Implications of Remote Work for Middle Management during the COVID-19 Crisis

Adilet Akhmetov & Georgia Machla

Main field of study: Leadership and Organization
Degree of Master of Arts (120 ECTS) with a major in Leadership and Organization.
Master thesis with a focus on Leadership and Organization: Societal Challenges and Organizational Changes (OL675E), 30 ECTS
Spring 2022
Supervisor: Maria Appelqvist
Title: Implications of Remote Work for Middle Management during the COVID-19 Crisis
Authors: Adilet Akhmetov and Georgia Machla
Main field of study: Leadership and Organization
Degree of Master of Arts (120 ECTS) with a major in Leadership and Organization.
Master thesis with a focus on Leadership and Organization: Societal Challenges and Organizational Changes (OL675E), 30 ECTS
Spring 2022
Supervisor: Maria Appelqvist
Abstract

**Purpose** - In order to capture the implications of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted in-depth interviews with 8 middle level managers employed at a Large Enterprise based in Sweden.

**Problem** - The influence of the middle managers on change management initiatives is prominent. We conducted this research regarding remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to understand the managerial perspective on the phenomenon.

**Method** - We have adopted a qualitative research method and utilized social constructivism for the analysis of the interviews. We applied the theories of change management and dynamic managerial capabilities to the empirical data that we collected through in-depth interviews.

**Results** - The results of the analysis include the middle management perspective on change management, in our case; the impact of switching to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research has provided us with their subjective perspective on remote work, as well as related issues regarding organizational changes in general.

**Conclusion** - Finally, we reflect on the perspectives that we gained through the interviews and discuss the limitations of this thesis, as well as further research possibilities.

**Key words** - COVID-19, Middle Management, Dynamic Managerial Capabilities, Remote Work, Change Management
# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1. Introduction, aim and problem**

1.1 Research Background  
   1.1.2 The Large Enterprise  
1.2 Research Problem  
1.3 Aim and Research Questions  

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

2.1 Middle Management and Change  
2.2 Middle Management and Remote Work  
   2.2.1 Dynamic Managerial Capabilities and Remote Work  

**Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework**

3.1 Change Management  
3.2 Dynamic Managerial Capabilities  

**Chapter 4. Methodology**

4.1 Research Method  
4.2 Research Approach  
   4.2.1 Philosophy of Science  
4.3 Data collection  
   4.3.1 Interviews  
      4.3.1.1 Interview Guide  
      4.3.1.2 Respondents  
4.4 Data analysis  
4.5 Reliability and Validity  
4.6 Limitations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Ethical Considerations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 5. Results and Analysis</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Change Management</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1 The proactivity</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2 The Challenge</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.3 The Process of Learning</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Middle Management</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 The Challenges of Leading the Team</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Communication in the Virtual Setting</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3 Remote Work and Social Interaction</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Challenges of Remote Work</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Resistance</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 Engagement</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 6. Discussion</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 7. Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A. Interview Guide</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B. Coding Table</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1. Introduction, aim and problem

The last few years have provoked institutional changes in the way that corporations work and function, since the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have altered the work of organizations and their employees in drastic ways. Many organizations had to adapt their operations to a hybrid work environment and remote working became the “new normal” (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). Before the pandemic remote work was not unheard of, but COVID-19 advanced it to immoderate levels (Battisti et al., 2022). The middle management faced unprecedented changes due to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only because they had to adapt their own activities, but also the equivalent workflow of their subordinates. While following instructions and regulations from the top management, middle managers had the responsibility to enhance the working conditions for their employees in online settings. Within this paper, we explore the perspective of middle managers on remote work during the COVID-19 crisis and its implications on their work life, based on a multinational corporation in Sweden.

1.1 Research Background

One of the key elements in establishing a successful transition to remote working during the crisis was building trust between leaders and their employees, while initiating collaborative initiatives (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). In such situations as a global pandemic, effective administration ought to strengthen organizational commitment and act as a facilitator, supporter and buffer against constant societal alterations (Guberina & Wang, 2021).

The hybrid working model is relatively recent and has become a necessity for business development (Karl et al., 2021), which stands on the fast paced economy and highly erratic business market of modern society. Hence, it is essential to gain perspective over non-routine situations, as these demonstrate the ultimate culture and management attitude adopted by an organization (Pawar & Eastman, 1997).

Organizations in Sweden had to mostly impose their own regulations for the type of employment, as well as the effect of the pandemic in the organizational conformation. The moderate policy from the government empowered the Swedish organizations with significant levels of independence regarding their adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the working conditions of employees. Considering that the regulations in Sweden
have been among the most permissive in the world, there is a strong interest in capturing the difference in the organizational adaptation in Sweden. By the same token, it is interesting to dive into the managerial perspective of organizations that adopted strict policies during the pandemic in Sweden. While the Swedish government aspired to establish a non-invasive policy regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent socio-economic consequences, the trust of people to the country’s emergency preparedness was challenged (Bengtsson & Brommesson, 2022). Therefore, we wanted to research how middle management reacted to institutional changes, by conducting a study based in an organization in Sweden during the pandemic.

1.1.2 The Large Enterprise

For that purpose, this paper approaches the managerial perspective during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as a forced organizational change, by presenting a qualitative study of a multinational organization that employs thousands of employees and maintains a dispersed presence around the world. In addition, it is one of the few organizations that behaved in a reactive way in regards to the pandemic in contrast to other organizations in Sweden.

