

The Rise of Digital Nomads

A qualitative study about managing digital nomads in corporate structures.

Stockholm School of Economics, Retail Management
Bachelor Thesis
Spring 2023

Authors: Nora Broman & Ellen Iljans
Supervisor: Johan Nilsson

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the risk, opportunities and methods that managers identify as critical when considering managing digital nomads in corporate structures. In order to present an understanding of the role trust plays in a remote work structure. It discusses the importance for managers to build and maintain trust and identifies important methods to achieve it, in order to successfully incorporate digital nomads in companies.

By highlighting the increasing contribution from digital nomads in corporate structures, this thesis problematizes the current lack of experience in managing highly independent remote workers together with the lack of academic research on the area. Therefore, a qualitative study with Swedish managers is carried out to deepen the understanding about how managers reason around remote work structures, with a specific focus on digital nomads. By these insights, this thesis identifies opportunities connected to becoming an attractive employer, attracting employees and prioritizing employee health, and identifies risks as difficulties in building close relationships, challenges finding a clear structure and issues related to policies. Further, the insights provide an understanding of important methods related to trust, as having an open-minded leadership style, providing regular check-ins, offering face-to-face interactions, and using cloud-based applications. This provides an understanding of the importance of reaching the second stage of trust in order to rely more on cultural controls when providing remote work opportunities. The conclusions from this thesis will help provide guidance to how managers can be the leading employers of the future.

Keywords: digital nomads, digital nomads in corporate structures, leading digital nomads, digital nomads and trust, remote structure, remote work, trust in remote work, management controls in remote work.

1. Introduction	1
1.2 Focus and delimitations	3
1.3 Purpose and research question	3
2. Theoretical Framework	4
2.1 Digital nomads	4
2.1.1 Digital nomads in corporate structures	5
2.1.2 Leading digital nomads	7
2.2 Trust	7
2.2.1 Trust in virtual teams	8
2.3 Research gap	9
3. Conceptual Framework	10
3.1 Three stages of trust	10
3.2. Management controls	11
4. Methodology	11
4.1 Research method	12
4.1.1 Research approach	12
4.2 Pre-study	13
4.2.1 Literature review	13
4.2.2 In-depth interviews	13
4.3 Main Study	14
4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews	14
4.3.2 Choice of participants	15
4.3.3 Analysis method	17
4.3.3.1 Audio-recording, transcribing, coding and searching for themes	17
4.4 Methodology criticism	19
5. Findings	19
5.1 A remote work spectrum	20

5.2 Attitude towards digital nomads	21
5.2.1 The current opportunities	21
5.2.2 Trusting digital nomads	23
5.2.3 Future prospects	25
5.3 Risks with employing digital nomads	26
5.3.1 Difficulties in building close relationships	26
5.3.2 Challenges finding a clear structure	27
5.3.3. Issues related to policies	28
5.4 Work methods to establish and maintain trust with digital nomads	29
5.4.1 An open-minded leadership style	29
5.4.2 Regular check-ins	30
5.4.3 Offering face-to-face interactions	32
5.4.4 Cloud-based applications	33
6. Discussion	34
6.1 Second stage of trust - a minimum level for a functioning remote structure	35
6.2 Managing digital nomads with trust	37
6.2.1 Task based trust-building methods	38
6.2.2 Social bonding activities	39
7. Conclusion	41
Limitations	43
Future research	44
References	45
Appendix	48
Appendix 1: Companies with digital nomad positions	48
Appendix 2: Companies that do not offer digital nomad positions	49
Appendix 3: Digital nomads	50

1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the issue of managing remote work with a focus on digital nomads. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies all over the world were forced to offer digital solutions, allowing their employees to work from home to comply with governmental restrictions. This global radical change in work-structures caused a permanent shift in the way that corporate structures are expected to look in the future as the employee expectations shifted. Employees' expectations about becoming more remote grew and awareness grew around the concept of digital nomads (Dhaliwal, 2020). Therefore, for companies to stay relevant as an employer they need to meet the new expectations, which makes managing remote work and especially the digital nomad a highly important area to research.

A digital nomad is characterized by not being tied to any geographical place or time frame, making them a highly independent type of remote worker (Hannonen, 2020). They can be separated from other remote workers as they are unique for their motivations to actively seek out new locations and experiences. Further, they prioritize flexibility, freedom, and autonomy in their work and lifestyle choices, in hopes of achieving reduced stress in both their professional and personal life (Kong et al., 2019). Looking at numbers from the US, being the leading nation in offering digital nomad positions, the number of digital nomads recorded at the end of 2022 had increased by roughly 130% compared to 2019. Going from 7.3 million to 16.9 million digital nomads in only 3 years (Lopez, 2022). The increasing number of digital nomads keeps its strong trend into the future with a forecast that 1 billion digital nomads will be employed in 2035. The statistics clearly identifies a movement within the workforce towards becoming digital nomads, where employees want to manage their own schedule and work from anywhere around the world. This rapid increase points to the importance for leaders to find functioning methods to manage these employees in the best way possible, as it could be identified that it will cause a shift in the way that managers lead their virtual teams (Malik, 2019). The managers need to approach the shift correctly and find methods and strategies that help them capture the opportunities that digital nomads bring.

Despite the increasing number of digital nomads, it is identified that the subject of managing digital nomads lacks academic research. Currently, there is extensive research on remote work and how to manage virtual teams, however this research lacks the perspective of a digital nomad which is a highly independent remote worker, making much of the findings insufficient. This, as many of the managerial methods found assume closer collaborations among the remote workers, which is an aspect that is limited in a digital nomad setting due to their geographical independence. This implies that many managers are left to blindly lead their highly remote teams, hoping for their methods to be successful. However, exploring without properly understanding the underlying characteristics of the leadership tools useful for managing remote workers constitutes a huge risk for companies and even makes many companies resistant to develop their remote offers even further. Both which are identified as harmful for the companies in the long run.

Today many Swedish managers are highly reluctant to employ digital nomads. This thesis finds that the most common reluctance refers to the fear of losing control and supervision of employees. From the pre-study it became evident that this could be connected to a lack of trust towards highly remote workers, that seemed to have emerged during the years of the pandemic. The lack of trust is found to arise from unfitting methods to lead these employees and from managers holding onto conservative leadership styles, causing a mentality issue. It becomes evident that managers lack the right tools to create and sustain trust in highly virtual teams, which creates a negative attitude towards the incorporation of digital nomads. Hence, the current tension lies in that managers have been taught methods that are proven to work well with a smaller remoteness in their teams, however these methods are not applicable when incorporating highly remote employees, which limits the growth of the digital nomad. This tension creates a need to explore what managerial methods are appropriate in order to build and sustain trust between managers and digital nomads.

Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the risks, opportunities and methods that are identified as important by Swedish managers, in order to inform the understanding of trust in a remote work setting. This, in order to help managers feel confident when developing their remote offers even further and to meet the existing rising demand of being a digital nomad. This thesis will

contribute to both the academic- and the practical world. Both adding the perspective of a highly independent remote worker, the digital nomad, to the previous research on remote work, while also highlighting the importance of building trust with digital nomads in a corporate setting to guide managers into becoming leading employers of the future. Understanding how to successfully manage digital nomads will serve as a resource to understand how to tackle difficulties in creating trust for remote workers on all levels, and how managers can reason around the structure of remote work. The issue has been researched by interviewing managers at Spotify, Svensk Handel, Volvo, Handelsbanken, Svenska Spel, PwC Assurance, Mastercard, Taco Tech, and two digital nomads.

1.2 Focus and delimitations

Due to the rapidly increasing employee interest in becoming a digital nomad, this thesis focuses on the aspect of managing digital nomads in order to provide companies with an understanding of how to effectively lead these new virtual teams. As digital nomads represent a highly independent remote worker, the findings of this thesis can be applicable to managing any level of remote worker, since the possibility of a closer collaboration will make the findings of this thesis even more effective. As the current tension identified lies within the aspect of trust, this perspective will be applied in the research in order to create a clear and applicable conclusion. The research of this thesis draws on interviews with Swedish companies, offering insight into a unique situation where digital nomads are not yet incorporated and therefore many speculations exist on how to successfully enable the development of corporate structures.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to guide managers in Sweden on how to successfully manage digital nomads. Successfully enabling this would make them a more attractive employer with more effective employees. The purpose is achieved by answering the two research questions below:

What risks, opportunities and methods do Swedish managers identify in working with digital nomads in a corporate setting?

How do Swedish managerial insights inform our understanding of trust in remote work settings?

2. Theoretical Framework

To conduct further research within the field of digital nomads, both conceptually and in the context of managing them in corporate structures, it is crucial to understand and categorize the current academic landscape. As this thesis aims to describe how to build trust between managers and digital nomads in corporate structures, previous literature is examined and discussed within this area. The areas include digital nomads, digital nomads in corporate structures, trust, and trust in virtual teams. As the issue of managing digital nomads has only been researched to a limited extent, the information for the trust pillar is drawn from research on remote work. All pillars are important to consider as they build an understanding of crucial building blocks for managing digital nomads. By the primary use academic research from a variety of journals, as well as relevant information from articles and previous reports in areas where the academic research is lacking, the pre-study concludes a steady foundation of the digital nomad situation today. The current research of digital nomads and the research of trust in virtual teams become two important pillars for the understanding of managing digital nomads, which this thesis aims to bridge.

2.1 Digital nomads

The first pillar which is important to understand is digital nomads and their role in a corporate setting. As a research category digital nomads have only appeared in academic papers during the last decade, however, it is now growing all over the world. As the research on digital nomads is in an early phase, an exact definition of the term tends to vary across research papers. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis the term digital nomad explains *“a category of professionals, who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, utilizing digital technologies”*. They have a location-independent lifestyle which allows them to travel to new places frequently, but with the constraints of a stable internet connection (Hannonen, 2020).

To separate between remote workers and digital nomads, the digital nomad is not tied to any geographical place or time frame, making them a highly independent remote worker. Digital nomads are individuals who actively seek out new locations and experiences, and who prioritize flexibility, freedom, and autonomy in their work and lifestyle choices (Kong et al., 2019). Motivators behind seeking the life as a digital nomad are found to be many. The most predominant ones are to gain full control over your work-tasks and the weight distribution of your work, being free to travel and explore different cultures and landscapes, and the possibility of personal development (Reichenberger, 2017). Digital nomads are characterized by seeking reduced stress in both their professional and personal life (Kong et al., 2019).

