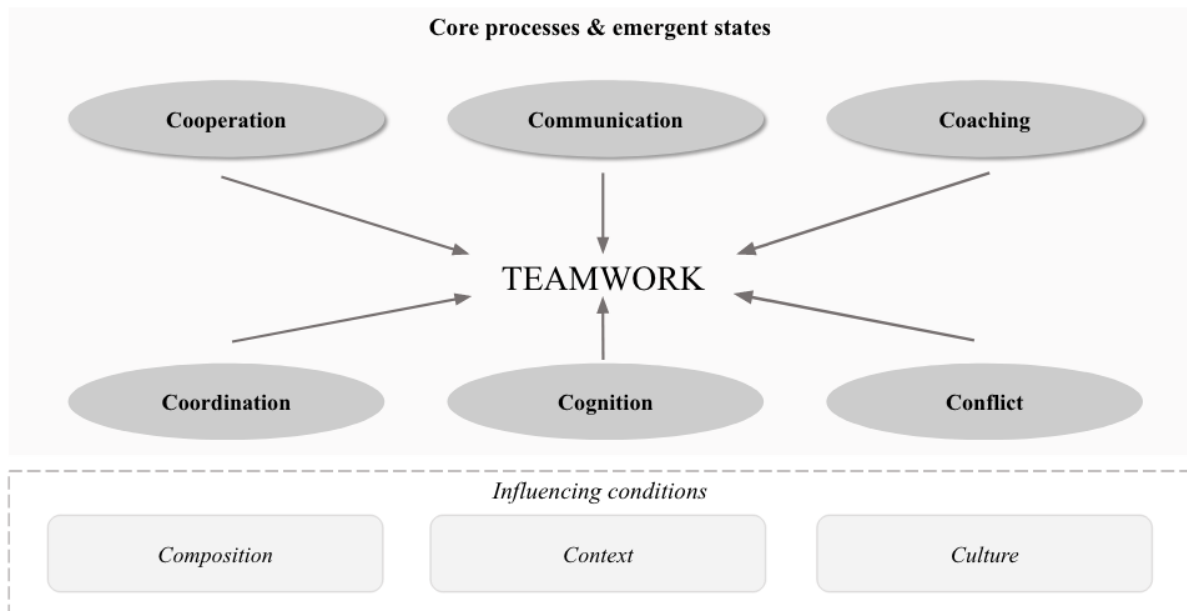
Based on the literature review, we can conclude that a research gap prevails on management consulting in relation to teamwork and virtual work. This study therefore aims to draw upon extant literature and theory to fill the gap and answer our research question. In the following section, we outline our theoretical foundation that will be used in our analysis.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

*In this section, we outline the literature that has been used for the creation of this study's theoretical lens. We first give an introduction to the heuristic by Salas et al. (2015a) that we draw on, and explain the different dimensions in sections (3.1) and (3.2). Thereafter, we explain how we complement and extend the framework through team spirit literature in section (3.3). The final theoretical lens is presented in section (3.4), followed by an explanation of how the theory will be used in the analysis.*

This paper uses a theoretical lens based on a literature review by Salas et al. (2015a) that draws upon the extensive body of research regarding teamwork. Teamwork can be defined as an “adaptive, dynamic, and episodic process that encompasses the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors among team members while they interact toward a common goal” (Salas et al., 2015a). The authors suggest nine “critical considerations” that serve as a guiding heuristic for teamwork effectiveness. This heuristic provides a basic understanding of the underpinnings of teamwork, and more specifically, what should be considered when selecting, developing, and maintaining teams.

Considering this, Salas et al. (2015a) have created six *core emergent states and processes*, and three *influencing conditions*. Processes are defined as interdependent activities that facilitate taskwork accomplishment in the pursuit of goals, while emergent states are the resultant dynamic properties of a team. The core processes and emergent states are the critical considerations that occur *within* the team, and these include the attitudes and motivations within the team for engaging in teamwork (i.e., *cooperation*), the behavioral interactions among members (i.e., *coordination, coaching, conflict, communication*) as well as the shared knowledge that arise out of these interactions (i.e., *cognition*). The influencing conditions on the other hand, (i.e., *composition, context, culture*), are those factors that have an impact on the core processes and emergent states. These factors shape the manner or degree to which teams engage in teamwork. Salas et al. (2015a) summarize their nine critical considerations visually as in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Heuristic of the critical considerations of teamwork, developed by Salas et al. (2015a)

### 3.1 Core Processes and Emergent States

**Cooperation** covers the motivational drivers of teamwork. This is the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings of the team that drive behavioral action. There are a number of indicators of cooperation that are critical to team effectiveness (Salas et al., 2015a). For instance, according to Cannon-Bowers et al. (1995) some critical factors for successful teamwork are trust, collective efficacy, and team/collective orientation. Collective efficacy refers to the sense of competence or perceived empowerment to control the team’s function or environment, whereas collective orientation regards general preference for and belief in the importance of teamwork. More recent research has shed light on other important components of cooperation in relation to team effectiveness such as team-learning orientation, i.e., shared belief regarding the degree to which team goals are geared towards learning (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2003).

**Conflict** reflects “the perceived incompatibilities in the interests, beliefs or views held by one or more team members” (Jehn, 1995). Conflict can be either task-based (i.e., differences in opinions regarding how to best execute tasks) or relationship-based (ie., sparked tensions or annoyances due to interpersonal differences). More recent research suggests that process conflict could be a third dimension, reflecting how to divide and delegate tasks and responsibilities among members in the team (Behfar et al., 2008). However, there is little consensus in research about the impact of conflict on team outcomes. Some scholars argue that relationship conflict would harm team performance most, while task conflict may positively impact team performance under certain conditions (Bradley et al., 2012). Task conflict can serve as a means for team members to express various viewpoints, opinions or solutions, which clearly has implications for team performance outcomes in terms of problem-solving tasks that require innovation and creativity. On the other hand, De Dreu and Weingart (2003), found that both relationship and task conflict have a strong negative correlation with team performance.

Recent research also suggests that there may be a more complex interaction between the two concepts than initially thought (Shaw et al., 2011).

**Coordination** is the enactment of behavioral and cognitive mechanisms necessary to perform a task and transform team resources into outcomes (Sims & Salas, 2007), and is essentially about orchestrating the sequence and timing of interdependent actions (Marks et al., 2001). Coordination can be either explicit or implicit, where the former refers to where team members intentionally plan and communicate to manage interdependencies, and the latter refers to team members to rather anticipate team needs and dynamically adjust their behaviors accordingly without being instructed (Rico et al., 2008). Effective coordination is a primary driver behind positive team outcomes, teams that utilize routines and distribute responsibilities have been found to be more effective than those that do not (Salas et al., 2015a).

**Communication** refers to “a reciprocal process of team members’ sending and receiving information that forms and re-forms a team’s attitudes, behaviors and cognitions” (Craig, 1999). Teams that communicate effectively, may alternate between explicit and implicit communication. Some highly effective teams may heavily rely on nonverbal cues and an ingrained understanding of one another’s expertise. The importance of team communication for positive team performance is well documented (Salas et al., 2015a). Teams that communicate effectively may use both explicit and implicit communication. In fact, some highly effective teams may occasionally explicitly say quite few words to one another, but instead rely on nonverbal cues and an ingrained understanding of one another’s expertise (Entin & Serfaty, 1999).

**Coaching** regards “the enactment of leadership behaviors to establish goals and set direction that leads to the successful accomplishment of these goals” (Fleishman et al., 1991), and the successful enactment of leadership behaviors has been shown to facilitate the emergence of executive processes and states in teams (Zaccaro et al., 2001). Coaching is necessary to recognize and help correct critical team errors and problems, but also to provide guidance in challenging situations (Salas et al., 2015a). Baran and Scott (2010) noted for instance the necessity of coaching behaviors such as direction setting, sensemaking, role modeling, and framing, although in the context of firefighters. In more recent research, such behaviors have been positively associated with team outcomes such as effectiveness, learning, satisfaction, and performance (Salas et al., 2015a).

**Cognition** can be defined as “a shared understanding among team members that is developed as a result of team member interactions including knowledge of roles and responsibilities; team mission objectives and norms; and familiarity with teammate knowledge, skills and abilities” (Wildman et al., 2012). In organizational settings, a failure to establish a shared understanding of a situation can result in weakened teamwork and negative outcomes (Salas et al., 2015).

### 3.2 Influencing Conditions

Salas et al. (2015a) further define three conditions that have an impact on the core teamwork processes and emergent states. These influencing conditions are more specifically not the attitudes, behaviors and cognitions that occur *within* the team, but are rather the factors that shape the manner or degree to which teams engage in teamwork. It should be pointed out that the authors (Salas et al., 2015a) have on purpose not created any directional paths among the critical considerations since literature suggests that they may influence one another under a variety of circumstances. Thereby, it is suggested by the authors that the factors should not be considered in isolation from each other, but rather that they must be holistically considered in trying to determine how to establish effective teamwork practices. Furthermore, no consideration is necessarily more or less important than any other, but based upon unique team situations, they can of course vary in importance (Salas et al., 2015a). The three influencing conditions *composition*, *context* and *culture*, will be explained more in detail below.

**Composition** has been considered an important consideration for teamwork since the beginning of its research field. An understanding of the relationship between the composition of teams and team performance enables managerial decisions when composing teams, as well as development of selection systems (Salas et al., 2015a). It has been shown that teams who have a strong collective orientation, i.e., the propensity for working in a collective manner in team settings, are more likely to achieve group outcomes and team effectiveness (Driskell et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, much research on composition has focused on personality traits and individuals. For instance, it was suggested in a meta-analysis that all of the “Big Five” personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and emotional stability) relate positively to performance in field settings (Bell, 2007). However, scholars in personality research have also moved beyond the Big Five to consider achievement orientation, dependability, locus of control, and assertiveness (Mathieu et al., 2008). Another important dimension of composition research is that of *member diversity*. Harrison et al. (2002), suggest for instance that maximizing differences in individual knowledge, abilities and skills, while minimizing deep-level differences (i.e., beliefs, norms) will improve effectiveness.

**Context** is referred to the situational characteristics or events that influence behavior, but also the manner and degree to which factors affect team outcomes (Johns, 2006). In an attempt to categorize context, Johns (2006) divided the concept in two: *omnibus context* and *discrete context*. Omnibus context refers to questions of “Who? Where? When? Why?”, whereas discrete context is divided into task (i.e., autonomy, resources, uncertainty) social (i.e., social structure) and physical (i.e., décor, lighting, temperature). Evidently, context is critical for teamwork since it shapes the very nature in which team members interact with one another. Other contextual factors mentioned are *organizational climate*, i.e., the importance for organizations to promote teamwork through their policies and practices to convey the message that teamwork is important and valued, and *external threat and stress*. Furthermore, technological advancements act as enablers for organizations to collaborate across time and space, which has resulted in more virtual and distributed teams, and puts organizations in

another type of context (Salas et al., 2015a). For the purpose of this thesis, we will solely focus on the context of *virtual work*, given the research question.

**Culture** has become an increasingly important consideration for organizations, in particular those that rely on teams (Salas et al., 2015a). Culture is the assumptions about relationships with each other and the environment that is shared among an identifiable group of people and manifests in individuals' values, beliefs, norms for social behaviors, and artifacts (Gibson et al., 2009). Cultural values shape the way that individuals view themselves in relation to the team, and play a critical role in shaping teamwork attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors. For instance, *individualism-collectivism* (i.e., the degree to which individuals view themselves as unique individuals or as part of a collective) is one of the most researched cultural values in the team literature due to implications for whether members will engage in teamwork processes (Bell, 2007). Another factor is that of *power distance* or the degree to which individuals value or acknowledge hierarchy and status. When individuals place a high value on hierarchy and status, it could be that they are less likely to voice potential errors made by superiors (Salas et al., 2015a). Lastly, research has suggested that culture may have greater predictive power than personality traits for outcomes such as organizational commitment, citizenship behavior, identification, and team-related attitudes (Taras et al., 2010).

### 3.3 Team Spirit

To further nuance the heuristic by Salas et al. (2015a), we draw on two concepts related to team spirit: *team cohesion* and *psychological safety*. These two concepts were briefly touched upon in the *cooperation* dimension by Salas et al (2015a), but as the concepts stood out as interesting to further investigate in our empirical data, we extend the theoretical lens by complementing with additional literature.

#### 3.3.1 Team Cohesion

Team cohesion was defined by Bollen and Hoyle (1990) as an individual's sense of belonging to a group and sharing a commitment to achieve common goals. In a more recent paper, by Salas et al. (2015b), cohesion was also described as something that drives team members to want to work together. Individuals who feel no sense of cohesion with their team, whether due to dislike, distrust, disinterest, or a host of other reasons, are argued to be less motivated and less likely to participate in the "teaming" behaviors that enable positive effects of teams (Salas et al., 2015b). Thus, cohesion plays an important part in teams and organizational performance. It has also been suggested that leadership style can affect the level of team cohesiveness. In a study by Stashevsky and Koslowsky (2006), transformational leadership style was associated with higher levels of team cohesiveness, as compared to transactional leadership.