The organization that we have chosen for our research (hereinafter - the Large Enterprise) maintains a presence in more than 160 countries and employs more than 24,800 people. The corporation is privately owned, with more than 50 years of activity in the automation industry, both inside and outside the borders of Sweden. The organization provides solutions in relation to food processing and packaging, while also taking initiatives which target sustainability and viability, for more than 30 years. The processing and packaging solutions are designed to treat the products gently, since the company's goal is to distribute food without the need of additional preservatives. In order to increase the level of recycling and meet its targets, the company engages in establishing new recycling activities such as developing and launching new recycling technologies, while also raising awareness about the importance of recycling and sustainability. As of 2021, the organization aspires to achieve zero waste in their field of activity in the next decade, which will be reinforced by producing more with less, increasing resource efficiency, and promoting sustainable practices, initiatives which align with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.

Its principal place of activity is located in Sweden, which will disclose how the organization has imposed strict restrictions during the pandemic, in spite of the unconventional guidance
from the government. In response to the pandemic, the Large Enterprise initiated a united policy for all of its departments in April 2020 which established a new policy so that its company wide workplace restrictions were based on the most affected country that the organization operates in at any given time. According to the organization’s announcement, it is “…one of the first companies in the world to initiate a radical transition regarding the execution of the production and the working type of the employees” (Senior Vice President of Human Resources, 2020). Their policy initiated mandatory measurements for employees, one that opposed the mainly voluntary recommendations launched by the Swedish Ministry of Health to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. These measurements indicated a strict off-site occupation for the protection of the employees during COVID-19.

Therefore, this paper aims to research the perspective of middle management on remote working, based on a corporation in Sweden. By conducting interviews with middle level managers within the organization, we aspire to understand the implications of the societal change that the COVID-19 initiated, namely; the rapid shift to remote working conditions.

1.2 Research Problem

Forced change as a factor which deploys dynamic capabilities within organizations and its impact on change management in general, has not yet been explored much in academic research. Even though there is plenty of research on change management, institutional change within the context of a societal challenge is often driven by innovation and sustainable development, unlike the recent pandemic conditions that forced organizations to react immediately to both major health and economic threats. The traditional view on change management focuses on the argument that organizations learn how to react to changes through established routines and strategies that shape the capacity for change of such an organization (Heckmann et al., 2016). This thesis aims to delve into the struggles and risks related to remote work that the middle management at the Large Enterprise had encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the conditions of the change and adaptations that had to be established immediately, we aspire to explore the individual experiences of middle level managers. By doing so, we intend to dive into the concept of change management and dynamic managerial capabilities, while focusing on the personal level of the people who hold middle level management positions.
1.3 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore the experiences of middle managers while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore decided to conduct in-depth interviews with middle level managers working within the Large Enterprise that was presented above, in order to gain their insights on the changes related to the pandemic, as well as the strategies that were adopted in order to cope with these changes.

Ultimately, the research question of this research paper is shaped as follows:

1. How did the middle-level management in the Large Enterprise experience remote work during the COVID-19 period?
2. What is the perspective of the managers on the Change Management of the organization?
3. What are the challenges that the managers identified during remote working?

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This Chapter sheds light on the previous studies on remote work and the experience of middle management of remote work. We have adopted the thematic order when structuring the literature overview based on the theories used for this research: change management and dynamic managerial capabilities in the context of remote work.

2.1 Middle Management and Change

Herzig & Jimmieson (2006) define middle management as “managers holding positions between the first-level supervisor and the level of executives, below those who have company-wide responsibilities” (p. 628). The role of middle management in organizations and change management is important due to several factors, such as the intermediate position between different actors and domains and their functions as agents of change (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Hence, the perspective of middle managers on change management is of particular interest for researchers and practitioners, especially in times of the COVID-19 crisis.
Previous studies point out the difficulties that middle managers face in times of change, such as conflicting and contradictory messages from senior management and subordinates, which often complicates successful change management (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). Given the intermediary role of middle management between the decision makers and employees, the idea of empowering middle managers in their everyday activities seems logical. Raelin & Cataldo (2011) argue for the benefits of empowering middle management; their research pointed to positive outcomes of such an empowerment which were increased involvement of employees, fostering safe context and trust within organization.

The research conducted by Herzig & Jimmieson (2006) assert that the perspective of middle management on change, especially in times of uncertainty, is important for organizations, because they support and facilitate the communication between senior management and employees.

2.2 Middle Management and Remote Work

Remote work is not a new concept, ever since digital technologies allowed virtual communication, people have been working online to varying degrees (Varma, et al., 2022). Shirmohammadi et al., (2022) define remote work as “an alternative work arrangement that involves individual workers performing tasks away from their primary offices, using information and communication technologies to interact with others inside and outside their organization” (p. 165). The COVID-19 crisis forced companies to send their employees home to maintain a safe working environment, which resulted in increased interest in remote work, including research and academia. Many researchers tried to investigate the advantages and shortcomings of remote working, with some criterias showing more positive impacts than others (Battisti et al., 2022). For example, the utility of the tools that are provided during online working are significant for the successful communication of the employees (Hantula, 2011).