The rapid growth of digital nomads can be explained by socio-political factors, among others, but not limited to globalization, individualization, wireless communication technologies and increased interest in flexible working lives (Hannonen, 2020). Previous studies from the US show that young adults have the largest interest in being a digital nomad, as they thirst for professional freedom and control over their own time and place (Frey, 2013; Pofeldt, 2016). This is further shown in a study conducted by Forbes, a global media company, that found that 47 percent of the Millennials workforce were freelancing, while only 28 percent of working Baby Boomers were doing the same. Therefore, with the emerging workers from Generation Z this number is expected to grow even further (Pofeldt, 2016). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a large effect on the speed in which digital nomads grew in popularity. Between 2019 and 2020 there was a 49 percent increase in digital nomads in the US alone, and after the pandemic in 2022 digital nomads had increased by a total of 130 percent (MBO Partners, 2020).

2.1.1 Digital nomads in corporate structures

Today managers stand at a crossroad, as they either choose to develop along with the inevitable change toward digitalism or choose to resist and ultimately stagnate in their positioning on the market. The first, being the most common, is where digital nomads have the chance of entering into corporate structure (Frick & Marx, 2021). As digital nomads enter into corporate structures, they in most situations become part of global virtual teams. A global virtual team is defined as a

nationally, linguistically, and culturally diverse remote work group. In general, these teams coordinate their work activities through the use of information and communication technologies (Zander et al., 2013).

Integrating digital nomads into corporate structures, and into global virtual teams, does not only require an alteration of technological tools but rather a whole shift in management practices. In general, it requires managers to offer and promote flexible work arrangements, provide access to technology and communication tools, and establish clear expectations for performance and communication. Trusting the digital nomad is a prerequisite for this (Frick & Marx, 2021).

As incorporating digital nomads into corporate structures conflicting values between them and the corporate managers have been found (Frick & Marx, 2021). Further, it is found that digital nomads are faced with institutional barriers as they attempt to become integrated in the corporate structure. These institutional barriers include existing cultural norms, strict power dynamics, and organizational policies. All barriers show to arise from the lack of trust, both trust from the manager and from the nomad. This barrier has been found to appear in situations where there are no routines for check-ins or updates, or when there is a lack of communication between the two parties (Kong et al., 2019). Additionally it has been found to arise in situations where there is a misalignment of values (Fick and Marx, 2021). All this risks limiting digital nomads' ability to successfully cooperate with the corporate system (Kong et al., 2019).

Therefore, to accommodate the increase of digital nomads, managerial actions are needed. It is important that managers understand digital nomads' motivations and values (Hannonen, 2020). The main motivations and values center around trust and respect. This includes both that digital nomads feel trusted and that they have a feeling of trust towards the management, and that the management is transparent and supportive when needed. Further, it is shown that managers need to actively collaborate with digital nomads to mitigate the barriers mentioned above (Kong et al., 2019).

2.1.2 Leading digital nomads

As discussing about leading digital nomads in corporate structures, two management styles have appeared which are ‘micromanaging’ and ‘managing by delegating’. A micromanager closely monitors and controls every aspect of an employee's work, often to the point of being overly involved and interfering with the employee's ability to do their job effectively (Kilber et al., 2014). They tend to be excessively focused on details and lack trust in their employees to do their work without constant supervision and direction (Kilber et al., 2014). On the other hand, managing by delegating is a management style in which a manager assigns tasks and responsibilities to employees and gives them the freedom to work independently, with the understanding that they will be held accountable for their performance (Drescher, 2017). Managers who delegate effectively provide clear guidance, set expectations, and provide the necessary resources and support to enable employees to succeed (Drescher, 2017). Studies by MBO Partners (2018) and Howington (2018) argues that the topic on how to successfully manage remote workers is important for the industry to explore. The first mentioned identifies effective delegation as one of the key factors in successfully managing remote workers, indicating that it makes remote workers feel engaged, productive, and connected to the company culture without having to tell them they should (MBO Partners, 2018). While the latter highlights that remote workers who are trusted to work independently and are given clear expectations and goals are more likely to be satisfied and productive in their jobs (Howington, 2018).

From the theory, it becomes evident that micromanaging can be counterproductive when managing digital nomads, while effective delegation can be an important tool for managers to help their remote workers succeed. By providing clear guidance and expectations, along with the necessary resources and support, managers can help remote workers feel engaged and productive while also respecting their desire for autonomy and flexibility.

2.2 Trust

The second pillar which is important to understand is trust and its role in enabling virtual teams to function successfully. Trust is a wide concept and used in many different situations which

leads to that the definition tends to vary. For this thesis, trust will be defined as *"a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both before he can monitor such action (or independently of his capacity ever to be able to monitor it) and in a context in which it affects his own action"* (Gambetta, 2000). More simplified, trust involves a belief or expectation that another person or group will behave in a certain way, even when there is some degree of uncertainty or risk involved.

2.2.1 Trust in virtual teams

As trust is found to behave differently in virtual settings, this is explored extensively below. The strong growth in web-mediated organizational relationships, in which digital nomads is an example, has created an increased interest on how to manage virtual teams successfully (Zander et al., 2013). The degree of virtuality in teams varies across organizations, projects and specific teams, however the research is united in that it is here to stay in the future (Ford et al., 2017). However, as technologies improve, become more reliable and available, many leaders forget about the social challenges that need to be addressed in order to successfully lead a virtual team (Zander et al., 2013). Literature states that to be an effective leader one must ensure that they build trustworthy relationships with their employees, and therefore all leadership strategies in a virtual team should contribute to building and sustaining a climate of trust (Ford et al., 2017).

However, establishing trust in virtual teams has shown to be complicated for many reasons. Conventional wisdom assumes that trust develops from a history of interpersonal interactions and communications, which to a large extent is limited in virtual teams (Greenberg, 2007). For example, interactions in the hallway before a meeting starts, as a social bonding activity is missed out (Zander et al., 2013). Studies have additionally shown that the level of trust is impacted by employees' ability to observe what the whole team is doing (Ford et al., 2017). As members in a virtual team never meet in person, they have no ability to observe, no past to build on nor a future to reference (Ford et al., 2017 and Greenberg, 2007). Additionally, virtual teams that are global are usually characterized by time zone and geographic distance that further complicates the absence of face-to-face interactions (Zander et al., 2013). Therefore, developing

relationships and a social and professional respect, which is a prerequisite for building trust, is hard for virtual teams (Zander et al., 2013). This requires managers to find new alternative ways to establish trust among the team (Greenberg, 2007).

The previous research on how to build trust in virtual teams has been examined. As trust can take many forms, often depending on which stage the team exists in, it is described that different actions are required in different stages. However, in general to be effective in building trust in virtual teams the leader needs to enhance the members perceived belongingness to a social group. There is a need to facilitate experiences that encourage social conversation that allows for deeper interface and interdependence (Zander et al., 2013; Greenberg 2007, and Ford et al., 2017). Inventing ways that allow for transparency in the team is therefore seen as critical (Zander et al., 2013). Thus, this would enhance the remote team members perception of being recognized and valued (Ford et al., 2017).

2.3 Research gap

Overall, current research about digital nomads, trust, and the world of virtual teams highlight the need for further understanding of the methods that are important to create a strong feeling of trust between managers and digital nomads. To effectively lead virtual teams and integrate digital nomads into corporate structures it is, in one perspective, important to understand the motivators and needs of digital nomads (Hannonen, 2020). In another perspective, it is equally important that managers develop a thorough understanding of the managerial methods to build trust throughout the employment journey. Organizations need to address institutional barriers and promote a culture of balance where they can offer flexibility and independence while still nurturing close relationships to and between all its employees (Kong et al., 2019).

So far, research has found that managing digital nomads requires a shift in management practices (Frick & Marx, 2021), however no specific methods have been identified. Further, research about how to build trust in virtual teams on a general level has been conducted, but is lacking specific connections to digital nomads. Thus, it is evident that there is no bridge between the two pillars that provides a clear guideline on the management practices required to build trust with digital

nomads. Therefore, the findings of this thesis bridges the research gap and helps complete the picture in understanding the future of leading digital nomads.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework identifies tools that are critical for the further understanding of this thesis. First, the ‘three stages of trust’ model, outlined by Slack and Lewis (2015) is presented. It helps identify how trust behaves and affects relationships in different stages that a virtual team experiences. Secondly, three management controls, outlined by Merchant and Van der Steede (2017), will be presented as an additional useful tool. It helps identify the different types of controls that a manager can infer within its team, which help understand the managerial findings.

3.1 Three stages of trust

The ‘three stages of trust’ model, developed by Slack and Lewis (2015), identifies three general stages of trust and the factors that characterize them. The first level of trust is called calculative trust and is bare minimum. In this stage, the two parties do not have a close relationship and the trust that exists is purely based on facts, knowledge and rational reasoning. The second level of trust is called cognitive trust and occurs as the parties have established a closer relationship. It is based on a mixture of knowledge and emotions that have developed as more positive experiences have been shared where the parties have learned about the traits and interests of the other party. Lastly, the third level of trust is called bonding trust. This level of trust is achieved between two parties when the relationship is close and when no reassurance is needed as they have shared a large number of positive experiences. Both sides feel confident that one will do what's best for the other, as they see each other as being in the same group, sharing goals and values. At this stage, there is a high degree of closeness, and the trust is solely based on emotional reasoning. From the ‘three stages of trust’ model it becomes apparent that certain managerial methods are necessary in order to reach the later stages of trust, which is important to consider as managing digital nomads.

3.2. Management controls

Merchant and Van der Steede (2017) describes three important management controls as result controls, action controls, and cultural controls, which are all used by managers to ensure that employees' work is done properly. The methods are described to be used in parallel with working on trust, and specifically, the controls decline in intensity as a higher level of trust is built.