#### 3.3.2 Psychological Safety

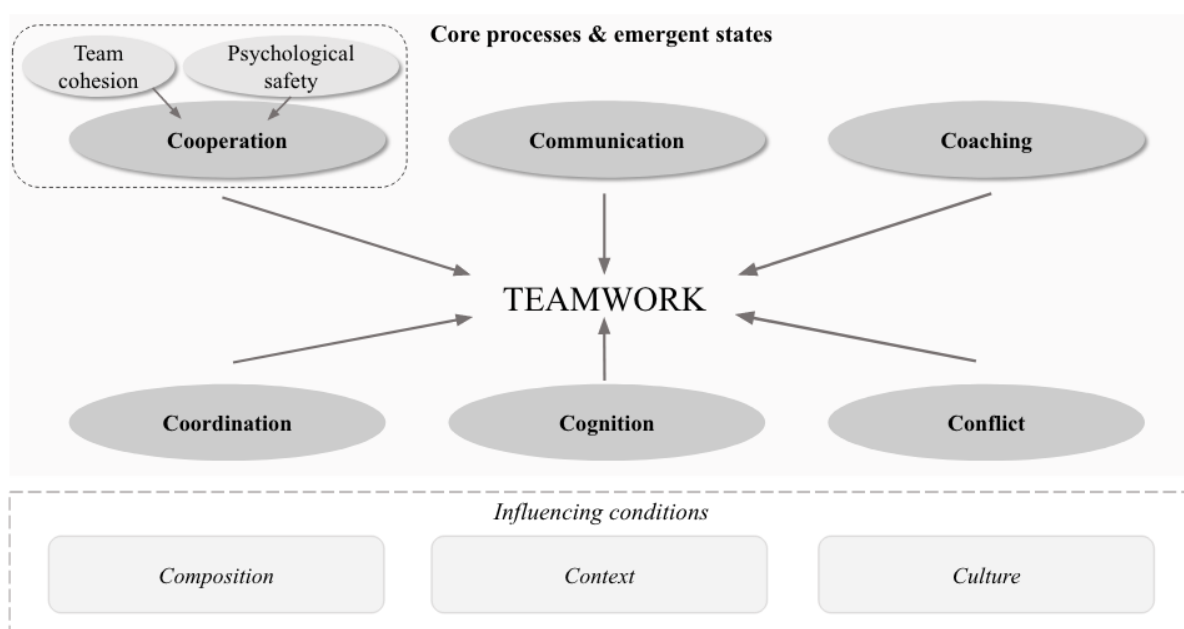
Psychological safety is in the literature described as individuals' perception about the consequences of interpersonal risks in their work environment. It is made up of presumed beliefs about how other people will respond when one puts oneself on the line, for example by asking a question, reporting a mistake, seeking feedback, or challenging the status quo

(Edmondson et al., 2004). The author describes it as “engaging in a tacit calculus at behavioral micro-decision points” where one assesses the interpersonal risk associated with a specific behavior against the interpersonal climate. One would therefore think “If I do X here, will I be hurt, embarrassed, or criticized?”. If the answer is no, the subject can proceed with their actions. This implies that actions that are seen as acceptable in one group, might be unthinkable in another workgroup. This can consequently be explained by the different beliefs about probable interpersonal consequences (Edmondson et al., 2004). It has been suggested that psychological safety leads to positive outcomes such as work engagement, and learning development (May et al., 2004; Schein 1985).

### 3.4 Theory Usage

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research question, the theoretical foundation used for analysis in this thesis has been constructed in an abductive and iterative approach. Therefore, empirics and theory have emerged together along the process. At first, our study was exploratory with some inspiration from literature, but as interesting themes emerged, relevant theories and literature were incorporated. Ultimately, this thesis takes a standpoint in Salas et al.’s (2015a) heuristic of critical considerations of teamwork, which is used as a lens to explore how the different dimensions have been affected by virtual work in management consulting.

Early on in the gathering of our empirical data, the *cooperation* component stood out as particularly interesting to further investigate as it seemed to have been largely affected by the virtual context. To capture mentioned difficulties related to this, we extended with literature on two concepts, *team cohesion* and *psychological safety*, which further nuances our analysis of the empirical data. Therefore, we highlight these concepts in our illustration of our theoretical lens.



**Figure 3.** Theoretical lens by Ahlborg & Lindell (2022), inspired by Salas et al. (2015a)

## 4 Methodology

*The following section outlines the methodological approach chosen for our study. The sections are divided as follows: Scientific Research Approach (4.1), Research Context (4.2), Research Design (4.3), Interviews (4.4), Data Analysis (4.5) and Trustworthiness (4.6).*

### 4.1 Scientific Research Approach

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting.

Teamwork is a socially constructed entity that is subjectively experienced and interpreted by the individual. As our thesis takes a standpoint from the individual's point of view and the nature of teamwork is subjective, our study is based on a constructionist ontological observation of the world, where the experiences of the interviewees and the authors are perceived as social constructions in a constant process. An implication of the ontological position is that the studied phenomenon has emerged from the research process, and hence, the interpretations and views of the authors in this study influence the findings which present one version of social reality (Bell et al., 2019). In practice, this implies that we as researchers will present a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be seen as definitive. Consequently, knowledge should be viewed as indeterminate and to a certain degree subjective (Bell et al., 2019).

The epistemological considerations of this study concern teamwork in management consulting where the aim is to understand how individuals have experienced this phenomenon differently, if at all, in the virtual work setting. In order to interpret our empirical data, we have to make sense of our interviewees' worlds and understand the examined phenomena through the meanings that the respondents assign to them (Boland, 1991; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). To achieve this, the study is built upon an interpretivist approach, where the behaviors of each interview subject are mediated through the authors' subjective interpretation. This approach is applicable to understanding how and why things occur in a social setting, making it critical in this study where human behavior is examined (Bell et al., 2019).

Since our research question relates to a complex empirical phenomenon, getting a deep understanding through the empirical data is critical. As a result, a qualitative approach has been followed, enabling the development of new theoretical propositions based on real-world observations (Bell et al., 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The qualitative nature of the study has also enabled us to get a nuanced picture of the participant's experiences of the studied phenomenon.

In order to answer the research question, an abductive approach has been applied where empirics and theory were developed in parallel and iterated in an ongoing process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Bell et al., 2019). The abductive method enabled us to constantly reflect during

the research process and also allowed for flexibility in the data collection where new themes in the data welcomed theoretical alteration along the way (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

## 4.2 Research Context

For the purpose of this study, management consultancy firms in Sweden were chosen. Three essential factors back up the relevance of this geographical scope: (1) Sweden has a strong position in the European management consulting market (IbisWorld, 2022), (2) A strong preference for working within management consulting prevails (Universum Global, 2021), and (3) Sweden benefits from fast technological adoption (European Commission, 2021).

Moreover, as the authors were based in Sweden when the study was conducted and speak the native language, a Swedish context was deemed appropriate. The majority of the interviews could therefore be held in Swedish which facilitates a more natural and relaxed setting for the interviewees. It also facilitates the analysis since it is the most relevant and comprehensible language for both the interviewees and the authors (Bell et al., 2019) which is deemed appropriate for our constructionist and interpretivist position.

## 4.3 Research Design

### 4.3.1 Multiple Case Study

A multiple case study has been used to gather the empirical data (Darke et al., 1998; Bell et al., 2019). Case study research is suitable for answering “how” and “why” questions where little is known about a certain complex phenomenon (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). Due to the prevailing research gap on teamwork in relation to virtual management consulting work, this approach seems suitable when answering our research question. In addition, the case study method enables a deep dive into real-life situations while investigating experiences and perceptions in relation to the chosen phenomena as it unfolds in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In order to answer the research question through strong and reliable evidence (Baxter & Jack, 2008), a multiple case study was deemed appropriate. Through this, we allow for analysis both within and across situations (Yin, 2003). Following this approach, we aim to get a more holistic understanding and picture of virtual work’s impact on teamwork in management consulting, not only in one organization but in several organizations.

### 4.3.2 Data Collection and Sample

#### 4.3.2.1 *Selecting Case Companies*

When selecting the case companies, a purposive sampling method was used (Bell et al., 2019, Korstjens & Moser, 2017). This method is deemed suitable in qualitative research when the researchers aim to identify and select information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources (Etikan et al., 2016). In our case, this implied that we focused on contacting interviewees at some of the largest management consultancies in Sweden. This strategy was

undertaken both because the management consulting industry is rather consolidated in the Swedish market, and we believed to have a higher chance of reaching people in each firm when the employee count was larger. In addition, we both possess a fairly broad network within these firms, which would increase our chances of scheduling interviews in an efficient manner.

In our final sample, five case companies were represented, which all are global and well-known management consultancies. Due to privacy concerns, the company names were anonymized and are presented as Company A-E.

#### *4.3.2.2 Selecting Interview Subjects*

For the interview subjects, the sampling method used was once again purposive (Bell et al., 2019). Since project teams in management consulting oftentimes include consultants of various hierarchical positions, it was perceived relevant to include respondents from different seniorities to get a more comprehensive view of teamwork. As a result, representatives from three different hierarchical positions were contacted: junior consultants, project leaders, and partners. These three categories are universal for all management consultancies, however, the official titles may vary.

In the purposive sampling, the interview subjects were initially chosen based on contacts throughout our network. All the interviewees were contacted through email or social media channels. The sampling was based on three different criteria to ensure relevance in the information given by respondents but also to make sure the interview subjects represented a variety of views and perspectives with regards to their company and hierarchical position. As a result, the participants had to meet the following criteria: 1) they were working in the management consulting industry in Sweden, 2) they had been working in virtual project teams to some extent, and 3) they represented a variety of companies as well as hierarchical levels. In total, 23 people were contacted, whereof three people did not respond or did not have time for an interview. Thus, our data consisted of 20 interviews from five different management consultancies in Sweden. The interviewees are presented below, in hierarchical order.

Number	Respondent	Company	Gender	Position	Date of interview
1	Junior 1	Company A	Female	Junior consultant	13/2-22
2	Junior 2	Company B	Female	Junior consultant	16/2-22
3	Junior 3	Company C	Female	Junior consultant	17/2-22
4	Junior 4	Company D	Female	Junior consultant	18/2-22
5	Junior 5	Company C	Male	Junior consultant	19/2-22
6	Junior 6	Company A	Male	Junior consultant	24/2-22
7	Junior 7	Company C	Male	Junior consultant	25/2-22
8	Junior 8	Company E	Female	Junior consultant	11/3-22
9	Junior 9	Company C	Male	Junior consultant	17/3-22
10	Project leader 1	Company B	Male	Project leader	22/2-22
11	Project leader 2	Company A	Male	Project leader	2/3-22
12	Project leader 3	Company B	Female	Project leader	8/3-22
13	Project leader 4	Company B	Female	Project leader	8/3-22
14	Project leader 5	Company D	Male	Project leader	11/3-22
15	Project leader 6	Company C	Male	Project leader	15/3-22
16	Project leader 7	Company A	Male	Project leader	16/3-22
17	Project leader 8	Company A	Male	Project leader	30/2-22
18	Partner 1	Company B	Male	Partner	9/3-22
19	Partner 2	Company C	Female	Partner	15/3-22
20	Partner 3	Company B	Female	Partner	30/3-22

**Table 1.** Interview subjects

As shown in the table above, three companies occur more than others. We aimed to schedule an even number of people for each company, but due to restrictions in our network and the availability of interview subjects, some companies ended up being more represented than others. In an attempt to even out the distribution between companies and initiate dialogue with more prospective interviewees, snowball sampling served as a complement to a certain extent based on recommendations from previous interviewees (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, we are aware of the fact that the distribution between the different hierarchical levels is skewed towards the more junior consultants and project leaders. This was however a conscious choice by the authors since early empirical insights revealed that partners are not always as involved in the teamwork processes in the management consulting firms. However, to gain a comprehensive view of the studied phenomena, it was still perceived as relevant and valuable to incorporate the perspective of a few partners in the study.

## 4.4 Interviews

### 4.4.1. Interview Process

All the interviews were conducted between February 13th and March 30th 2022. Based on the preference of the interview subject, the setting varied between in-person interview, video conference interview, or interview through phone. In each interview, one of the authors acted as the interview lead while the other author took notes, and added questions as they arose. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The interviews lasted between 24 mins to 73 mins, with a mean length of 50 mins. The differences in time varied mostly due to the time availability and seniority of the respondents. The more senior interviewees had in general less time to allocate for the interview, due to busy schedules.

### 4.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews followed a semi-structured approach (Bell et al.,2019). This setup enabled us to ask follow-up questions about interesting themes while still letting the interview guide help us ensure that the most important themes were covered. In addition, a semi-structured technique avoids asking leading questions, something that is critical when exploring a subject's reality and experience. A potential disadvantage of the semi-structured technique is its reduction of comparability between interviews (Bell et al. 2019). In addition, since the interviews varied in length, not all questions were asked to each respondent, spurring the reduction in comparability.

The interview guide was created in three steps. Firstly, we compiled questions related to teamwork that we thought would give us a comprehensive overview of the phenomena. Secondly, to ground our study in earlier research and explore already established concepts in a new, virtual setting, areas connected to literature and theories were included. At this point, an initial interview guide was constructed which then was tested on the two first interviewees. After having received insights about what areas were more informative than others, the interview guide was altered in line with the abductive nature of the study. For example, during our two first interviews, it became clear that questions covering team spirit needed to be more and deeper in order to get a clearer empirical foundation to stand upon in the analysis. As a result, we focused more on exploring this dimension in the upcoming interviews.

## 4.5 Data Analysis

When processing the data, a thematic analysis was conducted (Bell et al., 2019) which focuses on identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting themes found in the data set. Thematic analysis is useful for examining the perspectives of a wide range of research participants (Nowell et al., 2017) where its theoretical freedom enables high flexibility while still providing a rich and detailed account of data. In addition, the method enables the researcher

to summarize key features of larger data sets as it requires a well-structured approach (King, 2004).

The first step of the analysis was to get familiar with the data which was a process that ran in parallel with the interviews. Shortly after each interview, the interview was transcribed and read through by the authors. Following this, the coding process started. As a first step, the authors separately processed the data into first-order constructs. In practice, this meant that each author went through all transcripts and notes from the interviews and inserted all relevant codes, *first order concepts* (Gioia et al., 2013), into Excel. This was completed separately before comparing and synchronizing the data together, in order to ensure quality (Barratt et al., 2011; Nowell et al., 2017) and remove biases. At this stage, 100 versus 77 codes were identified respectively. After synchronizing, 36 *first order concepts* were selected based on the frequency of responses connected to each code. The *first-order constructs* were then clustered into 9 *second order themes*. Due to the abductive approach of this thesis, the themes were partly constructed with the theoretical framework in mind, but some themes emerged solely out of the empirical data. Finally, the *second order themes* were organized into 4 *aggregate dimensions* (Gioia et al., 2013). The aggregate dimensions are presented in the section outlining the empirical data: *Way of working, Leadership, Team spirit & Organizational culture and A Psychological Perspective*.

In **Appendix 2**, all *first order concepts*, *second order themes* and *aggregated dimensions* are mapped out.