Online environment and remote work altered the means and ways of communication between employees and their managers. According to a study conducted by Cao et al. (2021), multitasking became more common because of virtual meetings. On the other hand, the research conducted by Yang et al. (2022) revealed that switching to remote work reduced regular meetings and calls. The study also indicated the increased role of stronger ties during the pandemic, which “are better suited for information transfer, and decreased role of weak
ties, which are less likely to provide access to new information” (Yang et al., 2022, p. 43). Prior research revealed that working in virtual teams is less effective at sharing information, while some authors correlate this with a lack of face-to-face interaction (Gifford, 2022).

One of the main disadvantages of remote work is that it caused both managers and employees to be more demanding (Battisti et al., 2022), as well as decreased engagement among employees (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). Delfino & van der Kolk (2021) investigated the relationships of managers and their employees in the remote work environment. Their findings point to the change in management towards the more constraining type of control and monitoring, as well as increased autonomy experienced by their subordinates (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021). Due to the constraints of working online and inability to supervise the activities of team members in person, managers had to use digital monitoring platforms (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021).

2.2.1 Dynamic Managerial Capabilities and Remote Work

Dynamic managerial capabilities are defined as the abilities of managers that they employ to create, expand and adjust the ways companies function in order to demonstrate the relationship between managerial decisions and actions under conditions of change (Helfat & Martin, 2015). There is not much academic research on dynamic managerial capabilities in the context of remote work; it is often regarded in relation to other change factors, such as sustainable development, diversity management, etc. However, it is indicated that the process of development of dynamic managerial capabilities is heavily influenced by the work environment, which can foster the way managers react to changing circumstances (Corrêa et al., 2018). Hence, remote work can be seen as a context for the middle management to deploy their dynamic capabilities during the COVID-19 crisis.

The research conducted by Wohlgemuth et al., (2019) linked dynamic managerial capabilities, trust building and employee participation. Trust can be defined as “an individual’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the belief that another party is competent, honest, reliable, and concerned about the individual’s own interests” (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999, p. 159). Employee engagement requires a certain degree of trust, therefore managers have to loosen monitoring and encourage independence in work (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019).
Gifford (2022) indicates that a lack of social interaction affects teamwork, especially in a virtual environment where communication through digital tools reduces the social cues that help build relationships.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter we review the theory of change management and the theory of dynamic managerial capabilities, in relation to the experience of middle management at the Large Enterprise during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1 Change Management

Change management is portrayed as a process of constantly progressing an organization’s direction, structure and capabilities, so as to satisfy the needs of external and internal stakeholders (Moran & Brightman 2000). According to Castells (2007), societies evolve through the deconstruction of deep rooted institutional practices “under the pressure of new power relationships and thus, constructing new sets of institutions” (p.258), which therefore allows progress. In the process of change management, it is essential to emphasize the characteristics that need to be altered, while preserving the good qualities of the business (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Thus, the importance of the evaluation process is indicated, which highlights the features that need to be altered. Hence, change management depends on the assessment according to which the change will be initiated. That stands behind the reason why change initiatives often “fail to succeed”, since the lack of proper prioritization, in combination with the “initiation of too many change strategies”, cause the so-called “change fatigue” (Bruce & English, 2020). Additionally, organizations today need to be more vigilant than ever, since societal crises are recurrent and significantly impact the stability of the business market.

Nevertheless, change management literature indicates the complications and complexity of the change process, which demands an organizational and cultural initiative, rather than ill-conceived implementation of transformational strategies (Franken et al., 2009). Indeed, strategic initiatives under one set of circumstances cannot necessarily be successfully applied in another context (Balogun et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the experience that is gained during a crisis is fundamental and acts as a facilitator, in order to cope with future challenges. For instance, the past two years have forced corporations to make digitization and digital
transformation a necessary strategic characteristic (Matt et al., 2015). Even though that was already a prerequisite for sustainability in the modern business market, many organizations still struggle with adopting digital transformation (Andersson et al., 2018).

The research on the subject reveals the continuous pursuit of the optimum steps that are required for successful change management. Having said that, the process of change ought to be future-proofed and viable in the long term, highly adjusted in the process and the content of the organization (Goodman & Truss, 2004). Relative research aspires to provide an explanation of why most forced-changes reveal the lack of preparedness and therefore affect corporations, - a pattern that was also observed during the COVID-19 crisis (Nabi & Mishra, 2021). The transformation of the last two years required organizations to provide remote infrastructure that can support a digital workforce (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). Embracing the shift to remote working has been a prominent organizational adaptation, which ultimately reflects the flexibility of an organization.

For the sake of transparency of the paper, the basic division between organizational changes is provided below (Harvard Business School, 2020). Change can be classified in to two primary categories according to their nature:

- Organic (or adaptive) change refers to the gradual and slow transition from a state to another, where the organization has all the time and resources necessary to react. Certainly, this category reflects initiatives that provide the organization with a long term plan in order to adapt as a natural course. Therefore adaptive changes provide organizations with the time frame to establish a change strategy (Hess & Kazanjian, 2006).