Results controls are used to measure and evaluate an employee's performance based on the results they achieve. The control provides a clear and objective way to measure an employee's performance, however, it only measures the achieved results, rather than including how the employee achieved this. Further, action controls are used to ensure that employees follow specific procedures or actions. It provides clear guidelines for how work should be done, which leads to consistent and high-quality results, however, it is rigid and disrupts creativity and innovation. In connection with trust, both controls are often used when a lower level of trust is present. Lastly, cultural controls are used to create a work environment that promotes the desired behavior and values. This can shape employee behavior and create a positive work culture, however, it may take a long time to implement and is not effective if employees do not share the same values and goals. In order for managers to rely on this control a high level of trust needs to be present. To conclude, each of these controls has its own advantages and disadvantages and depending on the level of trust, a manager can adopt a combination of the controls to reflect the organization's goals and culture.

4. Methodology

To answer the research questions of the study a qualitative method and an abductive research approach has been used. Specifically, a two-step process, including a pre-study and a main study, has been used in order to collect all the relevant data for the subject. The research method, research approach, pre-study, main study and lastly a methodology criticism will be described in depth below.

4.1 Research method

A qualitative research method has been used in order to successfully answer the research question of this thesis, more specifically this was executed in the form of in depth interviews. A qualitative research method involves collecting data that is non-numerical, for example text or audio, to understand a specific concept, experience or opinion. The method is often used in situations concerned with developing a deeper understanding of a concept and its relations to other variables, which is then used to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution (Saunders et al., 2019). For this thesis, it was first used to understand how managers approach the issue of trust between themselves and their employees, to in a second step understand the actions taken to build and maintain the trust. All with a specific focus on a context of flexible corporate structures, that would allow us to draw conclusions on how to manage trust in a digital nomad context. A qualitative method was deemed appropriate as it allows the starting point of the study to center around the participant's perspective and around what they perceive important and significant. Further, it generates a deeper understanding of behaviors, values and opinions which are all critical aspects for the study (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

4.1.1 Research approach

An abductive research approach has been used for this thesis, which describes a reasoning that begins with an unexpected observation as the conclusion. Based on the conclusion, a set of possible sufficient or nearly sufficient premises is determined to explain the conclusion. As the approach assumes that the premises are accurate it can be inferred that the conclusion is also valid (Saunders et al., 2019). For this thesis, the issue regarding lack of trust when managing remote workers became an unexpected observation. Therefore, combined perspectives of trust and managerial methods matched with managerial insights were identified to provide clarity on the issue of trusting remote workers.

4.2 Pre-study

The first step in the data collection process started with a pre-study. An essential step to clearly identify what has been researched on the subject before and to test the digital nomad concept in a corporate situation. An important step before defining a specific angle to the theme. The pre-study consisted of two steps, a literature review and two in-depth interviews, which will both be described thoroughly below.

4.2.1 Literature review

To understand the concept of digital nomads and their relation to corporate structures, the pre-study started with a literature review based on the most relevant previous academic papers. A literature review can be described as a less systematic way of collecting and combining previous research (Snyder, 2019). The materials for the literature review were collected from a broad variety of journals, and in cases where articles from journals were lacking, grey literature was also used. For the literature review conducted it became evident that the subject of digital nomads in corporate structures is limited. An identified reason for this is that the concept of a digital nomad is somewhat undiscovered as it became a research category only during the last decades, with an acceleration during the last years (Hannonen, 2020). To deal with this, research on remote workers was also addressed. The literature review managed to identify gaps in the current research, some of which will be addressed in this thesis. Identifying literature gaps is described as a critical component for building conceptual models and creating theoretical frameworks (Snyder, 2019). Further, as the previous research for the area has been limited, a high credibility of the previous studies and their findings have not been assured. To deal with this, this thesis will test and expand on the previous research findings. This is done to ensure a high credibility of the findings of this thesis.

4.2.2 In-depth interviews

As a second step in the pre-study two in-depth interviews were conducted to bridge theory with empiricism. One digital nomad and one manager were contacted and asked to share their

thoughts on the subject of digital nomads in corporate structures. The interviewees are held anonymous to protect their personal identity. In-depth interviews are informal and can be used for many purposes but in this thesis it was used to deeply explore and understand the area of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2017). This technique does not use predetermined or scripted themes to guide the interview, instead it is totally exploratory and emergent (Saunders et al., 2019). The interviews followed a convergent interview structure where the interviewee was first given the opportunity to talk freely about the subject but later more specific and focused probing questions were used. The structure was chosen in order to first gain general insights of the area but then to test the emerging theory that was found in the initial interview stage (Bryman & Bell, 2017 ; Saunders et al., 2019). However, a quick focus on particular issues, which this approach leads to, may limit the scope of the research project, or possibly lead to bias and affect the generalisability of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, this type of interview approach was only used during the exploratory stage and later complemented with semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews will be described further in relation to the main study phase.

4.3 Main Study

The second step in the data collection process is the main study. The step which will help answer both thesis questions. The main-study consisted of semi-structured interviews, which will be described more below.

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

All interviews conducted in the main study followed a semi-structured interview technique. A semi-structured interview is a kind of non-standardised interview technique, which implies that a predetermined list of themes and key questions are constructed and used to guide each interview (Saunders et al., 2019). The themes explored were trust between managers and remote workers (sometimes full digital nomads), discussed in relation to risks, opportunities, methods, and critical actions. For all three interview-groups, separate interview-guides was constructed to touch upon these themes (see Appendix 1, Appendix 2, and Appendix 3). This method allowed the study to have a larger freedom, for example changing the order of questions and asking

follow-up questions, which is crucial to extract all relevant knowledge from the interviewees. Further, the method gave the interviewees freedom to answer the questions in the way they deemed relevant (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

As the concept of digital nomads is quite unexplored in Swedish corporate settings, most managers in the semi-structured interviews spoke about digital nomads on a hypothetical level. The hypothetical nature of the interviews are used as an opportunity to provide guidance for Swedish companies to incorporate digital nomads. However, worth noticing is that the interviewees only spoke on a hypothetical level as addressing questions about digital nomads, not when discussing the aspect of trust and the methods that are applied for remote workers today. Despite this, using interviews in a field that has not yet been widely discussed can be valuable as it allows for exploration of perspectives around how managers will act in the future. Since managers' beliefs about the future can affect their future behaviors.

4.3.2 Choice of participants

For this thesis, a few digital nomads and a broad variety of companies were selected to be interviewed. The companies vary largely in the level of flexibility they offer to their employees. The reasoning behind including companies with a variety of flexibility is partly due to the limited number of firms in Sweden currently employing digital nomads and partly from understanding that insights from all manager experiences in these companies will be valuable in order to reach solutions to the research questions, regardless of remote level, it was deemed necessary to include all levels.

In total eight interviews were held with managers from a variety of companies and sectors, while two interviews were held with digital nomads. All interviews were held digitally and varied between 20-35 minutes. All manager interviewees possessed high-ranking positions in their companies, and all of them had a mid- or high manager role, which enabled us to gain credible expertise. For all, offering job positions to digital nomads had been discussed before, but for some more than others. Their identities will be held anonymous due to ethical considerations, however, the companies, together with a general description of the interviewee position, will be

described. The managers will be characterized with a letter, e.g., Respondent A, while the digital nomads will be characterized with a number, e.g., Digital Nomad 1. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Interview participants

Respondent	Company	Position description	Industry experience	Date & duration
Respondent A	TacoTech	Business manager	7 years	17/02-2023 ; 23:24 min
Respondent B	Handelsbanken	HR manager	n.a.	20/02-2023 ; 20:01 min
Respondent C	Volvo	HR manager	21 years	24/02-2023 ; 25:27 min
Respondent D	Spotify	Strategy manager	6 years	24/02-2023 ; 27:28 min
Respondent E	Svenska Spel	HR manager	10 years	27/02-2023 ; 20:58 min
Respondent F	PwC Assurance	Senior team leader	n.a.	03/04-2023 ; 32:09 min
Respondent G	Mastercard	HR manager	8 years	03/04-2023 ; 30:03 min
Respondent H	PwC Assurance	Team leader	6 years	05/04-2023 ; 23:03 min
Digital Nomad 1	Digital Nomad	Full-time employed	> 1 year	27/02-2023 ; 19:53 min
Digital Nomad 2	Digital Nomad	Consultant	> 1 year	27/02-2023 ; 27:32 min

The selection method for the participants refers to a target-driven sample (Bryman & Bell, 2017). On one hand, companies that had a more limited approach to flexible job positions were chosen on the basis that they would contribute with insights about the obstacles that they saw with allowing this. On the other hand, companies which to a large extent offered flexible job positions were selected on the basis that they would provide specific methods that they had used to build and maintain trust with these workers. This allows the study to connect the methods to the obstacles found in the first sample. Lastly, digital nomads were chosen to give their view of the question and to back up what the companies said.

In an initial stage, a limited number of department managers of relevant companies were contacted. Further, throughout the interviews new relevant people and companies of interest were recommended, who were then contacted and booked. This refers to a snowball sampling, which implies that the initial contacts are used to generate further contacts (Bryman & Bell, 2017). This method is commonly used when it is hard to initially identify people of relevance, as the case for this thesis. By using this selection method, relevant people with the right expertise have been able to participate in the study, which has contributed with valuable insights (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.3.3 Analysis method

To analyze the qualitative data generated from all the interviews, a thematic analysis was used. A thematic analysis is described as a foundational method for analyzing data from qualitative studies, which highlights its relevance of adopting it for this thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). The main purpose of thematic analysis includes to search for themes and patterns that occur across the data. This method offers a systematic, yet flexible and accessible approach to analyze the data, as it is logical but allows for rich descriptions, explanations and theorizing (Saunders et al., 2019). The method was mainly used to integrate related data drawn from different transcripts in order to draw and verify conclusions.

4.3.3.1 Audio-recording, transcribing, coding and searching for themes

All interviews conducted in the main-study phase were recorded, as approved by the participants. Audio-recording can enhance the understanding of the interviewees explanations and meanings as it allows for listening to the conversation multiple times (Saunders et al., 2019). Further, it allows the interviewers to concentrate on listening and questioning while reducing the chances of mixing up data from interviews positioned close in time, both critical aspects in order to ensure a high trustworthiness (Bryman & Bell, 2017 and Saunders et al., 2019).

Further, the data was transcribed directly after each interview, that is, reproduced verbatim as word-processed accounts (Saunders et al., 2019). This is an important first step in the thematic analysis process in order to familiarize with the data. As transcribing is a very time-consuming task it was divided between both thesis authors to ensure a high accuracy and to ensure minimal loss of information. This is deemed a necessary step in order to analyze the data with high credibility as it reduces the risk of misinterpretation and allows for a fair picture of the recorded material. It helps to understand not only what has been said but also how it has been delivered (Bryman & Bell, 2017 and Saunders et al., 2019).