#### 4.6 Trustworthiness

To conduct the research in a trustworthy fashion, we have aimed to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and integrity (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Perner & Skjølvik, 2019). *Credibility* refers to the extent to which results appear to be an acceptable representation of the data (Perner & Skjølvik, 2019). Measures were taken to address credibility by e.g. asking follow-up questions if something was unclear, so that interviewees were understood correctly and concepts in our analysis would be close to the observations. Moreover, by transcribing all interviews in detail we could ensure that the data for our analysis was based exactly on the respondents' answers. *Transferability* refers to the extent to which findings apply to other contexts, and it has been argued that this can pose a problem in qualitative research which tends to employ case studies and small samples (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To increase transferability, a description of the context of the study is given in section 4.2. Hopefully, that can serve as a guide to which setting the study was explored in. *Dependability* refers to the extent to which findings are stable and consistent over time across locations (Perner & Skjølvik, 2019), similar to the notion of reliability. This is a difficult criterion within qualitative research since it is not possible to freeze a social setting nor the circumstances in which the study was conducted. It could be that practitioners in management consulting have another view about the effects of virtual working differently in a few years from now, in comparison to the setting of this study which was two years into the COVID-19 pandemic where virtual work was to a high extent enforced. Therefore, it should be taken into

consideration if future studies explore a similar phenomena as this study. To ensure inter-observer consistency, an important part of the analysis was to initially analyze the data separately and then compare and discuss findings to ensure that we agreed. Having open questions and an open dialogue in the interview also helped ensure higher *confirmability*, so that personal values or theoretical inclinations would not affect the conduct of the research (Bell et al., 2019). Lastly, in an attempt to increase the trustworthiness of the empirical data, participants were informed that they would be completely anonymous and that the data would be protected (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2019).

## 5 Empirical Results

*The following section provides a presentation of the empirical data which has been divided into four parts: An Altered Way of Working (5.1), Leadership (5.2), Team Spirit and Organizational Culture (5.3), and A Psychological Perspective (5.4). A description of how the analysis of the data has been conducted can be found in section 4.5, and a more detailed overview of the data can be found in Appendix 2. The empirical results presented below, constitutes the foundation for this study's analysis of how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting.*

### 5.1 An Altered Way of Working

#### 5.1.1 Work Procedures

Before COVID-19 and the shift to virtual work, consultants normally worked at the client's site Monday to Thursday and from their home office on Fridays. After the transition, on-site client contact was limited and the workstreams were instead handled virtually or from the home offices of the consultants.

*"How we work with our clients has changed quite a lot, before the pandemic we were almost always out with the client Monday-Thursday, and then we worked Fridays from the office. But we sat most of the time with the clients. Now, we sit in the office to a much greater extent, and have a lot of meetings at Zoom with the clients, so they also work a lot from home. Many clients also have a more flexible work model, so it does not make as much sense for us to go to their office if they are still sitting at home."*

- Project Leader 8, Company A

As a consequence of the virtual shift, the interviewed consultants have experienced an increased flexibility where it is accepted to work from home or other optional locations rather than the physical office. The newly given flexibility is seen as positive and differs a lot from the old guidelines where work in the office or at the client's site was the norm.

*"[...] the whole atmosphere has changed, and it is both positive and negative. [...] now it is perhaps more positive, it has become more accepted to work in a hybrid mode and if people feel like working from home, it is completely accepted [...]"*

- Junior 1, Company A

As a result of perceived benefits with flexible working, hybrid working models will probably be seen to a greater extent in the future. A partner expressed how sitting together countless hours a week might not fit everyone and that a new more hybrid way of working might cater for a larger group of people.

*"[...] you hope that in the future, and we talk a lot about that, to open up opportunities for more flexible ways of working. To sit in a team room 60 hours a week may not be something that everyone loves [...] Now I think a lot of teams are talking about co-locating X number of hours a day or a week, and then they work remotely. So people can choose a little bit."*

- Partner 2, Company C

Not only the physical location changed when virtual work was imposed, the everyday work structure for the consultants also transformed. As possibilities of quick alignments in the office and problem solving sessions in a group room were erased, physical meetings were replaced by countless hours on Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Many meetings and an occupied calendar became a recurring theme in the empirics as several interviewees tended to come back to this as a main implication of the virtual transformation.

*"[...] I would say that the biggest difference is that you sit in a Teams meeting, all the time. It was not done in the same way before."*

- Project leader 4, Company B

As the work moved online, an expected constant availability also became a fact.

*"Now you have become so much more accessible, and to get a call at 22 in the evening a little out of the blue, had never happened before. If you are not in the office, then you do not work. While now you are available around the clock as well."*

- Project leader 1, Company B

### 5.1.2 Collaboration

As physical meetings were replaced with virtual meetings, the collaboration aspect in teamwork became heavily impacted. Solving problems together, preferably with a whiteboard and visual tools was no longer as effective and instead, people tended to focus on their own tasks instead of working together. From the junior consultants' point of view, a difficulty in raising questions fostered a "trial and error"- approach, further spurring on an individualistic way of working.

*"It's worse at a distance. Because otherwise when you sit together you can work on whiteboards and paint slides together. [...] it's easier to work together and build on things. I really think the collaboration is what fails at a distance while, for example, independence thrives only because you have to take ownership of what you produce in a different way."*

- Junior 3, Company C

As part of the teamwork-heavy nature of the management consulting profession, brainstorming and problem-solving is a central part in day-to-day work. When asked about collaboration, this was especially brought up as something that worsened due to the virtual setting.

*"[...] what I think has been impacted the most is our internal work, and the teamwork itself. We work in teams for a reason, we think that one plus one is greater than two. That is the very idea of teamwork. [...]. But above all, it has been difficult to solve complex problems and to think innovatively. The creativity itself has suffered a bit from this [...]. I have not found the keys really to best handle that, I like to sit in a room where you have whiteboards that you sketch on. In fact, I think it has been very difficult to get this working through Teams."*

- Partner 1, Company B

When collaboration deteriorates and the work becomes more individualistic, knowledge development becomes highly impacted.

*"I would say that it gets worse, of course, you do not ask these questions you want to ask, it is not easy to exchange ideas and get input, but you want to take it as far as you can yourself, until it really doesn't work."*

- Junior 1, Company A

As part of collaboration, several interviewees describe that helpfulness, an important element in the work of management consultants, has decreased within the teams.

*"At a distance, it's easier to get somewhat checked out of your job, especially if the workstreams are separated and you feel finished on your end. You do not know if others are struggling. And it is, of course, easier to get away by only finishing your own task as long as you don't see your colleagues. If you sit together, it's a lot more joint team effort."*

- Junior 2, Company B

*"I would say that the willingness of helping is the same, but the opportunity to do so has gone down"*

- Project leader 2, Company B

Overall, collaboration has been negatively affected for management consultancies due to virtual work. However, some interviewees still highlighted one positive aspect which is the increased access to co-workers that are geographically distant. Examples of this include senior partners and experts that normally have a tight schedule but suddenly are able to join in on a digital meeting for valuable comments and input.

*"We have a very good exchange of knowledge at my workplace. And since it is a global company with many experts, it works almost better online. All of a sudden, you have access to*

*super-niche experts. I have had 3 expert conversations with senior individuals today [...] and they would never have had time for me otherwise. It has only gotten better and better with COVID-19 when it has been online. So people who would otherwise have been forced to travel to a client site that can now be at home become so much more accessible to others, it's super good. Then I would say that we have many different knowledge platforms in my workplace, I think that part may not have changed that much but just expert networks are better”*

- Junior 3, Company C

### 5.1.3 The Communicative Dynamics

As a result of the virtual work model, several interviewees describe how communication has been largely affected. From having quick, process-based, and ongoing communication, the majority of all team communication was handled through digital forums such as Slack, Skype and Teams. When describing the new way of communicating, many interviewees came back to the word “transactional”, implying that the communication went from process-based to output-based, eliminating small talk and pointing focus towards the main task.

*“It becomes a much more transactional relationship [...], it becomes different physically when you sit and brainstorm. Now, you do not call someone to do it the same way. It becomes more straightforward, [...] You call someone, you share your screen and show quickly. Then you get yes/no, yes/no and then you shut down. Otherwise, you may work together to solve the problem. Now it is more "you have a problem, you call me". The one calling is the one having a problem instead of the team having the problem”*

- Junior 3, Company C

When asked about what transactional means, Junior 5, Company C says: *“The discussions and all interactions are only linked to the purpose or problem solving [...] All interactions become much more to the point. And that in turn can be effective in a way, but I do not think the net effect of being transactional exceeds the negative with the loss of communication and the social aspects. Net, it is more important that you allow yourself to talk about something other than just the purpose of the interaction”*

In addition to being transactional, several interviewees express a poorer quality of communication in general. The poor quality of communication risks mitigating effective work since explaining concepts, visual design, and data representation often requires physical tools such as a whiteboard to be powerful. In addition, virtual communication misses out on non-verbal cues and nuances which in turn increases the tendency of misunderstandings.

*“[...] I think there will be a lot more misunderstandings, often you communicate in writing. There is a lot of information that is missed, you do not fully understand each other. It is simply not effective. And of course, there are counter-arguments, e.g. that if we write with*

*each other it will be more direct and for my flow, it is more efficient, but I think there is so much stuff that is missed that is very important in our work.”*

- Junior 7, Company C

Poor communication also tends to make junior consultants try more on their own instead of getting input from their team members by keeping a constant dialogue. The decreased frequency of communication thus creates an inefficient workstream triggering double work.

*“If you are alone, you probably try yourself once more, because when you write to people it takes longer and everything is not yes and no questions”*

- Junior 5, Company C

Feedback is another important communicative element that is actively used in management consulting to follow up on team members. When asked about this, the majority of the interviewees described how formal feedback has remained the same during virtual work.

*“Formal feedback has worked at least as well, how to develop and how projects have gone has worked the same way as before. We have clear processes for how and when to do it.”*

- Project leader 1, Company B

Even though formal feedback seems to remain unchanged, several interviewees express difficulties in receiving and giving ongoing feedback in the virtual setting, which is a perceived phenomenon by both junior consultants and project leaders.

*“Then there is also ongoing guidance. It is a bigger obstacle for me as a junior to ask questions if we are not with each other. If you are with each other, it is quite simple because knowledge transfer is faster in the same room. It is a larger barrier to call you or write [...]. The only thing that is lost or becomes more difficult is the ongoing feedback, the spontaneous feedback.”*

- Junior 5, Company C

#### 5.1.4 Efficiency

When asked about how virtual work has affected effectiveness and efficiency, most of the interviewees agreed that it has become more efficient when the task and scope is clear and there is no need for discussing. However, when ambiguity occurs and brainstorming and problem-solving are needed, a physical setting is preferred.

*“[Virtual work works] extremely good if you have a clear plan and the work is progressing as it should. Then it is almost better than usual. [...] fewer distractions or where I interrupt team members”*

- Project leader 7, Company A

*“What has been challenging about working digitally, is primarily brainstorming and things like that”*

- Partner 3, Company B

## 5.2 Leadership

Leadership is another area that has been affected due to the virtual setting where worsened problem and potential recognition of junior colleagues are documented findings. This has created challenges for both junior consultants as well as leaders.

*“It becomes more difficult for me to express my problems and what I am good at. Building trust is harder and explaining if something works well. What I know I'm comfortable with will not get noticed in the same way. Problems can be difficult to concretize and be clear about what a problem is. The last thing to add is that some things become much easier for someone experienced to do on their own, instead of delegating it and giving the opportunity to "challenge". It can also disappear because it is faster to do it yourself than to schedule 30 minutes and explain what someone should do”*

- Junior 6, Company A

An altered sense of control is another documented finding that interviewees from all hierarchical levels expressed. Junior consultants reported that they suddenly felt more controlled when working from home, while leaders reported that virtual work made them lose control of how teams are progressing.

*“[...] there was somehow more control over us because it had never happened that we would work at home before. [...] I guess it made partners worried about how it would work. My practice leader introduced a morning meeting with us every single morning and we were not even in the same project, it was more a question of "what are you going to do today?" which became very superfluous and felt like someone was checking that you were awake.”*

- Junior 2, Company B

*“And I also think a frustration arose from many partners that they have not kept track in the same way of where the teams are, and there have been some surprises that have not happened before because you have a better feeling for it on-site.”*

- Partner 3, Company B

Another aspect that was brought up by project leaders was the tendency of working more in “silos” and thus having to coordinate more and in a much more formal way as a project leader. Instead of having an ongoing dialogue in the whole team, the project leader suddenly needed

to act as the communicative metropolitan. This increased the dependency of the project leader and decreased the communication between the junior consultants.

*[...] when you have people who work on different workflows [...] and overlap a little, to get those things and to have a clear dialogue between them has of course been more difficult than when you sit together. In the office, you would tap on the shoulder [...] and discuss. While now, that coordination is even more important for the project leader, since he or she has control over input from different people. Everything that behaved a little more organically before and by itself, has of course needed to be formalized and orchestrated more as a project leader. [...]*

- Project leader 8, Company A

## 5.3 Team Spirit and Organizational Culture

### 5.3.1 Looking into the Team: Team Spirit

As a consequence of working virtually, the participants expressed how team spirit and the feeling of belongingness in the team deteriorated. Many participants explained how the loss of social interactions such as team dinners, afterworks, and trips made relationship-building harder but also the work overall more boring. Since management consulting is a demanding profession, non-monetary team rewards such as social gatherings can function as motivators to make long nights in the office worth the effort, and hence, the loss of it might trigger resignations. When asked about what team spirit means for the interviewees, describing elements such as trust, having fun together, liking your colleagues, and feeling that you work towards a common goal were mentioned.

*"We work a lot and part of the job is about putting in a lot of time and effort, but you still get a lot out of experiences, [...] events and fun stuff. It has definitely gone down. [...]. As the team itself, I think it is perceived as less satisfying, less fun to go to work, more difficult to deliver to the client [...]"*

- Project leader 7, Company A

When asked about the importance of team spirit within management consulting, the respondents were all very aligned that it is critical. The expressed importance of team spirit is especially concentrated among the junior employees and the project leaders within the organization, even though respondents from all hierarchical levels emphasize its relevance.

*"[...] I think it's directly crucial for people to be able to stay in consulting. The whole thing with consulting is that you give a lot of your time and energy, and then I think it is very important that you feel that you get something back. If you spend all your time awake at*

*work, it will, of course, be very important which people you hang out with and the feeling and togetherness.”*

- *Project leader 3, Company B*

To nuance the discussion, the respondents were asked what consequences bad team spirit might impose. The interviewees expressed that lack of team spirit impacts the work itself where the consultants tend to spend less time on the task and do not go the extra mile to reach the same quality.