- Radical (or transformational) change refers to the unexpected demand for change, while disrupting the normal function of an organization (Heyden et al., 2020). This type of change occurs without proper warning and demands quick response and reconstruction. The external factors include change that is forced upon the organization, such as situations like the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding strategic initiatives in change management, the implementation of organizational change could be succeeded through 8 steps (Kotter 1996), which function consecutively and aim at assisting with adaptation to new trends, both regarding organic and radical changes. Major emphasis is put on the establishment of a change culture in the organization, which acts
as a foundation for organizational change, regardless of its nature. To be precise, the Kotter change model stands on three basic divisions; (i) creating the climate for change initiatives, (ii) engaging with the new initiative by creating a positive disposition and finally (iii) maintaining change and creating agility.

Since radical changes have been quite frequent during the last few years, we come to the conclusion that unless change is actively embraced and proactively established, organizations risk becoming outmoded, especially in automation industries (McGuinness et al., 2021). Thus, it is considered essential for organizations to establish the capabilities to adjust and embrace change to their advantage. The need for change initiatives naturally results from factors which can regard both the internal and external activity of an organization.

Corporations often neglect the first steps of the change initiatives, namely the process of creating the climate for change initiatives (Kotter, 1996), which then displays the low tolerance to societal challenges. Therefore, this model remarks the significance of loyalty to the process, which ought to include all of the steps, in order to establish a strong and agile organizational presence.

3.2 Dynamic Managerial Capabilities

The theory of dynamic managerial capabilities emerged as a measure to address the role of managers in the decision making process (Helfat & Martin, 2015). Dynamic managerial capabilities are defined as the abilities of managers that they employ to create, expand and adjust the ways companies function in order to demonstrate the relationship between managerial decisions and actions under conditions of change (Helfat & Martin, 2015). Since the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the way managers normally interact with their teams, middle managers were the link between top management and employees, who had to improvise and act quickly. We apply the theory of dynamic managerial capabilities to the experience of the middle management working at the Large Enterprise in order to reflect on the managerial experience of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Widianto et al., (2021) creates the division between three dimensions of DMC; managerial cognition, social capital and human capital.

Managerial cognition refers to the analytical mindset of a manager which allows for better planning and problem solving through collaborative strategies and comprehensive analysis
(Widianto et al., 2021). Team leaders and managers with such qualities foster smoother transition during times of change and facilitate a more trustworthy relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Managerial cognition includes “mental models and beliefs, mental processes and emotions” (Helfat & Martin, 2015, p. 1285). The way managers operate and make decisions is heavily influenced by the mental structures that they build based on the knowledge and information they receive (Helfat & Martin, 2015). The main obstacle for managers to apply their cognition in times of change is transferring their knowledge from one context to another. Nevertheless, Helfat & Martin (2015) indicate that managers who previously experienced change developed the ability to apply their knowledge structures in other contexts.

Managerial social capital covers the interrelations within an organization and the bonds between employees that promote the feeling of trust and confidence in the organization (Widianto et al., 2021). The concept is closely related to transparency of an organization and accessibility of information distributed across all levels. Keeping people informed and updated on important matters encourages better understanding of the value of changes and strengthens more efficient communication. Both formal and informal professional ties can be a source of necessary information for managers that can help them seize new opportunities (Helfat & Martin, 2015). Social capital does not necessarily refer to relations within the organization managers work in, it can also include external ties that help managers obtain relevant information and resources.

Human capital concerns the skills and knowledge of the manager obtained during previous education, learning and training (Widianto et al., 2021). This concept also includes the personal qualities, interests and values of a manager that allows for a better understanding of the processes during change, which is combined with the education and training expertise.

When it comes to forced change, managers need to react promptly and mobilize all the resources available at that moment. When COVID-19 disrupted organizational functions and workflows, companies had to develop new resources, solutions and strategies in order to stay alive (Kahkonen et al., 2021).
Chapter 4. Methodology

In the chapter below, we demonstrate the method of the analysis. Since the aim of the paper is to explore the experiences of middle-level managers during remote work, we wish to elicit rich data from the interviews, that will be then analyzed according to the theories that were presented above.

4.1 Research Method

For the purpose of this study, we chose to conduct qualitative research. Qualitative research is a method that is commonly used in social sciences in order to collect expressive understanding of a situation, while it aims to capture the cause of individuals’ behavior (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interviews were a frame in which we could engage with the backgrounds of the participants and understand their experiences in remote working. As Alvesson (2011) argues, interviews do not necessarily generate information within specific scientific fields of interest for a research project, but also engage in a sense-making activity. Qualitative research may not necessarily create objective data, but it captures many of the personal views on a situation, which assist with generating meaningful interpretations (Kvale, 1996). Consequently, choosing qualitative research was selected as the optimum method in order to understand, comprehend and sympathize with the interviewees.

Ultimately, this qualitative study will allow us to understand ideas, motives, and behaviors by providing answers to “how?” and “why?” (Creswell, 1998).