Then, to categorize the data with similar meaning, coding was conducted. It involves labeling each unit of data within the transcript with a code that summarizes the extract's meaning. Coding is an important second step in thematic analysis and used to manage the data to enable further analysis on groups with similar codings (Saunders et al., 2019). It is a useful tool as qualitative data often is large and complex (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In this thesis, color-coding was used, which refers to the different themes being coded into different colors. This is a common and simple approach often used in combination with a thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). In total, six colors were used to code all relevant data generated from the interviews, as shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Color coding scheme

Color	Theme
Green	Information about the company today.
Purple	The company's attitude toward digital nomads, including future visions.
Red	Identified problems with remote workers, with emphasis on digital nomads.
Blue	Identified opportunities with remote workers, with emphasis on digital nomads.
Pink	The trust aspect, the company's view and in relation to digital nomads.
Yellow	Managerial methods used for remote workers today.

Additionally, as a third step in the thematic analysis, patterns and relationships were searched for. The list of codes created in the step above were categorized into a shorter list of themes that could be directly related to the thesis questions. A theme is described as a broad category that

incorporates several codes that are in some way related to one another, and that concludes an idea that is important for the research question (Saunders et al., 2019). Further, as a last step in the thematic analysis, the themes were refined which concluded the main themes of this thesis: attitude towards digital nomads, risks with employing digital nomads, and work methods to establish and maintain trust with digital nomads.

4.4 Methodology criticism

As semi-structured interviews, with a smaller number of respondents, are used to conclude the findings of this thesis, limitations can be identified. The research neither represents a fully global perspective nor represents the total Swedish market as there is a lack of sectors as well as companies. Further, the study is limited to companies that allow for some level of flexibility which additionally causes limitations as the companies are chosen intentionally.

A general issue with using qualitative research methods is that it is difficult to generalize beyond the situation in which it is produced, meaning that the respondents in the study cannot fully represent a population (Bryman & Bell, 2017 and Saunders et al., 2019). Because of this, this thesis focuses on generalizing towards theory instead of towards a population. Another issue with the qualitative research method is the lack of objectivity, meaning that there is a risk of bias occurring (Bryman & Bell, 2017 and Saunders et al., 2019). This means that the qualitative results are based on the researchers' often unsystematic perceptions of what is important and significant, meaning that it can be hard to understand why a specific team was chosen over another (Saunders et al., 2019). To deal with the above, the themes identified are based on unanimous reflections from the respondents. This means that themes were not chosen based on one convincing argument but rather based on topics that were discussed by all participants.

5. Findings

The following section will present perspectives discussed by the managers and digital nomads interviewed as four themes: a remote work spectrum, attitude towards digital nomads, risks with

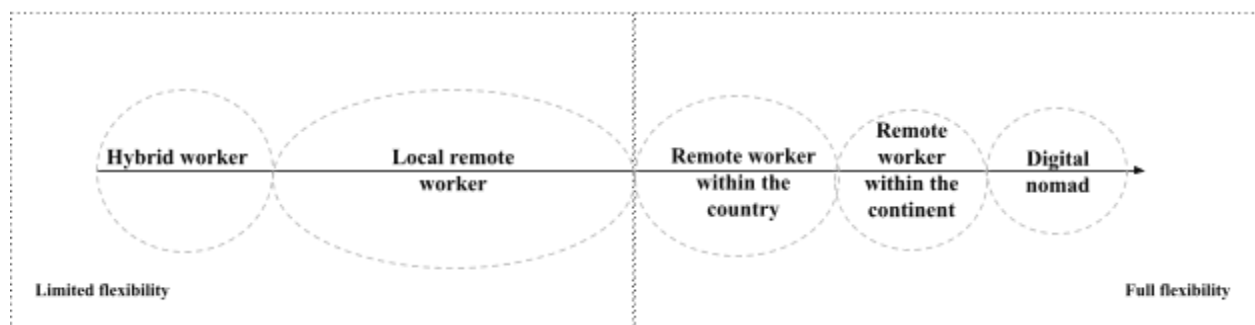
employing digital nomads, and work methods to establish and maintain trust with digital nomads.

5.1 A remote work spectrum

The concept of digital nomads, as defined in the theoretical framework, is a highly independent type of remote worker. However, it has been found that there is a lack of digital nomads employed in Swedish-based companies today which means that it is, for the purpose of this thesis, necessary to create a remote work spectrum as presented in Figure 3.

The remote work spectrum, which is based on the managers conclusions, identifies the different types of remote workers and their level of flexibility. Specifically, the spectrum shows that digital nomads are a type of remote worker, however they are characterized by being more flexible and independent, both with regards to time frame and geographical place. Therefore, as this thesis focuses on the most independent form of remote worker, the remote worker to the far right, it becomes evident that the findings of this thesis may be applied throughout the whole spectrum as less flexible companies still benefit from the insights. In other words, the insights could be adopted to all flexibility levels which strengthens the relevance of the findings for companies offering any type of remote work structure.

Figure 3: Remote work spectrum



The 5 levels of remote workers identified in the spectrum are defined based on conclusions from the interviews. Firstly, the least flexible form of remote work is referred to as 'hybrid workers'. These workers are given the freedom to work from home a certain number of days a week,

allowing the employee to have some flexibility in the structure of their work days. Secondly, the 'local remote worker' is positioned on the right of the 'hybrid worker'. These workers are characterized by working full-time from home, but with a close collaboration and dependence on their team. They have some control over the scheduling and time management but are still reachable if needed in the office. Third on the spectrum, entering the more flexible side, is 'remote workers within the country'. They are geographically bound within the borders of the nation and have full control over their schedule. This level of remote worker is very close to the fourth level, the ones who are geographically independent within the borders of the continent and referred to as 'remote worker within the continent'. They're both free to travel and visit places while working according to their own schedule, but are restricted by tax law and insurance policies. Lastly, digital nomads are the most independent form of remote workers that have been identified in this research. They also have full control over their schedule but are not restricted to any geographical place.

5.2 Attitude towards digital nomads

Through the interviews it is found that the general attitude towards digital nomads is positive, and for the future the majority sees them as an established type of employee. However, many reflections are based on a hypothetical perspective, which generally shows that the incorporation of digital nomads into Swedish-based companies is limited in the near future. The respondents' thoughts have been characterized and the following section have been structured accordingly. Three areas have been identified: the current opportunities, trusting digital nomads, and future prospects, which will all be described more in-depth below.

5.2.1 The current opportunities

The interviews reveal that the majority of respondents are familiar with the concept of digital nomads and that the attitude towards them in today's corporate environment is positive. On the one hand, some managers describe that they only offer digital opportunities within certain roles and in certain situations which points to a lower flexibility in their job arrangements. This positions them on the left side of the spectrum. However, despite their lower level of flexibility,

they all see similar opportunities in offering more remote job positions, including the possibility of acquiring higher talents, offering people simpler lives, and not forcing employees to spend a large amount of time on traveling. Respondent B states that:

That level of independence (digital nomads) is not offered in our current structure. We have said that we do offer flexibility but only based on operational requirements in our sector and decisions made by our management department (in cooperation with employees).

Further, they state that the development of their current hybrid model is discussed to a large extent, as they want to offer a better balance between being remote and coming to the office. It is described that they value the cultural strengths that develop when employees come to the office but also see the opportunities with offering remote work some days of the week. Gaining employee satisfaction, attraction of the job market, as well as maximizing productivity and creativity are further arguments brought up to support the hybrid solution.

On the other hand, the other managers currently strive to be as flexible as they can with their employees, which positions them on the right side of the spectrum. They all argue for the opportunities that it brings, where acquiring and keeping employee talent is found to be the main opportunity. Respondent A explains that:

[...] If an employee wants to work remotely, they should of course be allowed to do so. I believe that the employer should fulfill their dreams of traveling, and if we can keep a valuable resource at the same time, we will offer that possibility.

It is described that adapting the work arrangements to keep employees is crucial for companies' long run survival. Additionally, becoming a more modern and attractive workplace, especially considering the improved life quality for employees, is another strong argument. Specifically, Respondent E describes that their employees expressed interest in using the office for social purposes while their job tasks were preferred to be done from home, and therefore action towards this claim was taken. Moreover, from the respondents on the right side of the spectrum, two approaches have been identified when discussing how to manage remote workers, a learning-by-doing style, and a more proactive style. The first approach occurs when remote solutions force companies to find a management style that matches the new situation, while the second approach describes specific initiatives that would smoothly transition the office space to become more digital. Exemplifying the latter, Respondent D described their launch of 'work from anywhere program', an initiative to strengthen the remote infrastructure, while Respondent

G described a launch of 'working from elsewhere days' which enables employees to choose working location for certain days a year. Further, to smoothen this transition, the respondents explained that proper training regarding individual discipline and how to maintain a work-life-balance had been given to employees.

All respondents ultimately agree that the main opportunity from digital nomad solutions entails increasing the quality of life for their employees while maintaining the same quality of work. It is highlighted that it creates opportunities to work on the hours preferred by the employee, meaning that every work hour is more efficient than before, thereby enhancing productivity. Further, it is argued that a more flexible working arrangement allows for healthier communication and a flatter hierarchy which are two factors found to increase the trust within the company.

5.2.2 Trusting digital nomads

Moving on to the aspect of trust in the remote work setting. On the one hand, all respondents express that they have a huge trust towards their teams, regardless of the degree of remote worker, which explains that the issue of trust has not initially been an obstacle for implementing a flexible working arrangement. More specifically, it is stated that managers strongly believe that a leader must trust its employees from the start of employment until a reason not to trust them has occurred. Respondent F explains: "My attitude has always been to have trust until proven otherwise. [...] That's the intuitive instinct." On the other hand, it becomes evident that trust often is discussed in relation to adopting the right managerial practices, and with that, the risk of failure to strengthen the internal relations becomes a concern. Specifically, Respondent E explains: "A one-fit-all method does not fit all [...] it is about adopting the trust building to each individual's situation, both to their private and professional life".