*“Then I do not think you put in this little extra that is required in all the projects we do. The projects we do are intense [...] There is always a little stretch in that because they expect us to put in the little extra and then you have to have a good team spirit and have the conditions to create it. [...]*

- *Project leader 4, Company B*

Several interviewees express how virtual work has impacted the relationship with their leaders negatively. This is seen as negative since having strong relationships to all team members is important in fostering good team spirit.

*“[The relationship and connection is] by far worse, without a doubt, on all fronts. You do not get to know them, you do not understand them and you do a worse job.”*

- *Junior 7, Company C*

### 5.3.2 Looking Outside the Team: Organizational Culture

The organizational culture, meaning the overall cross-team culture, has also been negatively affected by the shift to virtual work. Several interviewees express how small social activities such as office breakfast or afterworks as well as larger events like kick-offs, trainings and trips with the whole company went missing as activities moved online. Just as team spirit is seen as critical with regards to retention, a strong and active organizational culture seems to be at least as important.

*“If you spend so much of your time at work [...], you must have a job that is fun. [...] The whole thing that you like about the management consulting profession [...] is all these things around, that you have great colleagues where many are now my best friends. That you have the culture we have, e.g. Friday lunch and we eat breakfast on Fridays [...] This was the reason why it became so incredibly boring when the pandemic began. [...] the only thing left was the job. I understand why many people quit then. You realized that the job itself may not be so exciting haha.”*

- *Project leader 4, Company B*

A lack of strong culture was described by another project leader as making management consulting firms more of “a commodity”. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the culture within the firm was seen as a competitive advantage where talents chose a certain management consultancy firm based on the people and the social culture. As work was conducted virtually, and the culture was worsened, the management consulting industry became more exposed to a “war of talents” where individual benefits acted as key differentiators between the firms.

*“In general, I think it is difficult to say what our organization does uniquely digitally. I mean, we do more or less exactly the same project as all other consulting companies in Stockholm, so why should I go to company X or Y really? That is probably very difficult to motivate at present. Everyone is sitting in Teams meetings, everyone is trying some boring digital afterwork as well. And you are never in the office and get a positive feeling or eat lunch or eat dinner together. It will be more of a "commodity", I can just as easily work for competitor X. [...] Also, there is nothing that makes any company stand out anymore in "soft values". So what you compare then becomes how much I have to work, what salary I get, what brand it is. Not so much “this is a damn fun bunch that you can sit and work with, and spend many hours with”. [...]”*

- Project leader 1, Company B

In order to desperately bring back the social culture, initiatives for virtual social activities were taken. However, the response was not as positive as hoped for. Instead, several interviewees see virtual social activities as a bit strained and boring.

*“[...] people are trying to run digital activities, but it's not fun. I had training for a week and [...] it was so boring and cringe. Everyone tries but no one has fun. It's kind of bizarre and ridiculous.”*

- Junior 4, Company D

In addition to social events and breakfasts, the spontaneous and informal conversations also disappeared as a result of virtual work.

*“[...] you only talk about the job now, you miss the social part. When you sit in the office, you can sit for an hour and eat dinner and talk about completely different things, which is very important in our industry as well. I think I get a worse picture of my leaders when I work from home because I only see how they want me to work faster and better but I never see that fun side where you talk about what happened this weekend.”*

- Junior 1, Company A

As a result of the decreased sense of team spirit and organizational culture, a loss in motivation was reported.

*"[...] I think the motivation has been affected negatively and I think it has to do with the togetherness and so on, especially [...] on a junior level. Before COVID-19, it was a bit informal that we played FIFA at 21.00, which still means that you become a little more friends. And then there is also something in that you get to travel, go on kick-off or training, it's still very fun to be able to do that and not just work all the time. [All those things] increase motivation."*

- Project leader 5, Company D

In addition, virtual work seems to have shifted the mindset from the collective approach to a more individualistic one.

*"[...] it has shifted from "We" to " Me Me Me ", as people have asked "what's in it for me?" to a larger extent. For example, we match and benchmark salaries to our competitors, and it went from people wanting to do fun things like planning the ski trip, to people saying that competitor X has raised their salaries and they get X SEK in cash for dinner. [...] So to get back to the question, as soon as the togetherness disappears, you become very like, what do I really do this for? [...]"*

- Project leader 5, Company D

## 5.4 A Psychological Perspective

### 5.4.1 Employee Well-being

Throughout the interviews, numerous participants emphasized the negative impact virtual work has had on individual well-being. A major driver in the deteriorating health was the perceived expectation of constant availability, in turn resulting in longer working days.

*"Another big difference was the working hours. [...] I always felt that the computer was there and you were expected to be available all the time [...]. I remember a partner saying one day "Everyone has to download the Teams app on the phone". We had never had that before. Before Covid, if you had lunch at the office, you just left the stuff on the desk. Now the expectation was to be available even though I cooked lunch at home. The constant availability is difficult. Everyone is a bunch of insecure overachievers and it's really hard to set boundaries and put your foot down when you still want to perform. It made you never feel really free and I think I worked more anyway."*

- Junior 2, Company B

A few interviewees also highlighted the difficulty of seeing how other team members are holding up and how they genuinely feel.

*"[...] it's harder to see how people feel, I would say, if you talk about well-being, it's harder because it's not these chit-chats where you can see that someone feels less motivated or that it*

*does not feel great overall. In virtual meetings, the mood is often happy-clappy. It is probably a danger that you sit by yourself and no one understands that you feel stressed."*

- Junior A, Company A

Although there is a general feeling of working more, having to be constantly available, and the difficulty of seeing how people actually are doing, virtual work has also brought a few positive consequences from a well-being perspective. One such positive aspect is the flexibility that virtual work brings.

*For me, it has had a super positive effect. [...] I feel that I have time for so much in my everyday life when I get to choose for myself. For example, you have time for a lunch walk with a friend who lives close by, you can be somewhere after work earlier or if you host a dinner in the evening, you can prepare this during lunch. [...]*

- Junior 8, Company E

In addition, the context in which different employees work also seems to matter to well-being. A few respondents suggested that living in e.g. a house with lots of space and an own office improves the positive benefits of working from home. Also, as older employees tend to live with their families to a larger extent than junior consultants, physical interaction for this group occurs at home and the loss of team interaction might not be viewed as a problem to the same extent.

*"[...] I cannot really complain about my well-being, many dimensions of virtual work have been very good for me. Instead of doing a lot of travel and hotel nights, I have been home all the time, and it's no problem for me, I live in a house, I have a desk, I have a screen... I do not have better facilities at work than I have at home [...] I'm not alone at home either, I have my family as well, so I get physical interaction with people anyway."*

- Partner 1, Company B

#### 5.4.2 Psychological Safety

The virtual setting facilitated by programs such as Teams and Zoom has created a communicative barrier according to several interviewees. The respondents explain that the "one person speaks at a time" nature of a Teams meeting creates obstacles in having an interactive discussion where primarily junior consultants hesitate to engage in the conversation and add comments that they otherwise would have added. This phenomenon is reported to occur both in in-team meetings and client meetings.

*"Yes, a little [poorer psychological safety virtually], and mainly because it is more difficult to get an idea of what others think. It is still the security of daring to say things and dare to be yourself to one hundred percent, which depends to some extent on the fact that you feel*

*accepted and appreciated by others and that is sometimes harder to feel remote, you do not get that feedback”*

- Junior 9, Company C

In line with the hesitancy of speaking up in the virtual environment, several interviewees also highlight the difficulty of communicating potential errors and mistakes digitally.

*"I think you are less likely to admit mistakes at a distance. On-site, it's easier to make it a common problem, 'We have a problem', blaming on miscommunication and sweeping under the rug. But when it becomes independent, it becomes clearer that you have done wrong and then I do not think you would have wanted to admit it."*

- Junior 3, Company C

Overall, several interviewees indicate that the psychological safety has decreased as a result of virtual work.

## 6 Analysis

*The following section presents our analysis of the empirical findings. For this purpose, we use the theoretical lens as illustrated in Figure 3, and previous research. The summarized key findings of how each consideration of teamwork has been affected due to virtual work, both negatively (-) and positively (+), can be found at the end of each section. First, core processes and emergent states are analyzed (6.1), followed by influencing conditions (6.2).*

### 6.1 Core Processes and Emergent States

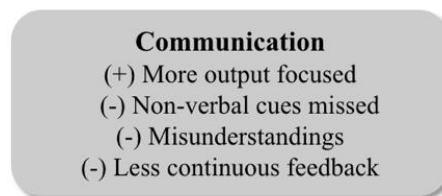
#### 6.1.1 Communication

Based on our empirics, we found that communication in project teams was largely affected, and mostly in a negative way. Interviewees perceive that communication has become very “transactional” and output-based, with less room for small-talk. In line with the literature, communication is indeed one of the aspects that is most challenging in a virtual context, and is said to often be more formal and focus more on work-specific issues (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). However, it was not only considered an issue that meetings had a clearer purpose and agenda. Interviewees expressed that the more transactional way of working was in a way more efficient.

Being able to rely on nonverbal cues, which is suggested important for highly effective teams (Entin & Serfaty, 1999), has been suggested to be hindered in the virtual context (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), which is in line with our findings. Interviewees stated that when working virtually, misunderstandings occur more frequently even if you communicate in script, since you do not fully understand each other. This leads to a poorer quality of communication and unnecessary mistakes. Another aspect that was uncovered in our empirics, was the fact that junior consultants may communicate less in a virtual context. More specifically, they tend to try more on their own before communicating to someone in the team that they need help or guidance. This creates a less efficient work process within the teams, where bottlenecks occur to a larger extent.

Feedback in management consulting is critical for high-quality exchanges within the project teams, in line with previous literature (Seers, 1989). We found that feedback could be either formal and structured, or more spontaneous and ongoing. Ongoing and more spontaneous feedback was perceived as less prevalent and more difficult to have virtually, especially between project leaders and junior consultants. This is also in line with literature on virtual teamwork, which has highlighted that informal and spontaneous interaction supports the provision of feedback (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). However, many viewed the formal feedback to work basically just as well virtually as in a physical setting. It seemed as mid-case or end-of-case feedback is something that is ingrained in the structure of the management consulting firms in this study, so it has been highly prioritized to keep feedback sessions booked, even though many have been scheduled online.

In sum, as illustrated in **Figure 4** below, communication within teams was largely affected by virtual work, both in positive and negative ways. On a positive note, communication is more efficient when it is output-based with a clear purpose, and formal feedback is perceived to work well in the virtual context. Looking at the negative aspects, problems have arisen related to junior consultants asking less frequently for help when encountering problems, a general tendency to miss out on non-verbal cues, misunderstandings, and less provision of continuous feedback.



**Figure 4.** Key findings for the *communication* consideration, positive impacts (+) and negative impacts (-) of virtual work

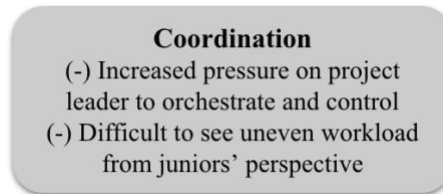
### 6.1.2 Coordination

Coordination, which refers to the orchestrating of interdependent actions within teams (Marks et al., 2001), has been affected according to our empirics. Previous literature has stressed various challenges with virtual leadership, and one aspect is that the monitoring and control of the project can become more difficult (Lee, 2021). Based on our empirics, we can see that the monitoring and control of the project teams have indeed become more problematic. The reason for this is that the consultants work more in “silos” and thereby interact less with each other. The project leader however, is perceived to be the one who has the central role in the teams to orchestrate and delegate tasks. When the virtual way of working then imposes a more siloed teamwork, the project leader becomes the central communication hub that facilitates the information flows in between workstreams. Ultimately, teamwork is highly dependent on the project leader to coordinate the different parts of the team. Another aspect raised by Lee (2021), is that it can be challenging to not actually see or know what the virtual employee is doing at one particular time. To mitigate this issue, project leaders and partners formalized touch-points during the days to ensure that progress was on track. This was, however, viewed by some junior consultants as they were more controlled than before.

Another aspect of coordination is *implicit coordination*, which refers to team members anticipating team needs and dynamically adjust their behaviors accordingly without being instructed (Rico et al., 2008). Given the individualistic nature of taskwork that virtuality imposes, this becomes negatively affected. Junior consultants mentioned that it is more difficult to understand how various parts of the project are connected, and that it is more difficult to see the workload and struggles of other team members.

In sum, as illustrated in **Figure 5** below, coordination has mainly imposed challenges for the project leaders, who are responsible for orchestrating the activities in-between workstreams in the project teams. Due to this, more formal touch-points have been scheduled on a day-to-day

basis. Furthermore, it is perceived more difficult for junior consultants to identify when other team members need help and the workload is uneven.



**Figure 5.** Key findings for the *coordination* consideration, negative impacts (-) of virtual work

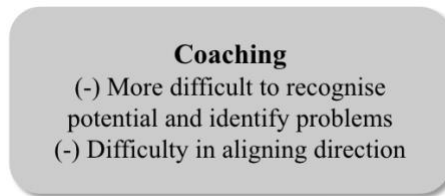
### 6.1.3 Coaching

In regards to the coaching dimension, it should be noted that coaching or leadership can be analyzed from the perspective of both project leaders and partners.

Previous research has argued that coaching is necessary to recognize and help correct critical team errors and problems, as well as to provide guidance in challenging situations (Salas et al., 2015a). Our empirical data suggests that leaders within management consultancies experience it to be more difficult to identify problems and recognize potential virtually, which in turn contributes negatively to team outcomes. For instance, it is mentioned that it is easier for a project leader to see if someone is struggling or is stressed out if they are co-present, and thereby easier to quickly help them out and get them back on track. Furthermore, there is a common perception that strengths and potential is better picked up on when working physically.

Theory also discusses that coaching refers to the enactment of leadership behaviors to establish goals and set direction (Fleishman et al., 1991), but this has been suggested to be challenging in the virtual setting (Lee, 2021). Given the siloed and more individualistic work, our empirical data reveals a difficulty in aligning different workstreams when working virtually, something that happens more organically when working co-physically. Therefore, we believe to see an issue related to setting common goals and a united direction, when consultants are more focused on their own tasks in their own workstream.