4.2 Research Approach

As stated above, we have chosen a qualitative approach, where we concentrate on the understanding of stories and experiences, rather than the creation of an outcome (Bryman, 2012). For that purpose, we chose to conduct this research utilizing the social constructivism approach, keeping in mind that the information that we receive is not neutral or objective, but rather dynamic and personalized. We decided to follow this approach because we support the perspective that the transfer of information holds significance in the means of the communication (Hirtle, 1996). Another important aspect of social constructivism is that it does not question the phenomenon of research, it is the ability to understand and make sense of the phenomenon that matters (Mir & Watson, 2001). Therefore, the way that we communicated our questions, as well as the way that our participants narrated their experiences hold a significance in an interpretation of an outcome.
4.2.1 Philosophy of Science

In this section we address the philosophy of science utilized within this paper and reflect upon the grounds for our choice of the research method. Due to the nature of empirical data collected and the way data was collected, social constructionism was selected as the philosophy of science. According to this approach, our analysis as researchers view knowledge as constructed, not created (Andrews, 2012). Therefore the reality of the people is viewed as both subjective and objective and we aimed at engaging with that perspective of the reality, when conducting interviews with middle managers. Additionally, research is driven by theory and the author guides the process of building the research problem, as well as what theories are to be used and what constitutes observations and evidence (Mir & Watson, 2000). Since our research focused more on the subjective opinions and experiences of middle management at the Large Enterprise, interpretation of the information received was influenced by our understanding of it and what theories we have applied in the analysis. Our thesis does not question the importance of the phenomenon of the middle management’s role in the transition to remote work at the Large Enterprise. Our interpretation of the subjective opinions of the respondents constitutes the research, based on previous research on similar topics.

4.3 Data collection

According to Bryman & Bell (2007), there are three types of qualitative interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. In order to capture the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the hybrid transition for the managers, we designed an interview guide (see Appendix A) which aimed to provide us with in-depth interviews.

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), semi-structured interviewing is often initiated with a set of predetermined questions, but ultimately the participants get the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions about subjects that they consider to be important. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were beneficial in order to create an informal discussion around the matter of COVID-19, in regards to the working conditions and adjustments taken. The purpose of this perspective aimed to capture the individual responses of the participants, so to overall comprehend the people’s actual experiences, rather than their general beliefs (King & Horrocks, 2010). Utilizing this interview structure, we aimed to identify the issues that are important for the understanding of the situation, which are highly dependent on the personalized experiences of the middle level managers.
The empirical data was gathered through the detailed transcription of the semi-structured interviews. The discussions regarded the individual level and perspective of each respondent, who belong to different sectors within the selected corporation. The aim was to capture the lens of the middle managers regarding remote working, so as to comprehend their stories. This qualitative study was conducted in a stripped-down format in order to acquire the meanings that individuals give to their experience, therefore to gain a contextual understanding of the social practice (Mishler, 2009). Ultimately, we aimed at obtaining rich and dynamic data from the different participants.

The following steps were applied by the researchers;

a. Brief introduction of the subject to the participants and familiarization with the method with which the interviews were conducted.

b. Provision of the information on the data confidentiality; statement of agreement with participants regarding the ways and means that private information is handled, managed, and utilized. Contact lists, recorded interviews, or other data that could reveal the identity of the participants were coded.

c. Permission asked for the recording of the interviews.

d. Execution of the interviews through a video or a phone call, according to the preference of the participant. Aspired to conduct individual, one-to-one interviews with the participants, unless group formation was desired by employees working in the same department.

4.3.1 Interviews

Since we decided to focus upon a specific organization, we have selected our participants based on their roles and position level within the Large Enterprise; our choice to stay within one company was justified by the initiative of the organization to follow a strict policy regarding working from home (from April of 2020 to March of 2022). The focus group is middle management, since their role within an organization is significant for the functionality of an organization (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Ultimately, we wanted to elaborate on the managerial perspective of remote working, as well as how they experienced the difficulty of leading people through the hybrid setting.
The process was initiated through collaboration with the HR department of the organization, which assisted with the assignment of the interviews for the period from mid-February till the beginning of March. Since almost all of the interviewees hold different positions at various departments within the company, we have decided to adapt the interview guides for the interviews individually, in order to cover as much relevant and necessary information as possible. We contacted all interviewees through email and agreed to conduct the meeting online as it is the “new normal” way of working for the Large Enterprise, which has already become a crucial fundament of our research. Most of them indicated Google Meet, as this platform is the main source of communication within the organization and all the employees have familiarized themselves with it. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, which allowed the process to develop around a dialogue, leaving time for personal reflections of the managers regarding the transition to the hybrid model and the managerial perspective.

4.3.1.1 Interview Guide

The structure of the interview guide aimed to receive the answers to the questions that were formulated through the main theoretical concepts, therefore to comprehend the personal experiences and perspectives during the remote working transition.

The interview guide included open-ended questions that aimed at covering the main concepts of interest to this paper; if the participants were not able to elaborate on one of the topics, we could reformulate our queries so that it would be more relevant to a specific position within the organization. Since every interviewee works within a certain area, such as Risk Management, Human Resources or Project Management, we aimed to build the interview guide in such a way that it would correspond to all of their expertise and knowledge.

Ultimately, we have adapted the flow of the interviews contingent upon the given field of activities of the interviewees. Our purpose of letting the interviews lead the flow of the research supported an open minded and unrestricted perspective, as we were positive that our participants will give us more insights if we do not confine them into a strictly structured frame of the interview guide (Bryman & Bell 2007). Furthermore, since we wanted to comprehend the personal perspective of the respondents, we support that open-ended questions could generate more individual approaches, since the experience is highly dependant on the person.
4.3.1.2 Respondents

Table 1. List of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Meeting Platform</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>18.02.2022</td>
<td>Google Meet</td>
<td>Interviewed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>18.02.2022</td>
<td>Google Meet</td>
<td>Interviewed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>21.02.2022</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>Interviewed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>21.02.2022</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>Interviewed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>22.02.2022</td>
<td>Google Meet</td>
<td>Interviewed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>28.02.2022</td>
<td>Google Meet</td>
<td>Interviewed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>03.03.2022</td>
<td>Google Meet</td>
<td>Interviewed together with Interviewee H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>03.03.2022</td>
<td>Google Meet</td>
<td>Interviewed together with Interviewee G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As presented above, the respondents of the study constitute a group of administrative staff: HR managers/Project Leaders/Risk Managers of the Large Enterprise based in Sweden, with global presence and influence.