To further reflect on how trust could be built with remote workers, a discussion about the employee's delivery was brought up as an important factor. Some respondents state that it never matters where the employee works but rather what is delivered and as the employee keeps on delivering upon agreement there is no need to mistrust them. With this, the managers at flexible

companies emphasize the importance of using a virtual system, where all employees ask questions straight away and make progress-comments in different ‘task-cards’. Respondent A explains:

[...] if I had not been able to log in every morning to the shared work-platform where I can see my employees' updates and that the jobs are getting done, I wouldn't have felt the same level of confidence and trust in having employees work on such a remote level.

The managers highlight that a clear communication towards one another, especially with regards to what is expected from the other person, is a crucial factor for increasing the trustworthiness of the employees.

In another perspective of the reflection, the importance of having an initial process for establishing the company values became evident, as sharing values is a large part of the training process in the first weeks of employment. Respondent A even explains how one digital nomad started their employment physically at the office to later become remote. This is considered a helpful building block for the trust between managers and employees to function well. Respondent A states that:

The training process is a crucial part of building a mutual understanding, [...] but above all it is the central step for creating trust and confidence since that is when you really get down to sharing values and incorporating them into the culture.

This perspective is additionally supported by other managers that highlight that the most important step in the employment journey is to build trust during pre-boarding and onboarding since that is where the values are shared, expectations are communicated, and personalities are revealed. Many managers explain the importance of communicating that trust and respect are key values at the company. Respondent B explains: “[...] we both have training courses as entering into the company and governing documents which returns throughout the employment period”. They all believe that the establishment of values is best done in the physical office, as they believe that the corporate culture takes longer to understand if there are no real-life interactions during the early stages of employment.

In addition, the managers push the perspective that leading a global team is very challenging since it requires more frequent and structured communication opportunities. It requires that both parties set aside time for general chatting to achieve the desired culture. Further, it is important to

have regular opportunities provided where everyone on the team can meet physically to keep on building their relationship, and thus passively build trust. Respondent C explains:

[...] there must be a continuous structure where employees can get to know each other outside of work, hence a manager needs to create activities that build trust that ultimately makes it easier and more effective to work digitally.

As all respondents are united in that trust is the most important component for maintaining seamless work in a remote structure, it is an area that they all describe that they put large efforts into. It is also added that the willpower to make it work is a close second in the most important component, as described by Respondent H: “The will of both parties is a very important aspect. The drive to perform a work task.”

5.2.3 Future prospects

When discussing the expectation about the future, all respondents agree that it will become necessary in the long term to offer job positions to digital nomads in order to stay relevant and attractive as an employer. Specifically, they highlight that there will be a competition between the companies on the market, and that an offering of a flexible structure will be crucial to stay competitive. Respondent A states: “I believe that companies will have to offer job positions to digital nomads since they need to compete against other companies that will offer it”. Further, managers express a belief that companies who do not offer a flexible structure will need to compensate in other forms, e.g., by raising salaries.

Further, some managers explain how the employment structure in Sweden is likely to become much more virtual in the future, while other managers counter this by stating that there will be a post-pandemic adjustment period. For the latter, it is described that companies will need to physically get back to the office to compensate for lost knowledge that occurred during the forced remote work period. Respondent H explains that:

There is a knowledge gap that has emerged, especially for the younger workforce, during the pandemic. It is noticeable now when we can see that the learning curve for our employees is much steeper than when everyone was present in the office compared to now that most work is done digitally.

However, all managers agree that the future work structures are highly volatile and can rapidly change, which means that leaders must be ready to adapt accordingly. Managers also agree that

the possibility of offering job positions to digital nomads in the future will depend highly on the type of role the employee has. For example they can see it being offered in the accounting-, law-, and tech-departments, but not in customer service or supplier relationships roles. Ultimately, they are united in that the traditional 9-5 office days will be a corporate structure of the past.

5.3 Risks with employing digital nomads

During the interviews, risks associated with employing digital nomads, or even remote workers in general, have been largely discussed. To structure the concerns, three major areas are found which are: difficulties in building close relationships, challenges finding a clear structure, and issues related to policies. All areas can be clearly connected to the larger issue of trust and will be described below more in-depth.

5.3.1 Difficulties in building close relationships

The most predominant concern with implementing remote workers refers to the challenge in building close relationships, both within the company, the team and one-to-one. The managers mention that it becomes a challenge as the workers are located at different places which could cause huge time differences. This means that it is hard to communicate frequently which limits the opportunities for collaborations. Specifically, Respondent A brings up that:

And when it comes to how independent one of my employees are structured right now, the time difference to the east pacific (9 hours) has led to difficulties in communicating ideas and discussions as they emerge, and instead the solution has become to use our platform so that we get updated on the other person's thoughts once a day.

Digital Nomad 1 additionally addresses the perspective and brings up the difficulties in discussing the work as the opportunity to get help in real time is limited by the time difference factor, which further has the ability to limit the building of close relationships. Further, the managers described that it may limit the building of close relationships and lead to a knowledge gap of the newly employed. Specifically, it is described that the learning curve is steeper when present physically than when being remote.

At the same time, the managers mention the challenges that the digital context brings with regards to supporting the employees. The limits of social contact, difficulties in supporting mental health, and the minor sense of belonging are factors that contribute to these challenges. The limits of the physical interaction leads to that people interact less which leads to the relationships becoming more shallow and work focused. This is further enhanced by Respondent D that explains that: “At the end of the day the factor paying the highest price in this new system is the sense of belonging when employees never bond and see each other”. Additionally, these challenges have often shown to make the work activities less engaging and creative, since people are not as freely spoken as they would have been in a physical setting where close relationships are the usual. This leads to a lack of the positive energy that otherwise is absorbed when walking through the physical office. The limits of building close relationships creates a whole different level of complexity, according to the managers. Specifically, Respondent C argues that “[...] you don't get the maximum effect out of the work because people don't cooperate as much together”.

5.3.2 Challenges finding a clear structure

Finding a clear structure that allows the organization to offer job opportunities to physical, hybrid and remote workers is an issue brought up by many respondents. Particularly, the issue of how to create and sustain the desired culture when the organization is so diverse, is emphasized by many. Managers express that companies need to find some sort of structure throughout the organization despite the diverse roles. This is further concluded by Digital Nomad 2 who believes that:

One of the major challenges is that many companies today offer a ‘choose your own’ hybrid model of remote work, which creates a lot of uncertainty and causes major problems in solidarity and structure.

Adding to this is the belief that the major concern lies within the leadership style adopted by the managers and within the organization as a whole. It is mentioned that a vague leadership style, combined with not communicating enough with the employees, contributes to the high level of uncertainty that many companies are experiencing today.

The majority of the managers state that the lack of a clear structure will be most hurtful for young people who are entering the workforce for the first time, specifically if they enter into young companies. Respondent A argues that:

Entering the workforce straight after school can be really risky if the structure is remote straight away, as much of the younger generation is doing today, where they don't get into the routines and time-frames that exist in an office job. This can potentially lead to them becoming unaware of what is expected from them in a corporate setting at all, ultimately making them difficult to manage.

This is explained by that young employees and companies already have a level of uncertainty, making the combination with an unstructured remote arrangement even more harmful to the corporate structure. This assumption is enhanced by Digital Nomad 1 who explains that:

A challenge of entering the workforce as a young digital nomad is that it can be hard to find motivation to work as you are surrounded by the opportunity to do lots of other more fun things.

Therefore, it is described that the younger workforce is strongly recommended to be physically present in order to fully learn to become as effective as possible. Being present allows the employee to hear more discussions which is a prerequisite for learning, also allowing for a closer coaching. However, it is further explained that a lack of clear structure could be hurtful for more mature workers and companies as well. Respondent E describes that a risk of mature teams working beyond their working hours had to a large extent been identified when a flexible organization was implemented. Respondent E states: “[...] we had a challenge with mature teams that did not stop working when being present at home, [...] for example by taking no breaks or not finishing on time.” The managers clearly identify that having a clear structure in a company that offers a diverse work layout, regardless of the maturity of workers and companies, is a critical factor.

5.3.3. Issues related to policies

The third issue that was brought up was that today's policies and regulations are hindering companies to fully become flexible, and therefore are limiting the companies ability to employ digital nomads. The topic of policies is very relevant in order to understand the barriers that companies are facing with employing digital nomads today. Specifically, Respondent B explained: “[...] when we looked into remote structures, we found a direct problem related to the tax-law system and insurance coverage [...] this side of it is actually quite problematic”.

The managers describe the built-in problems regarding tax and insurance coverage and other legal regulations that hinders the company from offering digital nomad positions. It is explained

that today it is not a problem for employees to work globally as long as nothing unexpected happens, but it is when unexpected things occur that it causes problems for the company. These problems are seen as very complex and therefore there is a need to be careful when approaching them. However, in general, managers are positive about the future and believe that as regulation changes and a better system between the global countries is built, the employment of digital nomads will increase for many companies.

5.4 Work methods to establish and maintain trust with digital nomads

The interviews conducted show that there are several methods that should be used in order to successfully integrate digital nomads into corporate structures. All methods brought up have a clear connection towards building trust which emphasizes the need for companies to focus on this. Further, it becomes evident that the majority of the managers interviewed, located on the more flexible side of the spectrum, share the same view of what methods are necessary to implement in order to meet the ultimate goal of reaching a seamless remote structure. Below, the most predominant work methods brought up during the interviews will be discussed more in depth, these are: an open-minded leadership style, check-ins, offering face-to-face opportunities, and cloud-based applications.

5.4.1 An open-minded leadership style

From the interviews it becomes evident that an open-minded leadership style is critical for building trust between managers and remote workers. The managers explain that the major factor for companies failing to implement a remote structure is that their management style is too conservative or traditional. The managers further describe this mentality to be rooted in either the belief that work only can be done in the physical office during traditional hours, or as managers using micromanaging and feeling the need to control everything.

Additionally, managers describe a mentality gap that is anchored into the company cultures, and emphasize the need of the total organization becoming more open-minded in order to succeed with a remote structure. This is exemplified by Respondent B that explains:

We might be controversial. There are probably employers who are much more flexible and open towards the concept of being a digital nomad [...] and therefore would succeed better at including them.