To sum up, as illustrated in **Figure 6** below, we believe that the coaching of teams has become more challenging in the virtual context. It is mentioned that critical behaviors such as identifying and recognizing potential are more difficult for leaders when working virtually. Moreover, the more visionary aspect of setting common goals and aligning direction becomes hindered due to more siloed work.

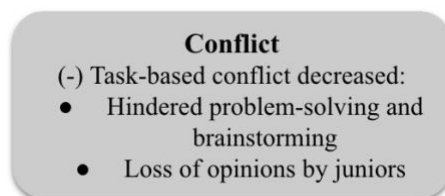


**Figure 6.** Key findings for the *coaching* consideration, negative impacts (-) of virtual work

#### 6.1.4 Conflict

Based on our empirical data, we can state that the conflict dimension has been affected in terms of *task conflict*, meaning differences in opinions regarding how to best execute tasks. In literature, it has been suggested that this tension may positively impact team performance under certain conditions, e.g. when teams engage in problem-solving tasks that require innovation and creativity (Bradley et al., 2012). According to our empirics, management consulting projects are often of a highly complex nature that requires a lot of problem-solving, brainstorming and creative thinking. On-site, these processes usually involve sketching on whiteboards, where team members come with ideas and inputs. However, interviewees mention that they have not yet cracked the code on how to conduct these types of meetings virtually. Another issue that has arisen that contributes negatively to task conflict, is that of expressing opinions. This was particularly expressed by more junior consultants, who hesitate to speak up with certain opinions in virtual meetings. It is mentioned that it is easier to jump into the conversation when you are in the same room, in contrast to the virtual setting where you need to click unmute and perhaps interrupt the one talking.

In sum, as illustrated in **Figure 7** below, task conflict is hindered in teamwork due to mainly two things. Firstly, problem solving and brainstorming is less efficient and of lower quality when working virtually, and junior consultants tend to express opinions less in the virtual context.



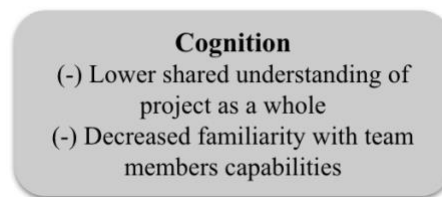
**Figure 7.** Key findings for the *conflict* consideration, negative impacts (-) of virtual work

#### 6.1.5 Cognition

The term cognition refers to having a shared understanding among team members of roles and responsibilities, team mission objectives and norms, and familiarity with teammate knowledge, skills and abilities (Wildman et al., 2012). We come back to the issues related to more siloed work and less interactions between workstreams. Not only do these contribute to the negative aspects as highlighted in the previous two sections, but also to a worsened understanding of the project as a whole for the other more junior team members. One junior consultant stated that it is difficult to get a comprehensive understanding of how the different parts are connected

during the course of the project, when working virtually. Essentially, the virtual way of working has led to a lower shared understanding in the project teams of the project as a whole, for the team members that are only working in one workstream. Furthermore, the virtual way of working has decreased the social interactions between members. This has implications for how well you get to know your teammates, and in turn, a decreased familiarity with different teammates' knowledge, skills and abilities, something that has been argued to be important for team outcomes (Salas et al., 2015a).

To sum up, as illustrated in **Figure 8** below, cognition has been affected negatively according to our findings, since the shared understanding among team members overall seems to have decreased in the virtual setting. Social interactions between members of the group, and in between junior consultants in particular, seems to have been lowered and hence reducing the familiarity with teammates knowledge, skills and ability.



**Figure 8.** Key findings for the *cognition* consideration, negative impacts (-) of virtual work

#### 6.1.6 Cooperation

The cooperation dimension of the theoretical heuristic covers the motivational drivers of teamwork. Concepts mentioned as important for this dimension are e.g. collective orientation, trust, collective efficacy, and team-learning orientation. To further add to this dimension, we complement with literature on *team cohesion* and *psychological safety*. This dimension is highly relevant to dig deeper into, since it has been suggested by previous literature that motivation may be hindered in a distance setting (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

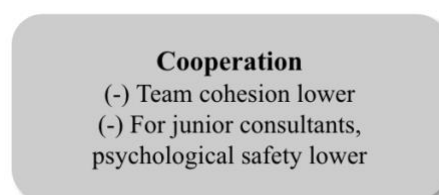
*Team-learning orientation* is something that Bunderson and Sutcliffe (2003) define as the degree to which team goals are geared towards learning, and according to Salas et al. (2015a) this has implications for *cooperation*. Based on our empirical data, we can state that knowledge development seems to be hindered to a certain extent in the virtual work setting. Junior consultants especially who have a lot to learn in the beginning may try to take it as far as they can before they ask a clarifying question, which in turn hurts their knowledge development. Hence, there does not seem to be a decreased degree to which team goals are geared towards learning, but rather increased difficulty in ensuring that learning is as efficient when working virtually.

Based on our empirical data, *team spirit* is one aspect that has shown to be essential for teamwork in management consulting. This relatively vague construct (Silva et al., 2014) can be explained by the concept of *team cohesion*, which is described as an individual's sense of belonging to a group and sharing a commitment to achieve common goals (Bollen and Hoyle, 1990). It is suggested that individuals who feel no sense of cohesion with their team, whether

due to dislike, distrust, disinterest, or a host of other reasons, are argued to be less motivated and less likely to participate in the “teaming” behaviors that enable positive effects of teams (Salas et al., 2015b). Given that the management consultancy industry is very demanding and requires more than a 40-hour week, interviewees mention that non-monetary rewards act as important motivators. It is said to be directly crucial to feel a belongingness to a team, and to feel the “we are in this together” spirit. This is often enabled by social activities where getting to know your teammates is in focus, such as team dinners. What we found however, was that team spirit and the feeling of belonging to teams had decreased dramatically. Mentioned consequences of this have been said to be decreased well-being, not walking that extra mile, and higher turnover. Interestingly, it has been found that the transformational leadership style has been associated with higher levels of team cohesiveness, in contrast to transactional leadership (Stashevsky and Koslowsky, 2006). As previously outlined, interviewees have regarded relationships and leadership overall to have become more transactional, which in turn may reinforce a decreased team cohesion. In other words, it may not only have been the fact that less social interactions have occurred physically, but also that leaders have become more transactional in their way of working virtually.

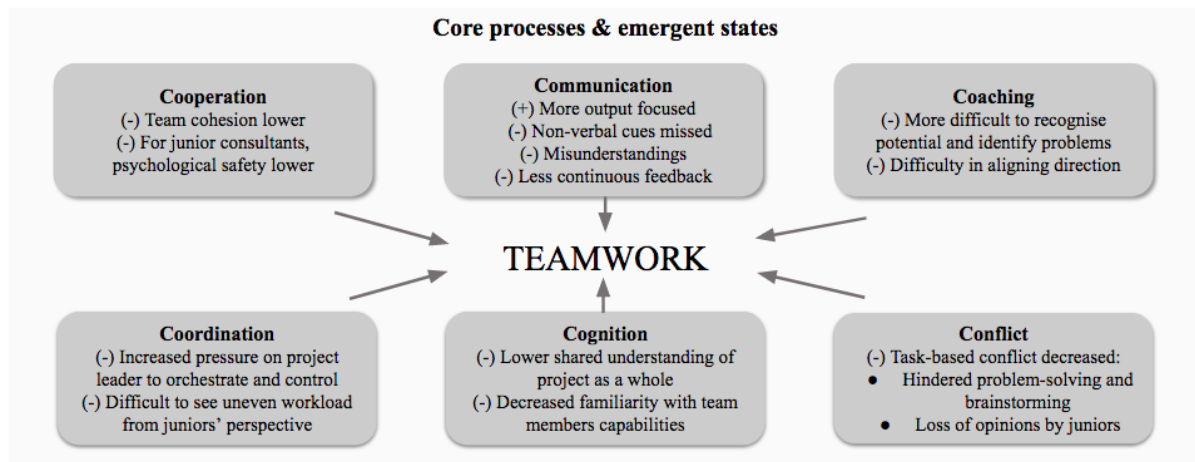
Finally, our empirical data gave us indications about how the concept of *psychological safety* was affected in the virtual context. Psychological safety refers to the shared feelings of safety within a team and allowing for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). Our findings suggest that some consultants, primarily those that are junior or relatively new, perceive a higher barrier virtually to actively speaking up in meetings. The interviewees mention for instance that it can feel like interrupting the project leader, or that it can be more difficult to get an idea of what others in the meeting will think. Moreover, it was stated that junior consultants may try more on their own, before asking for help or guidance. The other aspect of psychological safety that we found to be affected in a virtual context, was to admit errors or mistakes. There seemed to be a slightly higher tendency to admit to these mistakes quicker when being co-located. When working virtually, it was said by interviewees that they would try to solve it on their own to a higher extent.

To sum up, as illustrated in **Figure 9** below, it can be stated that the cooperation dimension has been largely affected in a negative way in the virtual setting. Described as the motivational drivers of teamwork, we believe that what has primarily been affected negatively, is the fact that the notion of team spirit has worsened in the virtual context. The feeling of being a cohesive team has decreased, which is considered critical to stay within management consulting. Furthermore, based on the empirical data, psychological safety seems to be lower to a certain extent in the virtual setting, especially for more junior consultants.



**Figure 9.** Key findings for the *cooperation* consideration, negative impacts (-) of virtual work

Before moving on to the next section that will outline how the *influencing conditions* have been affected, we summarize the *core processes and emergent states* in **Figure 10** below. Inside the boxes, positive (+) and negative (-) aspects illustrate how the teamwork dimensions have been affected due to virtual work.



**Figure 10.** Key findings for the *core processes & emergent states*, positive impacts (+) and negative impacts (-) of virtual work

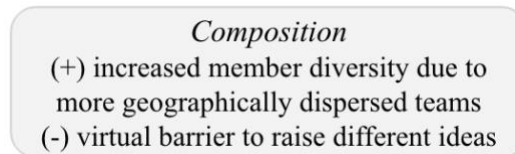
## 6.2 Influencing Conditions

### 6.2.1 Composition

The influencing factor *composition* cannot be considered any less critical in a virtual context. However, according to our empirical data, the virtual context has had certain effects on the composition dimension. Firstly, it can be said to have been influenced in a positive way since the virtual way of working has enabled geographically dispersed employees to work together. For instance, interviewees mention that it is easier to gain access to global experts, and it is easier for geographically distant team members to connect on a daily basis. This is also in line with previous literature that has suggested that better access to distributed experts is a positive aspect of virtual teamwork (Webster & Wong, 2008). Harrison et al. (2002) stress the importance of *member diversity*, where differences are necessary in knowledge, skills and abilities. When teams are working virtually, it may become easier to ensure that teams actually have these differences. On the other hand, something that may have become problematic for the *composition* dimension, is the fact that knowledge, skills and abilities are not being recognized or developed as well in the virtual setting. As our empirical data shows, the virtual context has implications for both knowledge development and creates a barrier to speak up, which could instead hinder the aim of member diversity.

In sum, as illustrated in **Figure 11** below, composition of teams has been affected in a positive way since it has enabled more geographically dispersed employees to work together, which contributes to member diversity. However, a potential hindrance to the goal of member diversity, i.e., to have a diverse set of inputs of knowledge, skills and abilities, is that the virtual

context poses challenges to knowledge development and a barrier to speak up about different ideas.

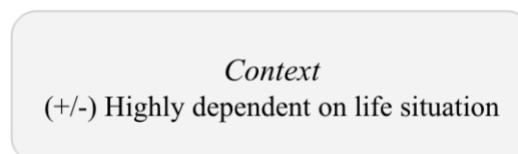


**Figure 11.** Key findings for the *composition* consideration, positive impacts (+) and negative impacts (-) of virtual work

### 6.2.2 Context

Even though the chosen focus of this study is the virtual context, we can see that the context of where employees are working (Johns, 2006) has been largely affected. As mentioned in our empirical data, the life situation of the team member largely influences how they perceive working from home. More senior consultants or partners tend to live in a larger apartment or even in a house, where they can sit in their own office, but still get social contact with family members. The situation is quite different for a more junior colleague, who typically lives in a small apartment, and may not have the opportunity to set up an office at home. Nevertheless, the virtual way of working makes the physical environment vary for team members, and for some, it works just as well from home if not even better, while some perceive that it is negatively influenced by sitting at home.

In summary, as illustrated in **Figure 12** below, the physical context of where consultants work seems to affect their perception of how it functions to work virtually. With that said, more senior consultants or partners have a better perception of working virtually due to a better life situation at home, in contrast to more junior consultants.



**Figure 12.** Key findings for the *context* consideration, positive (+) and negative impacts (-) of virtual work

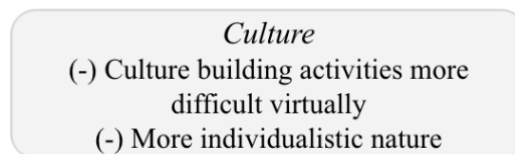
### 6.2.3 Culture

Our findings suggest that the organizational culture has been suffering due to the shift to virtual work. Interviewees mention culture-building activities such as afterworks, lunches, dinners, trainings and trips as essential for the management consulting industry. This is in line with what was stated regarding team spirit and team cohesion, that non-monetary rewards are needed to make the heavy workload worth it. Besides having a team that you like and enjoy working with, the wider organizational culture seems to have an important role to play for people to stay within management consulting. Efforts have been made to make these activities virtually

during COVID-19 when the possibility to conduct these on-site or physically was gone. However, these activities were rarely appreciated by the interviewees.

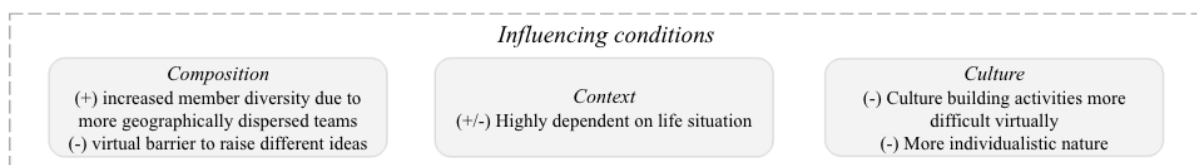
According to our empirical data, culture is important because it sets the very DNA of the firm, and directly influences retention. One project leader that worked before COVID-19, said that what made his firm stand out from the other management consultancy firms was much clearer before, and has become much vaguer since the shift to work virtually. It becomes clear that the *individualism-collectivism* which refers to the degree to which individuals view themselves as unique individuals or as part of a collective (Bell, 2007), has steered towards the individual rather than the collectivism. One project leader mentioned that management at its firm had recognized a shift towards more individualistic benefits rather than collective rewards. Before COVID-19 the mindset was more set on “we”, while virtual work has increased the pressure on e.g. individual salaries.