The areas of expertise of the respondents differ but can be arranged into three categories:
• HR Managers hold a corporate standpoint and their experience is more widespread since they are engaged with a variety of employees within the Large Enterprise. We gained a deeper knowledge of the organizational perspective from the interviews with HR managers, such as the provision of amenities from the organization to the employees, assistance services, collaboration with external companies during the pandemic, etc.

• Project Leaders have vast experience in dealing with managing their teams and their supervisors. Since they have a relatively strong connection to their team members and have worked with them on a constant basis for a certain period of time, their insights are focused more on trust and confidence between them and their subordinates. As such, we have focused more on the leadership aspect of the interview guide when interviewing project leaders.

• Risk Managers provide important information on the global perspective of the organization and how different departments around the world coordinate their activities throughout the period of adjustment. As Change Management is highly dependent on the activities of this department, the interviews with Risk Managers supplied this research with the understanding of the mechanisms of organization reacting and embracing change.

There were a lot of similarities between the opinions of our respondents, as well as certain distinctions. The main criteria for choosing the participants of the interviews were the administration of employees during the pandemic and the experience in dealing with the crisis. We did not contact the top management of the organization as we aimed at discovering the stories of those who were in unmediated contact with employees.

4.4 Data analysis
According to Saunders et al. (2007) there are three main approaches to theory development, which are deduction, induction, and abduction. These regard (in order); the theory testing, the creation of new theory or the combination of both. Deriving from the theoretical baseline, we intended to examine the theories related to Change Management and Dynamic Managerial Capabilities, but without necessarily testing a theory, or developing a new concept. Instead, we wanted to utilize the advantages of moving back and forth from the theories and concepts so as to better comprehend the personal perspectives of our interviewees. Therefore, the research analysis was conducted through the abductive approach, which is claimed (Saunders et al., 2007) to assist in understanding a phenomenon with the utility of existing data, the relevant theories and the new data so as to draw conclusions upon the interviews.
The in-depth analysis was additionally enhanced by the social constructivist narrative, since it assisted in the profound understanding of the interviews, rather than the austere division of the interviews in themes. Furthermore, the process in abduction is to extend the theory that is already in practice with the real life study, so as to create a bridge between reality and existing theory (Dubois & Gadde 2002). Ultimately, the abductive reasoning starts with a perception on the available data and then, creates the connection to patterns that ought to explain a phenomenon, which is usually a result of qualitative research (Kovács & Spens, 2005)

We have created a table with the main categories that were ensued from the theoretical chapter that we based our research on. The most insightful and meaningful quotes from our interviews were given a short summary which shaped them into a more concrete statement and then corresponded to the relevant category. More specifically, the coding process derived from the literature review and theoretical baseline presented in the second and third chapter, which allowed us to create main categories, which conclude the fundament of this thesis. The goal was to find the relevant codes, while mainly emphasizing on the participants’ stories and perspectives. These are concluded as such; Remote Working, Change Management and Dynamic Managerial Capabilities. We wanted to focus on the in-depth understanding of the interviews, which is why we preferred to have simple coding (Alvesson, 2011).

Here is an extract from the coding table for the purpose of illustrating the coding process:

**Table 2. Extract from the Coding Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Quote</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is encouraged to speak up, to take initiative, everyone should develop personal leadership. I can see in my projects that sometimes you do not need to be a strict leader; people take responsibility, people are proactive.</td>
<td>Employees are encouraged to speak up.</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We became much more creative, we started to do something we did not do before. Many things are more efficient. A lot of adjustment, a lot of problem solving.</td>
<td>Remote working increased troubleshooting.</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was quite hard because people did not pick up their phones, they did not turn on their camera so you did not know if they</td>
<td>Communication suffered due to remote working.</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
actually participated or if they were doing something else, so it was a bit of a chaos.

| We had this policy before covid also. You could work from home for two days if you had an agreement with the manager so that has been a policy in the past and I think it will be the same in the future. | Remote working was embraced before the pandemic. | Change management |
| Likewise if managers don't like to work from home employees are more reluctant to work from home. That's what we needed to take control of, to have equal things. | Managers had to work from home so that employees would do the same. | DMC |

(The full version of the table can be found in Appendix B hereto)

4.5 Reliability and Validity

Bryman (2012) defines research reliability as the consistency of measuring concepts and introduces three main components of reliability: stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency. Since we have tried to maintain the transparency of our research and we have transcribed all the interviews as accurately and precisely as possible, we are confident in the definition of the data obtained.

Depending on the person interviewed, there might be slight fluctuations as personal experience of the participants has impacted their evaluation of the key categories of the data. This fact corresponds to the idea of internal reliability where respondents’ scores on a certain indicator influence their scores on other indicators (Bryman, 2012).