This is also discussed by the digital nomads who explain that the control that managers have in the physical workplace can never be reached to the same extent in a remote structure. Therefore, the managers describe success as a matter of maturity between approaches to the work environment and the culture between colleagues. Daring to try new ways of leading and not being locked into the traditional leadership methods is something that is continuously brought up. This view is supported by Digital Nomad 2 who explains that:

The most critical component for a digital nomad to function in a corporate structure is that the manager has an open-minded leadership style, with trust in the culture and its employees, as this minimizes the risk of managers feeling the need to micromanage their employed digital nomads.

For some managers the implementation of flat hierarchy teams are brought up in connection to considering necessary leadership changes to comply with the above. In connection to this, they highlight the need of total transparency, which is deemed even more critical in remote teams than in physical teams. It is said to allow the team to build closer relationships which opens up for deeper interactions. Further, the need to rely more on cultural controls to build trust is brought up. Respondent E explains:

If anything it requires a very flat hierarchy [...] the reporting line should be very straightforward and the managers should have a very good sense of who does what and how each worker is doing. [...] there should be more cultural controls than anything else.

This perspective also enhances the need for a present leadership style that promotes tight communication which allows for deeper relationships. By the managers, it is concluded that the best way to ensure that an organization adopts an open-minded leadership style, in order to develop a strong feeling of trust, is to offer training sessions for managers that provide tools for leading remotely.

5.4.2 Regular check-ins

A consistent and frequent communication was highlighted by all respondents as a critical aspect to ensure trust between managers and its employees, and it was addressed that a structured way

of communicating is increasing in relevance as the employee is becoming more remote. All respondents explain the importance of digital check-ins, which by Respondent A is described as:

A very effective way for managers to keep their employees connected and in sync with the rest of the team, the company's visions and values, while it above all allows the employee to feel seen, appreciated and listened to.

Respondent C adds to this and explains that:

A frequent structure where you get to know each other in addition to each other's work role is critical in building trust and enables the remote work to function smoother.

It is described that the digital check-ins replace a structure where you occasionally need to meet physically. The managers state that the active work conducted to create trust is often done within each respective team, and especially within each relationship on an individual level. Therefore, it is highlighted that the check-ins should be adopted for relationships that need to be strengthened.

It is found that the check-ins can be structured differently depending on, for example company size, the employees dependence on collaborations, and the chosen leadership style. For example, the teams check-ins can be daily, weekly or monthly, while more frequent check-ins with a smaller part of the team or even one-to-ones are described to be conducted when necessary.

Respondent D explains that:

As long as the employee communicates question marks or updates when things are done, and the manager communicates when there are issues or worries about anything, there will be mutual trust created.

The frequent check-ins should be conducted both with managers but also with employees that you have a close collaboration with, as these structured communication opportunities constitute a major factor in building a relationship of trust. The digital nomads add and explain that a clear communication and frequent check-ins has been the key to succeed in their role.

By the respondents the purpose of the check-ins are discussed as twofold. Both as a way to discuss how the work is going but also as an opportunity to see how everyone in the team is feeling on a more personal level. On the one hand, it is described as a social activity. It is an opportunity to get to know each other's drive and commitment and it is described as a good substitute to the traditional coffee talks. Respondent C discussed that: "There must be a structure put in place where workers frequently can get to know each other outside of work, which builds trust, making it easier to cooperate remotely."

On the other hand, it is described as a work-related activity. It allows the team to share their work contributions and to see a bigger picture of their contribution to the company. The managers highlight that this creates a common vision and future for their work. Respondent E specifically explains that: “We meet to discuss how the work is going for all employees in the team [...] and plan for what we should do in the next three weeks.” Further, the managers explain that allowing the team to gather more detailed information about all work processes is said to be critical in understanding the reasons behind the progress. Additionally, it is explained that these check-ins help the manager to see if the employees deliver as they should, meaning that they also constitute a type of action control. Generally, the managers conclude that the check-ins are a critical component to ensure both sides of the feeling of trust.

5.4.3 Offering face-to-face interactions

The majority of the managers highlight that they believe in collaborations in the physical workplaces. They explain that it allows the company and its employees to develop together as one can help each other in a better way, while it also leads to creativity becoming greater. Some managers express that it is necessary to meet physically as that is how the culture transforms. It is explained as both critical for building the trust within the team but also to maintain the relationships, as it leads to a greater sense of closeness within the team. Concluding, it is described that being physically present is how you learn and become better at your work tasks, which emphasizes a “on the job training” approach.

In connection to this, a discussion about that it would be beneficial for digital teams to meet a few times a year is brought up by a few managers. Respondent A discusses that:

It would be beneficial to at least meet once or twice during a year to strengthen the company as a whole, which in turn will enable more efficient and inclusive work.

It is described that if the companies’ employees were to meet physically it would allow people that are not present in the same team to meet and create relationships with one another. This would create a more useful network in the company. Further, Respondent C expresses that:

In a digital team the productivity is often the same as in physical teams, however in most cases you won't get the maximum effect as the number of collaboration decreases.

This supports the idea of digital teams meeting physically each year. Further, the managers believe that physical interactions are an important pillar for establishing a transparent communication between a manager and a digital nomad. It is discussed that it enables the team to build closer relationships that are described as hard to build when not meeting physically.

Further, managers state that the relevance of meeting physically differs depending on the remote worker's dependence on the team. It is described that if the remote worker needs to have a close collaboration with others in the team to do their work, there is an increasing relevance of meeting physically as the quality of the work will be dependent on that there is a good relationship. Specifically, the closer an employee needs to collaborate with others in their team, the more frequent the employee's needs for physical interactions.

5.4.4 Cloud-based applications

Managers, which are present at companies who today have a very flexible working approach, describe that cloud-based applications are a necessary tool for the collaboration between managers and remote workers to function. It is described that a functioning work system is vital in determining success.

The use of cloud-based applications is emphasized, as it can allow the right level of control. The right level of control is described as a state where the manager can clearly see the progress and achievements of the remote worker without the remote worker feeling constrained or too closely monitored. By Respondent A it is explained that:

The fact that you can actually see what the other person is doing, with continuous updates, is exactly what makes it easier for a manager to feel confident that everything that needs to be done will be done.

This emphasizes the cloud-based applications criticality in building a stable foundation of trust.

It is added that these tools allow transparency going both ways, meaning that the remote worker could also see the actions taken by the manager. Managers further describe that the tools are used

to assign tasks to different people making it clear what every individual should work on. Further, it is described that these tools allow each individual to continuously update the progress of their work, enabling the rest of the team to visually see the progress of every task. Respondent H describes:

As you assign tasks and track the progress, these tools become very black on white [...] which makes the manager feel more confident in the trust given to its employees.

However, it is discussed by some respondents that the use of cloud-based applications could be hard in settings where the manager has a large amount of employees to lead, and that these tools therefore should be combined with regular check-ins, which is described above.

6. Discussion

The interviews revealed that managers, on a general note, are quite similar in their opinions on building and maintaining trust when managing digital nomads, and despite the hypothetical nature of their answers these insights are valuable to understand in order to properly manage remote workers on all levels. The findings answers the first research question by concluding the risks, opportunities and methods that managers identify in working with digital nomads. The risks identified as difficulties in building close relationships, challenges finding a clear structure and issues related to policies, while the opportunities were identified as becoming an attractive employer, attracting employee talent, and prioritizing employee health. Further, the managers identified important methods related to trust as having an open-minded leadership style, providing regular check-ins, offering face-to-face interactions, and using cloud-based applications during the work. Connecting the insights from the managers with the theoretical framework, the discussion helps conclude the understanding of trust in a remote work setting, thus answering the second research question. The discussion presents two areas: second stage of trust - a minimum level for a functioning remote structure, and managing digital nomads with trust, which will both be discussed below.

6.1 Second stage of trust - a minimum level for a functioning remote structure

From the findings it is evident that reaching the second stage of trust, in the three-stages of trust model, is a prerequisite for a functioning remote structure and for offering job positions to digital nomads. Reaching this stage is deemed necessary in order for managers to avoid putting too many action and results control in place, and to limit the chances of micromanagement to occur. The Swedish managers interviewed, implicitly state that their willingness to offer a high degree of flexibility to its employees rises in line with the three stages of trust model and with the dependence on cultural controls. Specifically, a higher level of trust where the manager relies more on cultural controls reflects a greater opportunity for employees to work remotely. This is concluded based on the full picture provided in the findings. A more specific support for the perspective refers to that managers want a physical on-boarding, and that they are concerned about the lacking work morale of younger employees. This further becomes evident as reflecting on the managerial attitudes towards trust and on the different controls in each stage along the three stages of trust model.

In the first stage of trust, called calculative trust and which reflects the recruitment/early on-boarding phase, the managers are skeptical to offer remote positions to their employees as their thinking is rational, and based on facts and knowledge (Slack & Lewis 2015). From the findings, an explanation for the manager's skepticism is that this stage lacks emotional attachment and that managers therefore tend to lean against traditional leadership styles, implying that the work is done in the physical office. Further, it is evident that managers need to rely on results control and action controls in this stage to ensure that the employees are doing the right thing. This implies that the risk of micromanaging is high which causes an unpleasant experience for the remote worker and the manager itself. The low level of trust evident in this phase, describes why the majority of the interviewed managers believe that the on-boarding process for an employee should be physical. This is because there is no developed relationship between the two parties, and therefore the employee needs to be physically present in order to develop a feeling of belonging. Further, it is explicitly described by the managers themselves that it is in the on-boarding phase that the “actual” trust is built, referring to the second stage of trust.

In the second stage of trust, called cognitive trust and which reflects the time after the on-boarding phase, managers tend to express a more positive attitude towards offering remote positions. In the findings, it is expressed by the managers that after the physical on-boarding where the employees have learned the company, they feel a greater confidence that they will act in accordance with the companies and the teams' visions, regardless of where they are located. In this stage, a closer connection between the parties have been established as experiences have been shared (Slack & Lewis 2015). Further, it means that as managers reach this stage they are more prone to rely on cultural control, which describes that they do not feel the need to control all actions and results made by the employee. This emphasizes the role of trust to be built and cultural controls to be used as it creates a more pleasant experience for everyone involved. Moreover, in the findings, the managers highlight that different activities and methods are needed to ensure that the second level of trust remains and develops further, in order to ensure that cultural controls could still be applied. It is especially highlighted that well structured methods to sustain the trust is necessary if the employee becomes remote, because in these situations the day-to-day development of trust is lost. The most important methods identified in the findings of this thesis will be discussed further in the section below.