To conclude, as illustrated in **Figure 13** below, culture is an important influencing factor for teamwork within management consulting, but seems to be difficult to both build and maintain in the virtual context. Based on the empirical data, the collective nature of the management consultancy firms has become more individualistic which has negatively influenced the motivational drivers of teamwork.



**Figure 13.** Key findings for the *culture* consideration, negative impacts (-) of virtual work

To sum up the influencing conditions, illustrated below is how the three conditions have been impacted.



**Figure 14.** Key findings for the *influencing conditions*, positive (+) and negative impacts (-) of virtual work

## 7 Concluding Discussion

*This thesis set out to answer the research question “**How has virtual work impacted teamwork in management consulting?**”. With the section below, we aim to answer our research question and bring forward our contributions to previous research on management consulting, PSF, and teamwork. Due to the nature of the research question, posing a “how”-question, we present our answer in three parts. Firstly, we discuss our findings in relation to the current management consulting and PSF literature (7.1). Secondly, we discuss our findings in relation to the current teamwork literature through our theoretical lens (7.2). Finally, we develop a conceptual model of how virtual work impacts teamwork in management consulting, bringing forth the findings as a visual representation (7.3). Following this, we suggest practical contributions (7.4) as well as limitations and implications for future research (7.5).*

### 7.1 Contribution to the Management Consulting and PSF Literature

This study has investigated how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting, which is an unexplored area in the extant literature. As demonstrated in the background and literature review, research on management consulting, in general, is relatively limited, especially in comparison to the broader PSF literature. Investigating research even closer connected to our research question, literature on virtual teamwork in management consulting in particular, is almost non-existent. This thesis contributes to filling this research gap in primarily three ways. Firstly, we suggest that the dynamics within the management consulting project teams have changed in the virtual setting in various ways. Secondly, we contribute with insights on how brainstorming and problem-solving have suffered largely, which is a critical component for teamwork in management consulting. Lastly, we contribute to the unexplored area of non-monetary rewards within the PSF literature. We suggest that the mindset seems to have become more individualistic, where monetary rewards are considered more important in the virtual context.

Given that previous literature on management consultancies in relation to teams has pointed towards the relationship with clients (Klärner et al., 2013), we contribute to research with a more nuanced view of how the *internal* project teams interact and function in the virtual setting. For instance, we have shown that the project leaders typically have a more central role to orchestrate and control the different parts of the team in the virtual setting, since virtual work has forced consultants to work more in silos, and hence, the contact between junior consultants has decreased. This way of working has shown to have large implications for more junior consultants in particular, which is another extension to research. Based on our findings, we suggest that junior consultants face various issues when virtual work is imposed. Firstly, it is more difficult to understand how different parts of the project are connected. Secondly, they tend to communicate less when they encounter problems in the virtual setting than in-person. Furthermore, it has been suggested by previous literature that the provision of feedback could be hindered in the virtual teamwork setting (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020) which we found to be affected differently depending on the type of feedback. Our study showed that formal

feedback sessions during projects worked just as well as in the physical setting, whereas the more ongoing and informal feedback was the one that was hindered in the virtual setting.

Even though previous literature on management consulting has suggested that processes are often uncertain and difficult to predict, and that brainstorming and problem-solving are central to consultants' way of working (Creplet, 2001; Adesi et al, 2015), research has not yet suggested how this dimension is impacted by a virtual way of working. Through our study, we suggest that this process has become more difficult and less efficient, where partners and project leaders still have not figured out how to best tackle this. This is an important finding in the management consulting literature as problem-solving and brainstorming are central components of teamwork conducted in these types of firms.

Previous literature has suggested that pressure is high on salaries and working conditions within PSFs (Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021), and our findings show that this has been increasingly important in management consultancies in the virtual setting. Another component that turned out to be critical for teamwork in management consultancies to be efficient, was that of non-monetary rewards, suggested as an under-researched area overall in the PSF literature (Sokolov & Zavyalova, 2021). We contribute with insights into what is regarded as important motivators in management consultancies in particular. The feeling of belongingness and having a cohesive team is considered critical for staying motivated, however, this becomes difficult in the virtual setting where social interactions are less prevalent and interactions are work-focused and transactional. Our study reveals that the "we are in this together" spirit that is key in consulting for walking that extra mile, is dramatically worsened in the virtual setting. We further see that this has fostered a more individualistic nature overall at the firms, where "we" has been shifted to "me me me", steering the focus towards monetary rewards such as salary and individual benefits.

## 7.2 Contributing to the Teamwork Literature

We also contribute to the teamwork literature by investigating how the virtual context has affected teamwork, something that Salas et al. (2015a) encouraged future researchers to explore. Furthermore, following the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rapid reconfiguration of teamwork, this is an important question to study. Based on our empirical findings, we have shown that teamwork has been affected in many different ways by virtual work. We thereby nuance Salas et al.'s (2015a) heuristic by showing how virtual work impacts the different dimensions both positively and negatively. Most aspects of our theoretical lens have been negatively influenced to a certain extent, whereas some aspects have been positively influenced. The way we see that virtual work has impacted teamwork can be summarized into two categories, *impaired team synergies*, and *decreased motivation*.

*Impaired team synergies* explain how teamwork synergies usually created by working together, emphasizing collective intelligence and effective communication, have been more difficult to obtain in the virtual setting. For instance, we see problems related to *coordination*, *communication*, and *coaching* (Salas et al., 2015a), since the work has become more siloed,

individualistic, and output-focused. In line with literature on virtual teamwork (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), we suggest that communication within the team becomes more transactional where important non-verbal cues are missed out on and a higher degree of misunderstandings occur. Simultaneously, virtual leadership literature has suggested that leading virtual teams poses challenges for controlling and monitoring (Lee, 2021). Our research confirms that leaders responsible for coordination face challenges in ensuring that everyone is on the same page, and we contribute with insights regarding the increased responsibility that project leaders face as a result. Consequently, we see a worsened *implicit coordination*, which has been suggested important for effective teamwork (Rico et al., 2008). Our empirics reveal that junior consultants feel a lowered understanding of the project overall and the workload of different members. Lastly, *coaching* is necessary to recognize and help correct critical team errors and problems, but also to provide guidance in challenging situations (Salas et al., 2015a). We extend this teamwork literature by showing that problem identification and potential recognition have been negatively affected in the virtual context, which hinders the development of team members. Thus, this has negative implications for *team synergies*.

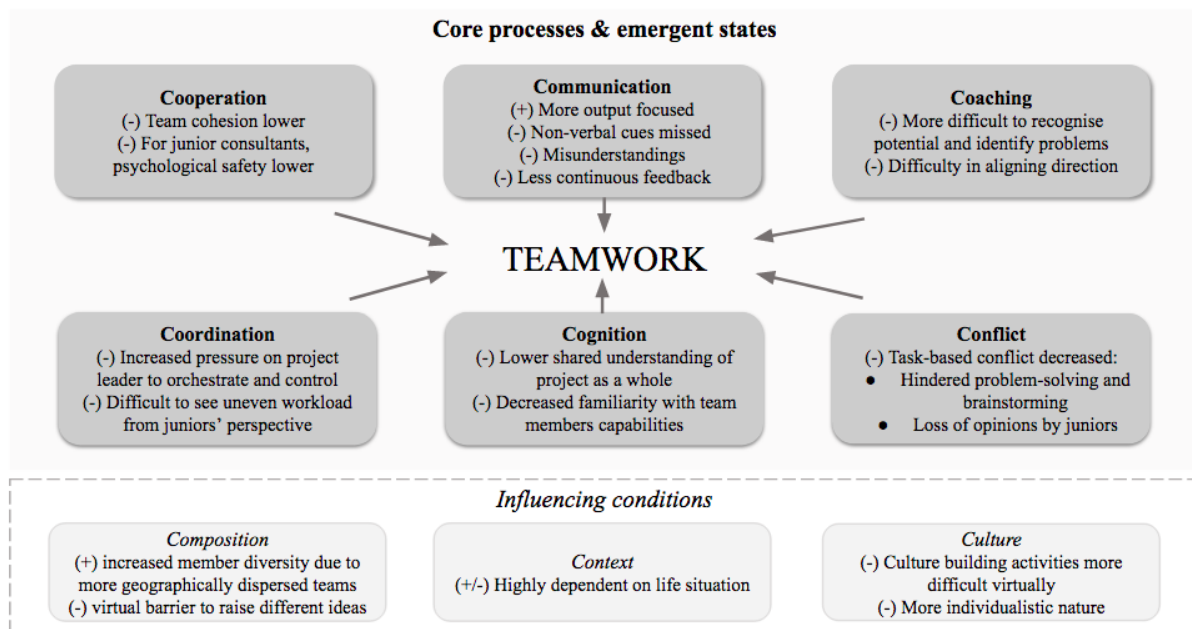
It has been suggested that teams which engage in problem-solving tasks can benefit from *task conflict* (Bradley et al., 2012). According to our empirics, however, teams struggle with finding an efficient way of having these creative sessions virtually. Consequently, various opinions and viewpoints are potentially missed out in the virtual setting, which relates back to *impaired team synergies*.

Secondly, we have discovered a tendency to *decreased motivation* in teamwork due to virtual work. We have come to this conclusion with the help of Salas et al.'s (2015a) *cooperation* dimension, further backed by the concept of *team cohesion* (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990) and *psychological safety* (Edmondson, 1999). Team cohesion has been stated as important for members who want to participate in the "teaming" behaviors that enable positive team outcomes (Salas et al, 2015b). Looking at our findings, we suggest that this has been negatively impacted in the virtual setting. Interviewees mention that as a result of not feeling a strong team cohesiveness or team spirit, they tend to not walk that extra mile for the team's sake. Moreover, our data suggest that psychological safety is negatively impacted in the virtual setting, where junior consultants perceive a higher barrier to speak up and may tend to express mistakes less frequently virtually. An influencing dimension of teamwork that we found to relate to *decreased motivation* was that of *culture* (Gibson et al., 2009). Culture has become an increasingly important consideration for organizations, in particular those that rely on teams (Salas et al., 2015a). Our empirical data suggests that this is strongly the case for management consultancies and that it is critical to set a DNA of a firm to make it stand out from competitors. Moreover, we see that culture and team cohesion are strongly linked since they incorporate the social aspects of teamwork, and we see that it is critical for management consultancies. However, they have been largely negatively influenced in the virtual setting, implying *decreased motivation* for teamwork.

### 7.3 Towards a Conceptual Model of Virtual Work's Impact on Teamwork in Management Consulting

Lastly, based on our analysis, we have developed a conceptual model which answers this thesis' research question: *How has virtual work impacted teamwork in management consulting?* We have extended the theoretical lens by Salas et al. (2015a) by drawing on the concepts of team cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). We summarize our key findings for each dimension, by highlighting the positive (+) and negative (-) aspects we have identified, as illustrated in **Figure 15**. Altogether, we can state that teamwork in management consulting has mainly been negatively influenced by virtual work. We see that *impaired synergies* as discussed above, are explained by e.g. the coordination and communication dimensions, while *decreased motivation* is mainly found in the dimension of cooperation.

We have intentionally not created any links between the different dimensions, as they are all interlinked and depend on each other, just as suggested by Salas et al (2015a). We believe that our illustration could serve as a guiding heuristic for management consultancies, or other PSFs when practicing virtual teamwork. Since we have concluded the main positive and negative aspects relevant to teamwork, it could guide firms in what challenges to mitigate, and what opportunities to leverage on.



**Figure 15.** Illustration of how virtual work has impacted teamwork in management consulting, by Ahlborg & Lindell (2022)

## 7.4 Practical Contribution

Since our empirical data has suggested both challenges and opportunities with the virtual context for teamwork in management consulting, we propose below some activities that could mitigate the challenges we have identified.

Firstly, to tackle the *impaired team synergies*, we believe that it will be important to find a combination of physical teamwork sessions with virtual work. Our empirics suggest that it is particularly important for teams to sit together when brainstorming or problem-solving sessions are needed, whereas when there is a clear scope and the work can be done independently, freedom of choice between a virtual setting or working from the office could be beneficial. It can also be important to meet physically to allow for ongoing and spontaneous feedback to occur in the team, especially so that junior consultants can ask questions when they arise. Moreover, our empirics suggest that formal feedback sessions work fine in the virtual setting, so it could be beneficial to schedule these online if it adds any efficiencies.

Secondly, and what may be most crucial for management consultancies to consider if virtual work will continue in the future, is *team spirit* and *non-monetary rewards*. We suggest that team-building activities such as team dinners, trainings, and kick-offs are necessary to have in a physical setting. Through this, social bonds can be created which is important for the motivation and retention of talents.

Lastly, our empirics revealed that the virtual setting imposes challenges not only to teamwork but to the overall *well-being* of individuals within management consulting. A feeling of constant availability has made especially junior consultants stressed, and a particularly worrying tendency that was raised was that females skipped pauses when working virtually. Therefore, it could be important to establish structures and guidelines for “how to work from home”, so that junior consultants can take necessary breaks without feeling stressed.

## 7.5 Limitations and Implications for Future Research

In this section, we outline potential limitations of this study and suggest what other scholars could further research. It should be mentioned that the virtual context that we have explored has been quite extreme due to the COVID-19 pandemic where most consultants were forced to work virtually. Therefore, a similar study in the future may come up with different findings, when virtual work is chosen to a higher extent by employees. Therefore, we believe that it would be interesting to further explore the *hybrid mode* as a context when freedom of choice between a virtual and a physical setting exists to a higher extent.

Another limitation that should be considered with this study is that interviewees have had varying degrees of physical versus virtual work experiences. We have not considered this in our analysis, e.g. whether someone who has worked to a higher extent virtually had different opinions than someone who has worked more at the physical office. However, we have ensured that everyone in the study has to some extent worked virtually, and has had experiences of

teamwork where members are not co-present. Future researchers could potentially compare how varying degrees of co-located teams and virtual teams differ from each other.