Validity refers to the adequate measuring concepts and whether they actually reflect the research goal (Bryman, 2012). Our interview guide assisted us in structuring the interviews and addressing the main concepts. However we have been interviewing employees of the same organization and the results might be different in other organizations depending on the industry they operate within.

4.6 Limitations

Since the interview guide includes queries related to the personal insights and experiences of the participants, our findings might be subjected to slight differences in answers. Depending on the department within the Large Enterprise and the work duties, the respondents have
expressed various judgements toward the key concepts. Moreover, personal outlook and prior experience may have influenced the answers of the participants and that affects the research findings as well. Due to the current circumstances of social distancing we carried out all of the interviews online, through various platforms and this might have affected the research. We could have possibly received more non-verbal communication from the respondents if the interviews were conducted in person. Virtual meetings have restricted a deeper and more comprehensive dialogue between us and the respondents; if we had the possibility of in-person interviews, it could have given us a better understanding of the information provided.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality was an integral part of the interview process and we have informed all of our respondents that the interview data would be anonymized and their personal information would be protected. We have assigned letters A-H to each participant and we have only mentioned the department they work in, since this information is important for our research.

Chapter 5. Results and Analysis

Under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was dominating the discussions regarding the reactive policy that the corporation initiated in April of 2020. Therefore, the conversations with the participants concerned the period of working from home and the minimum on-site labor in relation to the forced change during the last two years.

Our analysis is demonstrated through two main categories, which correspond to the presented theories; Change Management and Dynamic Managerial Capabilities. In order to draw conclusions upon the remote working experience of the respondents, we demonstrate the analysis through the lens of remote working in both categories.

Conclusively, we display the analysis through 3 levels; the Change Management, the Middle Management and the challenges that occur in the virtual working setting.
5.1 Change Management

5.1.1 The proactivity

Organizational context refers to a facilitating procedure of a company, on their path to reach the desired change results (Widianto et al., 2021). According to the respondents, the context of the Large Enterprise at the beginning of the pandemic allowed for changes to take place and therefore the organization reacted to the crisis immediately. The company operated and arranged the work of the departments through policies and regulations; by virtue of prompt updates and directions given by the top management. According to the participants, change culture around working from home was embedded in the activity of the organization already, which was implemented throughout the years, before the emergence of the pandemic:

*The organization already had some kind of organizational culture on remote work and that is how we managed to surpass the difficulty and act upon the challenge ahead of time.* (Participant G)

*Working from home was already an option so later, when the pandemic started, it helped us a lot with the transition.* (Participant E)

Hence, through the strategic change initiatives that were already in place, middle management and employees felt more secure during that period of uncertainty (Herzig & Jimmieson 2006).

Another important aspect of the proactive attitude was the global policy that united the departments around the world from the early months of 2020. This measure allowed for a coordinated transition of all the employees, which facilitated internal communication and promoted unity. The feeling of trust and safety was important for the uncertain period during the first months of the pandemic.

*We have our own communication team in Lund, we have weekly updates from the global perspective and we have weekly updates from the local perspective* (Participant H)

According to one of the managers, the Large Enterprise deliberately implemented the global policy so as to maintain control over the crisis and to promote unity around the departments globally:

*The organization has put safety higher (...) and we wanted to have the same standards worldwide.* (Respondent A)
Even though working from home was not unheard of before the pandemic, it was not common for neither employees nor managers to desire to work from home. Managers and employees were reluctant to remote working before the pandemic, as being present in the office was considered a normality:

*Some people were very afraid about working from home.* (Participant E)

*Before the pandemic I was not happy that people were working from home.* (Participant H)

In this sense, the Large Enterprise was already set for the hybrid model of working, but the transition period implemented the feeling of confidence for the employees working from home under normal conditions:

*The hybrid model is quite flexible so it gives you the chance to sit on your own and some days maybe not. Now we have learned to use the remote tools so combining these it would be a good mix.* (Participant E)

In order to achieve the drastic transition to solely digital occupation during the period of the pandemic, the organization had to assist with the provision of hardware, brief on how to use online platforms/tools, as well as support regarding the change of working conditions.

*Since we had the pandemic for quite a while, (...) we could even get some hardware, like screens, to work from home. We got allowance to buy some office chairs, to work from home. It is actually working quite well.* (Respondent B)

The provision of hardware, office furniture and monitor screens in order to facilitate remote working conditions, reflected the organizational preparedness to change (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020).

5.1.2 The Challenge

When the organization had decided to switch to remote work, the risk of weaker management and commitment to working schedule was part of the process. Team leaders have tried to maintain the normal day to day activity, but it was rather challenging, since virtual interaction made it hard for managers to follow up. The control on the actual working hours was challenging to measure and the factor of trust played the most important role in this process (Raelin & Cataldo, 2011):
There was a small fear whether people would take the responsibility and use the time for work only. (Respondent A)

Additionally, the proactive initiative regarding remote working was not implemented for fully remote work before the emergence of the pandemic. That meant that even if the organization tried to familiarize its workforce with online working conditions, nobody expected to switch from mostly on-site labor to fully remote work. Therefore, the managers had to cope with unpleasant situations regarding the working demands of their employees:

Actually, in the beginning we were not that prepared in terms of IT tools. It was running quite well but not good enough so many people were frustrated. (Respondent B)

Managers and team leaders had to develop certain proactive qualities in order to work in remote work settings, especially when applying the strategies and regulations adopted by the top management team of the company, so that the team members would adapt gradually:

(...) I tried to think about the outcome and how I could be proactive in order to avoid certain reactions, before starting implementing the policies. (Respondent C)

In that sense, the challenge of remote working at the beginning taught managers to be proactive, which was consequently a learning process for the employees:

I can see in my projects now that you do not need to be a strict leader, people learn to take responsibility, people are proactive (Respondent B)

The common ground among many of the managers was that the resistance to change could be managed in ways that are beneficial for the team in the long run. That was explained through the interviews as an attempt to embrace the changes rather than looking for ways to eliminate exposure to the change (Thomas & Hardy 2011).