In the third stage of trust, called bonding trust and which is developed over time, managers express an even higher willingness to offer remote structures. In this stage the parties feel a belonging to a group, and share the same goals and values (Slack & Lewis 2015), which implies that the managers are more prone to give the employees more freedom and supervise them less. In the findings it is expressed by a few interviewed managers that employees that have been at the company for a longer time are trusted more to switch to a remote work structure. This implies that managers present in this stage relies mostly on cultural controls and less on action and results control, and therefore the need to tightly control what the employee is doing at work is very small. It shows that the workers are given a huge freedom in this stage of trust. Therefore, as the very independent remote worker a digital nomad is, reaching this level would be beneficial.

This discussion about the levels of trust and the management controls helps understand that the second stage of trust, in the three-stages of trust model, is critical to reach in order to have a functioning remote work arrangement. This is deemed necessary as it allows Swedish managers to rely more on cultural controls which is critical for feeling confident in offering remote positions to their employees and for incorporating digital nomads in their corporate structure. Below this level, the remote-option seems highly insecure as the managers need to solely rely on action controls and results controls, which in most situations will result in an undesired adopted leadership style, a dissatisfactory experience for the employees, and even cause negative feedback from employees. For digital nomads specifically, it could be concluded that an even higher level of trust, reaching the third stage, would be beneficial in order to make the experience successful. This is because it would reduce the risk of managers feeling insecure as they could to a larger extent rely on cultural controls which reduces the risk of micromanagement. However, reaching the third level of trust is hard, especially when entering into new companies since it only develops with time. Therefore, it becomes evident that managers will need to move away from feeling full trust in their employees and accept a lower level of control when managing remote workers, and thereby it becomes evident that new methods of leading virtual teams are required.

6.2 Managing digital nomads with trust

Once understanding that reaching the second stage of trust and employing cultural controls is a necessary prerequisite to properly managing a digital nomad, it is important to discuss the most useful methods in managing digital nomads. As connecting the findings of the study to the theoretical background, two important aspects emerge. These represent the most imperative pillars for managers who lead remote workers on a general level and digital nomads specifically, being: task based trust-building methods, and social bonding activities. Combined, these pillars thoroughly create an understanding of how managers can successfully build trust in a remote work setting while incorporating cultural controls in parallel.

6.2.1 Task based trust-building methods

The task oriented pillar of building trust, described as managing by delegating in the theoretical background, is argued to be the most appropriate management style when leading digital nomads. On the contrary, micromanaging is deemed as hindering remote workers to be the most productive, creative, and healthy selves (MBO Partners, 2018 and Howington, 2018). The empirical findings of this paper confirm this perspective. It agrees with the argument that for a manager to reach full potential in hiring a remote worker they need to trust the employees self-leadership skills, level of expertise, and properly delegate. To provide the tools for understanding trust in remote work settings, three managerial methods from the findings are discussed: an open minded leadership style, providing work related check-ins, and using cloud-based applications. These three managerial methods all enable leaders to successfully delegate with a trusting mind using cultural controls, and will specifically be discussed in relation to the three stages of trust and management control, the two conceptual tools presented above.

Being a manager in today's employment landscape requires an open mind as found in the conducted interviews. As concluded from the findings, a good manager is able to customize its leadership style to a specific situation and employee. A good manager is able to be dynamic. In order to reach this, the manager must keep an open mind on how to act around different employees and different personality types. This will additionally help create a flat hierarchy in the workplace which ultimately increases trust on all levels. Lastly, having an open mind about new methods and techniques as a manager will build and strengthen the trust towards the employer itself, as this changes the mindset of the leader from suspicious to calm and open. Creating an atmosphere where employees feel the trust and confidence from their manager is a building block for implementing cultural controls, as correct delegation creates a system where all employees are aware of the expectations and want to deliver to their best potential.

Further, once trust has been created on a fundamental level, it is important for managers to provide work-related check-ins remotely. As mentioned by the managers, hosting regular check-ins where both parties talk about the progress of their work and discuss issues or questions is a major contributor to reaching the second stage of trust. Not only does this method strengthen

the motivation for workers, creating clarity in the purpose and direction of their own work, but the check-ins also ensure trust towards and from the employee, activating the possibility of cultural controls. This enables the manager to delegate with a confident and trusting mind and the employee performing well, mitigating any risk of failure to perform. In addition, using cloud based applications is taking the check-ins to the next level, enabling a more seamless distance between the manager and the employee. Finding a communication platform to help both parties be updated on what has been done and what needs to be discussed at the next check-in gives both the manager and the employee the tools necessary to reach the second, and even third stages of trust. Additionally, using cloud based applications to communicate progress will help managers in letting go of any temptation to micromanage as they do not need to ask questions about everything, as this is clearly evident by the automatic updates.

6.2.2 Social bonding activities

Moving on to the social bonding activities, i.e. the cultural pillar of managing remote workers, it is evident from both the theory and the findings of this thesis that the social aspect related to leading remote workers is deemed critical when determining the success of a flexible corporate structure. Social bonding activities, which strengthen the company culture, beliefs and values according to both previous academic literature and Swedish managers, constitute an important pillar to understand how trust behaves in a remote work setting. Previous research as well as the managers in the empirical findings argue that providing opportunities for social exchange and team building through different methods, especially early on in the employment journey, help them reach the second and third stage of trust, enabling managers to rely on cultural controls instead of the counter-productive results- and action controls discussed above. As discussed, reaching that level is a necessary requirement for a manager to feel confident in hiring a digital nomad or remote worker and lead them with the right management mindset. Therefore, methods on how to create space for social exchange and team building will be discussed further in this section.

Firstly, it becomes inherent, from analyzing the manager's discussion of the issue of finding a clear structure, that having physical on-boarding in the first few weeks of employment makes a

significant impact on the time it takes to reach the second stage of trust. Hence, being able to have a physically present on-boarding will subconsciously improve the management quality of the manager while simultaneously strengthening the motivation and loyalty of the employee. In addition, physical on-boarding will be an important step in creating a stable foundation for using cultural controls once the employee is remote. The study has found that this physical presence is highly valuable, especially in a situation where the employee will continue to work remotely. Secondly, in order to maintain the second stage of trust that has been established between the manager and the digital nomad, the study reveals that offering continued opportunities to interact face-to-face will not only fasten the timeline of reaching the third stage of trust but it will ensure that the balance between independence and belongingness is harmonized, which becomes an enabling factor for implementing functioning cultural controls that are driven by the employees themselves. Thirdly, and lastly, connecting to the method of task-related check-ins, providing social check-ins when face-to-face interactions are not possible has been shown to be a great option in order to maintain good mental connection between the coworkers and the manager. This finding is supported by previous theory where it has been shown that sharing details about one's private life with coworkers is a major contribution in strengthening the feeling of belongingness and connection with your co-workers and your boss, strengthening the seamlessness of activating cultural controls. (Zander et al., 2013; Greenberg 2007, and Ford et al., 2017).

Finally, from the methods discussed above, it becomes evident that the importance of a physical onboarding is problematic and controversial when connecting it to employing a digital nomad. Due to the remote nature of employing digital nomads, there is a high possibility that many managers will struggle to achieve in-office training during the on-boarding since the employee is not likely to be present in the same region or country as the office. However, as presented from the findings and discussion above, holding physical on-boarding substantially shortens the time it takes and is arguably a necessary practice to apply to reach the second stage of trust. This argument is supported by both the theory and the managers interviewed, but will continue to be a problematic goal to achieve with digital nomads (Zander et al., 2013).

Providing clarity in this discussion, it is evident that if the circumstances make physical on-boarding impossible, it will instead be important for the manager to be aware of the prolonged timeline to reach full comfort in delegating with trust. Further, it also requires both task-related and social check-ins to be more frequent in these situations. In order to avoid the perception of a controlling environment during this period, it will be equally necessary for the manager to have an open mind. On a last note of this discussion, providing and solving opportunities for the digital nomads to gather once or twice a year, socializing and holding workshops, will be even more essential in order to reach the second and third stages of trust when employing digital nomads remotely from start. To conclude the discussion, task based trust-building methods and social bonding activities are both crucial in order to successfully manage digital nomads with the right mindset and control system.

In conclusion, the discussion above answers the second research question by presenting how the managerial insights from the findings inform our understanding of trust in remote work settings. The discussion identifies the importance of reaching the second stage of trust in order to rely more on cultural controls when providing remote work opportunities. Further, multiple methods, based on the findings, are identified as important in order to reach that level of trust, which are divided into task-based work methods and social bonding activities.

7. Conclusion

This thesis identifies that the growth of digital nomads occurs rapidly, with the expected number that 1 billion people all over the world will be employed as digital nomads in 2035. However, it is additionally identified that research on methods to lead remote workers and virtual teams lacks the perspective of the highly independent remote worker, the digital nomad, which means that managers do not have the correct tools for successfully incorporating them. Additionally, this thesis shows that many Swedish managers are reluctant to employ digital nomads because of lack of trust, arising from, among others, unfitting remote methods, hasty management decisions, conservative leadership attitudes and mentality issues. Therefore, in order for companies to

successfully incorporate digital nomads and to stay relevant as an employer, research into managing digital nomads has shown to be highly relevant.

By the above, it became evident that Swedish managers needed guidance on how to successfully incorporate digital nomads in their companies. The purpose of this thesis was to identify the opportunities, risk and methods that Swedish managers deem as most important, to in a later stage conclude the understanding of the importance of trust and its behavior in a remote setting. The research was drawn on interviews with Swedish companies which offered insight into a unique situation as digital nomads are not yet largely incorporated and therefore many speculations exist on how to successfully enable the change.

To answer the first research question, this thesis found that managers in Sweden generally have a positive attitude towards employing digital nomads as the benefits are clearly realized, where becoming an attractive employer, attracting employee talent, and prioritizing employee health are three major arguments. For the future, both the digital nomads and the managers interviewed, were united in that the rise of digital nomads will continue and that it therefore will be necessary to successfully incorporate them to stay competitive. However, the managers are also expressing concerns about employing digital nomads, as the subject is new and therefore there is a lack of exploration around how to structure the organization. The managers identified risks in employing remote workers, which were found to relate to difficulties in building close relationships, finding a clear and understandable structure, but also legal hindrances. Further, the managers identified several methods that they deemed important to use in order to successfully integrate digital nomads and to avoid the risks mentioned above, which were, having an open-minded leadership style, providing regular check-ins, offering face-to-face interactions, and using cloud-based applications during the work. All methods brought up had a strong connection towards building trust which emphasized the need for companies to focus on this.