Although we aimed to interview people from different organizations to get a more nuanced understanding of our research question, we also see potential limitations with this case study setting. For instance, the fact that we had a quite uneven distribution of interviewees between the different companies could be seen as a limitation, since the answers could be biased towards those companies we interviewed more people at. Future researchers could therefore benefit from having a more even distribution between the different case companies.

Moreover, this study focused on the individual's perception of teamwork. Future studies may instead focus on specific project teams, and how different teams may cope better or worse with virtual teamwork. On that subject, we also see that an interesting topic to explore could be how different compositions of teams could best facilitate virtual teamwork.

Lastly, given the abductive and iterative approach of this study, where empirics and theory emerged simultaneously, the theoretical lens by Salas et al. (2015a) was incorporated at a relatively late stage. Therefore, the *conflict* dimension was for instance not specifically asked about in the interviews, but interesting insights emerged in our analysis of the data in relation to this. Another part of the *cooperation* dimension that we could have analyzed more in-depth, is that of trust. Therefore, we suggest that future researchers use the comprehensive heuristic by Salas et al (2015a) as a guide for the interview template, to ensure that all dimensions are covered.

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# 9 Appendices

## 9.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction of interviewers, research topic and administrative details:

- Presentation of research topic
- Ensuring anonymity and that the company name is not mentioned
- Do you agree that we record the interview for transcript purposes?

Background:

- Can you tell me about yourself?
  - What education do you have?
  - For how long have you worked in your organization?
    - Have you started to work in your organization during COVID-19?
  - What position / role do you have in the company?
  - What is included in your responsibility / work?

Teamwork at a distance:

- How do you work (differently) virtually in teams?
- How does the collaboration in teams work when you work virtually?
- How efficient and productive is the work in the team? What works well and not virtually?
  - Has virtual work affected the efficiency and productivity of the team? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
- Virtual work and leadership
  - How do you experience the leadership within the teams at a distance?
  - Has the distance work affected the way you / the leaders lead teams? Project manager vs partners?
  - Do you experience that delegated tasks vary virtually vs physically?
  - Do you feel that the relationship and your connection with your leader is different at a distance?
    - If not, what is the difference? Why do you think that will be the case?
- How does the communication take place in the team?
- How has virtual work affected your well-being / the well-being of your employees?
- How has motivation been affected by virtual work / hybrid mode (if at all)?
- How does the team work with knowledge exchange and knowledge development when the work takes place at a distance?
- How has virtual work affected...
  - ... Feedback and feedforward in your team?
  - (Junior)... how are your problems and your potential noticed and taken advantage of by your team members? / (Leader) How do you pay attention to and take advantage of your team members' problems and potential?
  - ... Helpfulness and cooperation within the team?

Team spirit at a distance:

- What effect has virtual work and COVID-19 had on team spirit and the feeling of belongingness to the team?
- Do you think team spirit is important? Why?
- What does team spirit mean to you? What is a good team spirit?
- What effects does bad team spirit have on teamwork?
- What do you / your leader / colleagues do to create a team spirit? (Who does what? Why? Does it work?)
- Are you actively working on developing guidelines / practices for how to work virtually? For example, how to create a good team spirit at a distance
- How do you become part of the team and the group at a distance? How has it been for you? For new colleagues?
  - If the person in question has on-boarded during COVID-19, how has that person experienced the onboarding process?
- Psychological safety (Contrast before virtual work vs in virtual work)
  - How open is the climate in general in your team to say what you think and bring forth opinions?
  - How comfortable do you feel about questioning "the status quo" or something you work on as a team?
  - How confident do you feel to admit a mistake or make a mistake without getting criticism or negative consequences?

Description of situation, event or experience:

- Can you describe a positive and a negative event that illustrates how COVID-19 has affected the teamwork in your organization?
- Is there anything you want to add?
- Do you have any questions for us?

## 9.2 Appendix 2: Data structure

Illustrative quote	First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate dimensions
<p><i>"How we work with our clients has changed quite a lot, before the pandemic we were almost always out with the client Monday-Thursday, and then we worked Fridays from the office. But we sat most of the time with the clients. While now we sit in the office to a much greater extent and have a lot of meetings at Zoom with the clients, so they also work a lot from home. Many clients also have a more flexible work model, so it does not make as much sense for us to go to their office if they still sitting at home. " (Project leader 8, Company A)</i></p>	<p>A shift in working from the customer site to the home office</p>	<p>Work procedures</p>	<p>An altered way of working</p>
<p><i>"Before the pandemic, it was really default to work in the office, or at the customer's office." (Project leader 3, Company B)</i></p>			
<p><i>"[...] the whole atmosphere has changed, and it is both positive and negative. [...] now it is perhaps more positive, it has become more accepted to work as a hybrid and if people feel like working from home, it is completely accepted [...]" (Junior 1, Company A)</i></p>	<p>Flexible working model</p>		
<p><i>"[...] you hope that in the future, and we talk a lot about that, to open up opportunities for more flexible ways of working. To sit in a team room 60 hours a week may not be something that everyone loves, and then you can kind of think: "What are the potential models for?" Now I think a lot of teams are talking about co-locating X number of hours a day or a week, and then they work remotely. So people can choose a little bit." (Partner 2, Company C)</i></p>			
<p><i>"[...] I would say that the biggest difference is that you sit in a Teams meeting, all the time. It was not done in the same way before." (Project leader 4, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Everyday work structure altered, more meetings</p>		
<p><i>"The number of meetings you have now makes the working day choppy, you sit in meetings back-to-back, and then you will not be super-efficient if you leave meetings for the first time at 4 pm on the day and have not had time to execute anything. And many of those who have worked in the industry before having emphasized this, these fast syncs were taken a little more adhoc when you now need to find time for everything that you can otherwise mention in passing." (Junior 8, Company E)</i></p>			
<p><i>"Now you have become so much more accessible, and to get a call at 22 in the evening a little out of the blue, had never happened before. If you are not in the office, then you do not work. While now you are available around the clock as well." (Project leader 1, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Constant availability</p>		
<p><i>"On the one hand, it is that perhaps you are expected to be available in another way, and be able to respond to things immediately" (Project leader 3, Company B)</i></p>			
<p><i>"It's worse at a distance. Because otherwise when you sit together you can work on whiteboards and paint slides together. You can read each other and it's easier to work together and build on things. I really think the collaboration is what fails at a distance while, for example, independence thrives only because you have to</i></p>	<p>Worsened collaboration</p>	<p>Collaboration</p>	

<p><i>take ownership of what you produce in a different way." (Junior 3, Company C)</i></p>			
<p><i>"I would say that it gets worse of course, you do not ask these questions you want to ask, it is not easy to brainstorm, but you want to take it as far as you can yourself, until it really does not work." (Junior A, Company A)</i></p>			
<p><i>"[...] what I think has been impacted the most is our internal work, and the teamwork itself. We work in teams for a reason, we think that 1 + 1 is greater than 2. That is the very idea of teamwork. [...]. But above all, it has been difficult to solve complex problems and to think innovatively. The creativity itself has suffered a bit from this [...]. I have not found the keys really to best handle that, I like to sit in a room where you have whiteboards that you sketch on. In fact, I think it has been very difficult to get this working through Teams." (Partner 1, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Brainstorming and problem solving worsened</p>		
<p><i>"What has gotten worse, especially in the consulting profession, is when you work with problem solving and co-creation, then it's damn tough to sit in Zoom when someone is bad at drawing or to take part in several ideas. It is difficult" (Project leader 5, Company D)</i></p>			
<p><i>"Now it's a bit like sitting in your own room and thinking about something, and then you have a meeting and you sort of separate again. Previously, you came up with something together through a discussion or drawing something on the board." (Project leader 3, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Individualistic/ try more on your own</p>		
<p><i>"You are forced to become more independent. [...] . It will not be the same quick interactions and the same questions, even if you can do it via chat and other things, it is not done to the same extent. It is also more difficult to get context in a junior's view of how things in the project are connected." (Junior 6, Company A)</i></p>			
<p><i>"I would say that it gets worse, of course, you do not ask these questions you want to ask, it is not easy to exchange ideas and get input, but you want to take it as far as you can yourself, until it really doesn't work." (Junior 1, Company A)</i></p>	<p>Hindered knowledge development</p>		
<p><i>"It has definitely been negatively affected. In the team you know that everyone works on their own things and does a lot, and if I finish in good time and am in the office and see how someone else is working, of course I stop and help. But you do not do that when you sit remotely, [...] then you think "I take the evening off and shut down the computer". You do not really see when the workload is unevenly distributed, so I think it has definitely deteriorated " (Junior 1, Company A)</i></p>	<p>Helpfulness decreased</p>		
<p><i>"At a distance, it's easier to get somewhat checked out of your job, especially if the workstreams are separated and you feel finished on your end. You do not know if others are struggling. And it is, of course, easier to get away by only finishing your own task as long as you don't see your colleagues. If you sit together, it's a lot more joint team effort." (Junior 2, Company B)</i></p>			
<p><i>"I would say that the willingness of helping is the same, but the opportunity to do so has gone down" (Project leader 2, Company B)</i></p>			

<p><i>"We have a very good exchange of knowledge at my workplace. And since it is a global company with many experts, it works almost better online. All of a sudden, you have access to super-niche experts. I have had 3 expert conversations with senior individuals today [...] and they would never have had time for me otherwise. It has only gotten better and better with corona when it has been online. So people who would otherwise have been forced to travel to a client site that can now be at home become so much more accessible to others, it's super good. Then I would say that we have many different knowledge platforms in my workplace, I think that part may not have changed that much but just expert networks are better" (Junior 3, Company C)</i></p>	<p>Increased access to co-workers</p>		
<p><i>"It becomes a much more transactional relationship [...], it becomes different physically when you sit and brainstorm. Now, you do not call someone to do it the same way. It becomes more straightforward, [...] You call someone, you share your screen and show quickly. Then you get yes/no, yes/no and then you shut down. Otherwise, you may work together to solve the problem. Now it is more "you have a problem, you call me". The one calling is the one having a problem instead of the team having the problem" (Junior 3, Company C)</i></p>	<p>Transactional</p>	<p>Communication</p>	
<p><i>"The discussions and all interactions are only linked to the purpose or problem solving [...] All interactions become much more to the point. And that in turn can be effective in a way, but I do not think the net effect of being transactional exceeds the negative with the loss of communication and the social. Net, it is more important that you allow yourself to talk about something other than just the purpose of the interaction" (Junior 5, Company C)</i></p>			
<p><i>"I think messages are easier to emphasize physically and it goes much faster. Especially in the consulting profession where there is a lot of graphic design, how are you going to show this in an easy way to understand? [...] this is much easier when you have the whiteboard. [...] I think [...] there will be a little more mistakes. Everything will be right in the end, but there will be more mistakes and because you have to correct those mistakes, you have to work a little later, work a little more. [...] (Junior 5, Company C)</i></p>	<p>Poor quality of communication</p>		
<p><i>"[...] I think there will be a lot more misunderstandings, often you communicate in writing. There is a lot of information that is missed, you do not fully understand each other. It is simply not effective. And of course, there are counterarguments, e.g., that if we write with each other it will be more direct and for my flow, it is more efficient, but I think it is so much stuff that is missed that is very important in our work." (Junior 7, Company C)</i></p>			
<p><i>"[...] you miss out on double-checking an idea [which you would do] immediately in the office. Instead, you might do an analysis that was not needed. You hold hands a little more physically than you do digitally in the process itself." (Junior 6, Company A)</i></p>	<p>Try more yourself</p>		
<p><i>"If you are alone, you probably try yourself once more, because when you write to people it takes longer and everything is not yes and no questions" (Junior 5, Company C)</i></p>			

<p>"It means that you may not ask the questions you usually ask, but you wait until you are completely stuck." (Junior 1, Company A)</p>			
<p>"Formal feedback has worked at least as well, how to develop and how projects have gone has worked the same way as before. We have clear processes for how and when to do it." (Project leader 1, Company B)</p>	<p>Formal feedback is the same</p>		
<p>"[...] we have had our formal systems and so on with end of case and midcase and that. The structural machinery has worked just as well anyway" (Partner 1, Company B)</p>			
<p>"Then there is also ongoing guidance. It is a bigger obstacle for me as a junior to ask questions if we are not with each other. If you are with each other, it is quite simple because knowledge transfer is faster in the same room. It is a bigger barrier to call you or write [...]. The only thing that is lost or becomes more difficult is the ongoing feedback, the spontaneous feedback." (Junior 5, Company C)</p>	<p>Ongoing feedback has deteriorated</p>		
<p>"[...] feedback that is direct input like "I'm thinking a bit about this graph .." such small questions, it's something you ignore to communicate. And there I also think that from my experience as a project manager, I do not have the energy to communicate so clearly. If someone has made a color choice on a graph that I do not like, I change the color myself instead of giving feedback" (Project leader 3, Company B)</p>			
<p>"When you sit with modules in a group where you need to discuss with each other, it will have the opposite effect, then it will be less effective to work at a distance. Especially on such projects where you have a lot of client contact [...]" (Junior 1, Company A)</p>	<p>Brainstorming affected negatively</p>	<p>Efficiency</p>	
<p>"What has been challenging about working digitally, is primarily brainstorming and things like that" (Partner 3, Company B)</p>			
<p>"[...] extremely good if you have a clear plan and the work is progressing as it should. Then it is almost better than usual. [...] fewer distractions or where I interrupt team members" (Project leader 7, Company A)</p>	<p>Efficient when scope is clear</p>		
<p>Efficiency and productivity depend on scope. When there is a clear scope, remote work is almost better because you save time that you would otherwise have spent on a flight, go to work, etc. You can save an incredible amount of time on it if it is a clear task where everyone knows exactly where to do and are experienced in the work. (Junior 3, Company C)</p>			
<p>"It can be easier as a project manager to see if someone has problems on site. People do not notice this in the same way online. I [...] Personally, I think that they see more of my potential in place. Just because it contributes to more thoughts and ideas than just sitting and producing." (Junior 3, Company C)</p>	<p>More difficult to recognize problems and potential online</p>	<p>Recognize problems and potential</p>	<p>Leadership</p>
<p>"It becomes more difficult for me to express my problems and what I am good at. Building trust is harder and explaining if something works well. What I know I'm comfortable with will not get noticed in the same way. Problems can be difficult to concretize and be clear</p>			

<p><i>about what a problem is. The last thing to add is that some things become much easier for someone who has been doing things for a while instead of them delegating it and giving the opportunity to "challenge". It can also disappear because it is faster to do it yourself than to schedule 30 minutes and explain what someone should do" (Junior 6, Company A)</i></p>			
<p><i>"[...] there was somehow more control over us because it had never happened that we would work at home before. [...] I guess it made partners worried about how it would work. My practice leader introduced a morning meeting with us every single morning and we were not even in the same project, it was more a poll on "what are you going to do today?" which became very superfluous and felt like someone was checking that you were awake." (Junior 2, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Consultants feel more controlled</p>	<p>Lost feeling of control</p>	
<p><i>"At the beginning of Corona, when you had to switch to digital, the leadership was completely unaccustomed to it. It became very detail-oriented, and you received emails like "remember that you are not allowed to do the dishes during working hours". It was like they did not trust their employees, that the management felt a great concern that people would freak out and lie on the couch all the time. [...]" (Project leader 3, Company B)</i></p>			
<p><i>"And I also think a frustration arose from many partners that they have not kept track in the same way of where the teams are, and there have been some surprises that have not happened before because you have a better feeling for it on the spot." (Partner 3, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Senior consultants lose control</p>		
<p><i>[...] when you have people who work on different workflows [...] and overlap a little, to get those things and to have a clear dialogue between them has of course been more difficult than when you sit together. In the office, you would tap on the shoulder [...] and discuss. While now, that coordination is even more important for the project leader since he or she has control over input from different people. Everything that behaved a little more organically before and by itself, has of course needed to be formalized and orchestrated more as a project leader. [...]" (Project leader 8, Company A)</i></p>	<p>Project leaders need to orchestrate and coordinate when juniors talk less</p>		
<p><i>[...] I have experienced that the juniors have less interaction with each other than I have with the remaining team members [...]" (Project leader 7, Company A)</i></p>			
<p><i>"I think it has definitely gone down. We work a lot and part of the job is about putting in a lot of time and effort, but you still get a lot out of experiences, [...] events and fun stuff. It has definitely gone down. [...]. As the team itself, I think it is perceived as less satisfying, less fun to go to work, more difficult to deliver to the client [...]" (Project leader 7, Company A)</i></p>	<p>Teamspirit has decreased</p>	<p>Looking into the team: Teamspirit</p>	<p>Teamspirit &amp; Organizational culture</p>
<p><i>"It has been greatly affected. [...] you do not feel the same "we are working towards a common goal" "we are in it together" that you need to keep the motivation. [...] you can not celebrate your wins together. Team dinners are very important where you are turned together and acknowledge what you have done together. [...] precisely considering that you are often so short at the company and it is extremely intensive work which requires counterbalance. It feels like many just experienced these</i></p>			

<p><i>very tough working hours and did not get to take part in the fun. There are many perks to working in these places such as travel and things like that. But it is taken from one and it is clear that it affects team spirit and how you feel about the job and the role.” (Junior 2, Company B)</i></p>	
<p><i>“[...] I think it's directly crucial for people to be able to stay in consulting. The whole thing with consulting is that you give a lot of your time and energy, and then I think it is very important that you feel that you get something back. If you spend all your time awake at work, it will, of course, be very important which people you hang out with and the feeling and togetherness.” (Project leader 3, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Teamspirit is important</p>
<p><i>“Yes, I think that's extremely important. It is important for all organizations, but I think it is extra important for an organization like ours. This is because we work hard and it takes a lot, that is perhaps what sets us apart because we work more than 8 hours a day. If you want to be able to motivate yourself to go the last mile, then there must be something more than just getting paid on the 25th of each month. You have to feel that you are part of something, that you are on your way somewhere and that you are developing yourself. I think you must above all feel that you are part of something, it's not only that I do a slide here and now and then tomorrow comes the next slide, but I am part of building an organization, building knowledge, helping our customers, the whole visionary dimension - I think that's incredibly important to us, in fact, and I think it's suffered.” (Partner 1, Company B)</i></p>	
<p><i>“Great impact on the material itself and work-life balance. The material will not be as good if you do not do it together and the work is not as well connected, but the analysis is more independent and you do not get the overall picture, it is more independent. People feel bad and may spend less time on the task. [...] When a team that does not get a team spirit together and discusses less and helps each other less, it ends up with everyone working more than they should have. It will probably easily be mediocre analyzes, nothing is connected, everything is independent and may not get the quality it otherwise would have been.” (Junior 6, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Lack of or bad teamspirit has negative consequences</p>
<p><i>“Then I do not think you put this little extra that is required in all the projects we do. The projects we do are intense [...] There is always a little stretch in that because they expect us to put in the little extra and then you have to have a good team spirit and have the conditions to create it . It's a bit like that, it's structured. With those benefits and what we have, we will get all the conditions we can for us to thrive at work and want to do a good job.” (Project leader 4, Company B)</i></p>	
<p><i>“Our new employees are super difficult to integrate in a good way.” (Partner 2, Company C)</i></p>	<p>Becoming part of a new team is harder in the virtual setting</p>
<p><i>“I think it's harder to become part of a team at a distance [...] When new people are here, you get to know each other bit by bit but it's harder to establish a collegial relationship. You only see what the other produces, but a worse perception of how the others are as people. [...] those who find it easier to be part of a</i></p>	

<p><i>team have more opportunities to participate in even informal meetings and such.” (Project leader 3, Company B)</i></p>			
<p><i>“I think a lot more is required of the individual. If we take the example of being in a team with a new employee that you have not met physically, that is the most difficult scenario. I mean it is much easier to say that we have lunch or coffee together if you are in the office. If you are at a distance, it gets a little weirder, and you do not do it to the same extent. So I think it takes a lot more of the new individual to try to "join the team" and create their role, rather than being welcomed as you are physically” (Project leader 1, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Who carries the responsibility for welcoming people into the team is not clear</p>		
<p><i>“You will probably be invited [...] Much lies on project leaders and consultants [senior colleagues]. It is more those who invite to the digital interaction ” (Junior 6, Company A)</i></p>			
<p><i>“[The relationship and connection is] by far worse, without a doubt, on all fronts. You do not get to know them, you do not understand them and you do a worse job.” (Junior 7, Company C)</i></p>	<p>Relationship with leaders impacted negatively</p>		
<p><i>“[...] one thing that is lost is usually humor and to appear nice when you give a shitty task. It is easier to communicate such things physically.” (Junior 5, Company C)</i></p>			
<p><i>“If you spend so much of your time at work [...], you must have a job that is fun. [...] The whole thing that you like about the management consulting profession [...] is all these things around, that you have great colleagues where many are now my best friends. That you have the culture we have, e.g. Friday lunch and we eat breakfast on Fridays [...] This was the reason why it became so incredibly boring when the pandemic began. [...] the only thing left was the job. I understand that many quit then. You realized that the job itself may not be so exciting haha.” (Project leader 4, Company B)</i></p>	<p>Organizational culture has worsened because of virtual work</p>	<p>Looking outside the team: Organizational culture</p>	
<p><i>“In general, I think it is difficult to say what our organization does uniquely digitally. I mean, we do more or less exactly the same project as all other consulting companies in Stockholm, so why should I go to company X or Y really? That is probably very difficult to motivate at present. Everyone is sitting in Teams meetings, everyone is trying some boring digital afterwork as well. And you are never in the office and get a positive feeling or eat lunch or eat dinner together. It will be more of a "commodity", I can just as easily work for competitor X. [...] Also, there is nothing that makes any company stand out anymore in "soft values". So what you compare then becomes how much I have to work, what salary I get, what brand it is. Not so much “this is a damn fun bunch that you can sit and work with, and spend many hours with”. [...]” (Project leader 1, Company B)</i></p>			
<p><i>“[...] people are trying to run digital activities, but it's not fun. I had training for a week and [...] it was so boring and cringe. Everyone tries but no one has fun. It's kind of bizarre and ridiculous.” (Junior 4, Company D)</i></p>	<p>Virtual social activities have not been appreciated</p>		

<p>“They tried to bring in some team building stuff, e.g. so you would make a smoothie online, no one thought it was fun so not many people logged in to the meetings” (Junior 1, Company A)</p>			
<p>“You miss these more personal “now we do not work”-conversations when you have lunch or dinner where you get to know people. Even if you have gotten to know people digitally, it would have gone much faster and become in a different way if you were seen physically all the time.” (Project leader 4, Company B)</p>	<p>Spontaneous and informal conversations have disappeared</p>		
<p>“[...] you only talk about the job now, you miss the social part. When you sit in the office, you can sit for an hour and eat dinner and talk about completely different things, which is very important in our industry as well. I think I get a worse picture of my leaders when I work from home because I only see how they want me to work faster and better but I never see that fun side where you talk about what happened this weekend.” (Junior 1, Company A)</p>			
<p>“[...] I think the motivation has been affected negatively and I think it has to do with the togetherness and so on, especially [...] on a junior level. Before corona, it was a bit informal that we played FIFA at 21.00, which still means that you become a little more friends. And then there is also something in that you get to travel, go on kick-off or training, it's still very fun to be able to do that and not just work all the time. [All those things] increase motivation.” (Project leader 5, Company D)</p>	<p>Decreased motivation</p>		
<p>“In the beginning, the motivation got absolutely worse, because you went from 100 to 0.” (Project leader 4, Company B)</p>			
<p>“[...] it has gone from “We” to “Me Me Me”, as people have asked “what's in it for me?” to a larger extent. For example, we match and benchmark salaries to our competitors, and it went from people wanting to do fun things like planning the ski trip, to people saying that competitor X has raised their salaries and they get X SEK in cash for dinner. [...] So to get back to the question, as soon as the togetherness disappears, you become very like this, what do I really do this for? [...]” (Project leader 5, Company D)</p>	<p>Mindset has shifted from being collective to individualistic</p>		
<p>“Another big difference was the working hours. [...] I always felt that the computer was there and you were expected to be available all the time [...]. I remember a partner saying one day “Everyone has to download the Teams app on the phone”. We had never had that before. Before Covid, if you had lunch at the office, you just left the stuff on the desk. Now the expectation was to be available even though I cooked lunch at home. The constant availability is difficult. Everyone is a bunch of insecure overachievers and it's really hard to set boundaries and put your foot down when you still want to perform. It made you never feel really free and I think I worked more anyway.” (Junior 2, Company B)</p>	<p>Personal well-being has been negatively affected</p>	<p>Employee well-being</p>	<p>A psychological perspective</p>

<p>Today I didn't have any lunch break [...] When we work we often sit in rooms together and then it becomes clear who is there and if someone is away you do not wait for an answer. But online you sit all the time waiting for a response. And I think you are expected to be online more at home. [...] It is difficult to disconnect what is work and what is leisure. It contributes to stress because you have to be available in a different way. When I'm at work and not responding, it can take an hour before I respond, but if I know that they know I'm home, I feel I have to respond at once to show that I'm active and producing something. [...] (Junior 3, Company C)</p>			
<p>When I was responsible for a cohort, I noted that especially girls, work without taking breaks, they just continue working. They [...] begin at 9 and just continue working until closing, everything feels very stressful. [...] (Project leader 5, Company D)</p>			
<p>"[...] it's harder to see how people feel, I would say, if you talk about well-being, it's harder because it's not these chit-chats where you can catch that someone feels less motivated or that it does not feel great. In virtual meetings, the mood is often happy-clappy. It is probably a danger that you sit and no one understands that you feel stressed." (Junior A, Company A)</p>	<p>Difficulty of seeing how colleagues feel</p>		
<p>"But also, following up on how everyone feels is important, you do not see how everyone feels at home" (Project leader 3, Company B)</p>			
<p>For me, it has had a super positive effect. [...] I feel that I have time for so much in my everyday life when I get to choose for myself. For example, you have time for a lunch walk with a friend who lives close by, you can be somewhere after work earlier or if you host a dinner in the evening, you can prepare this during lunch. [...] (Junior 8, Company E)</p>	<p>Flexibility is one documented positive aspect to wellbeing</p>		
<p>It has meant greater freedom for our employees, which I have appreciated. For example, I have been able to go to the country house on Thursdays and work from there. (Project leader 7, Company A)</p>			
<p>"[...] I can not really complain about my well-being, many dimensions of virtual work have been very good for me. Instead of doing a lot of travel and hotel nights, I have been home all the time, and it's no problem for me, I live in a house, I have a desk, I have a screen... I do not have better facilities at work than I have at home [...]. And we do not have a giant house, but we can lock ourselves in each room with my wife and children and good broadband and everything, so it works very well. I'm not alone at home either, I have my family as well, so I get physical interaction with people anyway." (Partner 1, Company B)</p>	<p>Older employees have better conditions to work from home such as a larger house or apartment which impacts well-being</p>		
<p>"It became more difficult for juniors who may not have large apartments but sit with their boyfriend or parents than for a partner who has a home office." (Junior 2, Company B)</p>			
<p>"In normal cases, it is easier to jump in and interact in a client meeting and add something significant, but it can be a little harder digitally via Zoom to click on "unmute"</p>	<p>Harder to dare speaking up and a higher</p>	<p>Psychological safety</p>	

<p><i>and have to interrupt your project manager” (Junior 1, Company A)</i></p>	<p>barrier for interrupting project manager</p>		
<p><i>“Yes, a little [poorer psychological safety virtually], and mainly because it is more difficult to get an idea of what others think. It is still the security of daring to say things and dare to be yourself to one hundred percent, which depends to some extent on the fact that you feel accepted and appreciated by others and that is sometimes harder to feel remote, you do not get that feedback” (Junior 9, Company C)</i></p>			
<p><i>“I think you are less likely to admit mistakes at a distance. On the spot, it's easier to make it a common problem. 'We have a problem,' blaming miscommunication and sweeping under the rug, but when it becomes independent, it becomes clearer that you has done wrong and then I do not think they would have wanted to admit it.” (Junior 3, Company C)</i></p>	<p>Higher barrier of reporting mistakes and errors virtually</p>		
<p><i>“I think it's much easier to admit mistakes if I'm sitting next to someone. It's about the feeling of being judged when you do not see the person you are writing to... If I email or write to someone, I have no idea how they will react when they see it.If they are sitting there and just "shit this is the worst I've been through", or if they think it's good respectively if I say it face to face I it was fine or not.” (Junior 7, Company C)</i></p>			