As reflecting on the findings, and connecting to the overall understanding of trust in remote work settings to answer the second research question, this thesis identified that trust is a prerequisite for a functioning remote structure. Specifically, by the use of Slack and Lewis' (2015) 'three stages of trust' model it was discussed that reaching the second stage of trust is required to

successfully offer job positions to digital nomads. This is further described with Merchant and Van der Steede (2017) conclusion of management controls, where it becomes evident that relying only on results control and action controls in a remote setting will lead to micromanaging and an unpleasant experience for the employee. Therefore, reaching the second-stage of trust and relying more on cultural controls are seen as important steps. However, it has also been concluded that managers will need to move away from feeling full trust in their employees and accept a lower level of control when managing remote workers. The methods from the findings are suggested as effective tools to reach the required level of trust with emphasis on the importance of physical on-barding, with the notion that reaching the second stage of trust will require more effort in the other methods if physical on-boarding is not possible. As concluded, by identifying methods that are useful for building trust with digital nomads, this thesis closed the research gap and provided an understanding of how to manage digital nomads in corporate structures.

7.1 Limitations

Before adopting the findings of this research three limitations have been identified that are important to address. Firstly, the study had a limited time frame which hindered the opportunity for collecting a wider scope of data. With more time, the research could have collected a larger sample than 10 interviews, possibly enabling more perspectives and frictions. Secondly, as brought up in the methodology, using semi-structured interviews for the study opens up for bias as the respondents express their own thoughts within the scope that the questions hold. This means that our study may lack alternative perspectives that the respondents thought were relevant to discuss. Lastly, connecting to the limitation before, the choice to focus on ‘trust’ can be argued to limit the scope of this thesis, including the findings and contributions. The choice to focus on ‘trust’ constrained the opportunity to explore other variables that may have an impact on incorporating digital nomads into corporate structures. However, facing these limitations, the data collection of this thesis is deemed sufficient in answering the research questions and contributing to both the practical and academic world as argued above.

7.2 Future research

The limitations of this research opens up for future research. First, a recommendation would be to expand on this research by including more perspectives. This includes opportunities to interview a larger number of managers, which could capture a broader scope of countries, sectors and managers with a wider range of industry experience. Further, exploring other variables such as monetary as well as non-monetary compensations could be conducted to deepen the understanding of the relationship between managers and digital nomads.

Another interesting aspect to conduct further research within refers to legal issues. The findings of this thesis identifies that with the right management attitude and the right methods companies are able to successfully offer job positions to digital nomads. However, the management attitude combined with identified methods does not fully solve the issues with employing digital nomads, as raised by the interviewed managers. A huge hindrance for companies which are skeptical to offer job positions to digital nomads concerns issues related to policies, e.g., tax policies, assurance policies and other law regulations. Guiding companies on how to deal with these issues will be critical in determining the future of digital nomadas, and are therefore deemed highly relevant to research. Therefore, we believe that future research on issues related to policies for employing digital nomads is an area interesting to explore in the near future.

References

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2017). *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder* (3rd edition). Liber.

Drescher, G. (2017). Delegation outcomes: perceptions of leaders and follower's satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 32(1), 2-15.

Howington, J. (2018). *Remote Work Statistics & Trends: The Latest in Remote Work*. FlexJobs. URL: <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/remote-work-statistics/> (accessed: 20230515)

Dhaliwal, G. (10/2020). *How The Pandemic Is Changing The Future Of Work*. Forbes. URL: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/10/27/how-the-pandemic-is-changing-the-future-of-work/?sh=1c222e866841> (accessed: 20230515)

Ford, C. R., Piccolo, F. R., & Ford, R. L. (2017). Strategies for building effective virtual teams: Trust is key. *Business Horizons* 60(1), 25-39.

Frey, T. (2013). The Great Freelancer Movement: Eight Reasons Why Your Next Job Will Be a Project. *Journal of Environmental Health* 76 (5), 46-48.

Frick, N., & Marx, J. (2021). Integrating Digital Nomads in Corporate Structures: Managerial Contemplations. In *Proceedings of the 54th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*.

Gambetta, D. (2000). Can We Trust Trust?, in Gambetta, Diego (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, chapter 13, pp. 213-237. URL: https://www.academia.edu/458517/Can_we_trust_trust (accessed: 20230515)

Greenberg, S. P., Greenberg, H. R., & Antonucci, L. Y. (2007). Creating and sustaining trust in virtual teams. *Business Horizons*, 50(4), 325-333.

Hannonen, O. (2020). In search of a digital nomad: defining the phenomenon. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22, 335-353.

Malik, Z. (26 april 2022). *Over 1 billion digital nomads by 2035*. International Accounting Bulletin. URL:
<https://www.internationalaccountingbulletin.com/feature-2/over-1-billion-digital-nomads-by-2035/> (accessed: 20230515)

Kilber, J., Barclay, A., & Ohmer, D. (2014). Seven Tips for Managing Generation Y. *Journal of Management Policy*, 15(4).

Kong, D., Schlagwein, D., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2019). Issues in digital nomad-corporate work: An institutional theory perspective. *In Proceedings of the 27th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)*.

MBO Partners. (2020). *COVID-19 and the Rise of the Digital Nomad*.
<https://s29814.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MBO-Partners-Digital-Nomad-Report-2020.pdf> (accessed: 20230515)

MBO Partners. (2018). *The State of Independence in America: 2018*. URL:
<https://www.mbopartners.com/state-of-independence/mbo-partners-state-of-independence-in-america-2018/> (accessed: 20230515)

Merchant, K. A., & Van der Steede, W. A. (2017). *Management Control Systems* (4th Edition) Pearson Education.

Pofeldt, E. (2016). *Freelancers Now Make Up 35% Of U.S. Workforce*. Forbes. URL:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/elainepofeldt/2016/10/06/new-survey-freelance-economy-shows-rapid-growth/?sh=30366cc57c3f> (accessed: 20230515)

Reichenberger, I. (2017). Digital nomads – a quest for holistic freedom in work and leisure. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 21(1).

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th edition). Pearson Education.

Slack, N., & Lewis, M. (2015). *Operations Strategy* (6th edition). Pearson Education.

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333-339.

Lopez, A. M. (21 october 2022). *Number of digital nomads in the United States from 2014 to 2022*. Statista. URL:
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1298313/number-digital-nomads-united-states/> (accessed: 20230515)

Zander, L., Zettinig, P., & Mäkelä, K. (2013). Leading global virtual teams to success. *Organizational Dynamics*, 42(3), 228-237.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Companies with digital nomad positions

We will start with a few questions that deal more generally with you offering job opportunities to digital nomads...

- How long have your company been offering job positions to digital nomads?
- Why did your company start to offer job positions to digital nomads?
 - What are the benefits and risks?
 - How do you mitigate the risks? How do you capture the opportunities?
- In what positions do you offer digital nomad opportunities?
 - Do you think this will change in the future? More roles? Fewer? Why? Why not?
- What changes did your company have to make (in the organization) in order to successfully offer job positions to digital nomads?
 - Structural changes? Cultural changes? Task allocation? Others?

Now we will ask some questions that are more specific about the trust between the manager and employees...

- Can you describe how your company views and works with trust?
 - What control systems do you have in place to build and to ensure trust in daily work? Please be specific.
 - Does the control differ depending on remote/ not remote workers? Describe.
 - Does the trust go both ways? (manager → employee & employee → manager)
- What part of the employment journey do you think is the most critical for building trust?
 - Recruitment? Training? Afterwards? Why?
- A limited trust is an obstacle for many companies which are choosing to not offer job positions to digital nomads, what is your view on this?
 - How does your company tackle lack of control when employees are working as digital nomads?
- As a manager, what do you consider to be the most important prerequisites for successful collaboration between managers and digital nomads in the future?

Appendix 2: Companies that do not offer digital nomad positions

We will start with some questions that are more general about how your organization views digital nomads...

- Are digital nomads a term that you are familiar with?
 - Has digital nomads or remote work been discussed in your organization? How?
 - Is this something that you plan to offer in the future? In what job roles?
- What are the advantages and risks that you see in offering job positions to digital nomads?
 - Does your organization need to make significant changes to be able to offer this? If so, what?
 - Would it be practically possible for your organization to offer this?

Now we will ask some questions that are more specific to the aspect of trust between managers and employees...

- Can you describe how you view and work with trust in your organization today?
 - How do you ensure that people can trust each other?
 - Which part of the employment journey do you think is most crucial for building trust?
 - What specific processes do you apply to build and maintain trust within the company?
- Would you feel the same level of trust if employees worked as digital nomads? Why/Why not?
 - Would the trust differ from those who work remotely today? How?
 - What would need to remain the same? What would you need to change?
- As a manager, what do you consider to be the most important prerequisites for successful collaboration between managers and digital nomads in the future?

Appendix 3: Digital nomads

We will start with some questions that are more general about your experience of being a digital nomad...

- Describe your experience as a digital nomad.
 - How long have you been working as a digital nomad?
 - Country? Company? Role?
 - How did you come into contact with the job?
 - How did the learning process work? Digital or on-site?
- Do you think you will continue to be a digital nomad in the future? Why? Why not?
 - Is it possible to continue from the company's perspective?
- Describe some advantages and disadvantages of being a digital nomad (related to a work context)

Now we will ask some questions that are more specific to the aspect of trust between managers and employees...

- How do you experience the trust between you and your employer today? Is it present from both sides?
 - Have you ever experienced problems related to trust? If yes, why and how did it get resolved? If not, why do you think that no problems have occurred?
- How have you and your manager worked with trust?
 - Which part of the employment journey do you think is the most crucial for building trust?
- Do you actively work to strengthen the trust between you and your manager? How? Specific actions.
 - What do you need in order to continue to have trust in your employer? What do you need to do to ensure that your employer continues to have trust in you?
- What is the most important thing your employer can give to you in your role as a digital nomad? Choose one.