At the same time, the organization tried to accommodate the needs of their employees and treat each case individually. Even though the workers who could work from home were advised to do so, if an employee could not perform their tasks properly at home, due to family reasons or similar, they could come to the office in order to meet individual needs and requirements. The first priority was safety and health of employees and the organization aimed at protecting both physical and mental health. Mental health is an integral part of a smooth organizational
transition (Bruce & English, 2020) and so, the organization took extensive measurements to protect it. According to the respondents, the company aimed at having a smooth adaptation process by emphasizing on the employees’ well being:

We had some colleagues that had to come to site even though we were not allowed, we let them come because they had issues at home so they could not work from there. We took care of them (Respondent D)

They also launched a mental wellbeing campaign for all employees, but also for us managers. There has been a lot of support from the company. (Respondent F)

From the very beginning of the pandemic, the Large Enterprise had established a work group that would deal with the COVID-19 crisis; the global team of specialists within the organization had created risk levels for each country and what was expected from each risk level. A healthcare department was launched for the company employees where they could get assistance related to the COVID-19, other health issues and mental health aid. Apart from that, the company had hired an external company where employees could get psychological help, whether related to the COVID-19 or remote working, while family members had the access to the service as well. During one of the interviews, we were informed of a specific call service that helped the Large Enterprise employees to cope with the crisis:

Half a year after the beginning of the pandemic we had a call service, EAP, Employee Assistance Program. (...) You have 10 calls, and it is also for your family members. That was really appreciated. We also had a healthcare center in Sweden and you could call them. (Respondent D)

5.1.3 The Process of Learning

Change initiatives in the organizational context require the transition from a state to another through education and exposure to new narratives and procedures (Moran & Brightman, 2000). For the Large Enterprise, the management had to come up with solutions to increase efficiency and create motivation through alternative options, since the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic were extremely unstable:

I think in the beginning the pandemic was so new, nothing you would expect and nobody knew how it would affect the business, the working environment. (Respondent A)
The period of uncertainty is a normal ingredient of the transitioning period and should be actively embraced for the successful initiation of the change (Senge & von Ameln, n.d.) This strategy is beneficial for the production of innovative solutions and new initiatives. As one of the respondents mentioned, the long period of uncertainty provided time for improvisation:

We became much more creative, we started to do something we did not do before. Many things are more efficient. A lot of adjustment, a lot of problem solving.
(Respondent B)

Nevertheless, the organization has tried to teach and educate managers on the “new normal” way of working, which shows the ability of the company to adapt and become flexible in times of crisis:

The company put up the rules, e-learning, how to manage in a crisis, how to manage Covid-19, how to be a leader remotely etc. (Respondent A)

The general impression was that the organization had already embedded initiatives that allow flexibility, which acted as a facilitator for a smooth transition (Guberina & Wang, 2021). After this experience, and since the restrictions were being lifted around the world at the time of the interviews, the Large Enterprise is switching to a mixed way of working. Some days of the week will be spent working on site and some days the employees will be able to work from home:

We are introducing a new procedure - flexible working arrangements. How we as managers see working from home in the future. (Respondent F)

This perspective shall reimburse both the remote and on-site work advantages (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021), since the past pandemic has provided adequate time in order to reflect on the drawbacks and benefits of remote working, which was not known or tested so far. Overall, the process of the transition helped both managers and employees to adjust and familiarize with the change:

I think it is important to be able to adjust to changes in this global environment.
(Respondent B)

The Large Enterprise has implemented certain necessary policies covering various aspects of the transition process and is planning to gradually introduce new policies in regards to a hybrid form of working. As mentioned by our respondents as well, the hybrid model will be
highly valuable for the new organizational structure:

*Now we have learned to use the remote tools so combining these it would be a good mix.* (Respondent D)

5.2 Middle Management

In this section we will address the challenge of managing teams during remote work. We will utilize the theory of dynamic managerial capabilities to reflect upon the experiences of our respondents as team leaders. Therefore, we review the way that middle-level managers see their experiences during remote work and what abilities they had to employ or expand as team leaders.

5.2.1 The Challenges of Leading the Team

As we have mentioned before in Section 3.2, the theory of dynamic capabilities managerial cognition refers to the analytical mindset of a manager which allows for better planning and problem solving through collaborative strategies and comprehensive analysis (Widianto et al., 2021). Other authors suggest that dynamic managerial capabilities include “mental models and beliefs, mental processes and emotions” (Helfat & Martin, 2015, p. 1285). As a consequence of the pandemic and remote work, the respondents mentioned that a supportive and encouraging approach was optimized:

*I never put people down, I use humble management. Even if someone is having incorrect input, it is still an input. I think this encourages people to speak up.*

(Respondent B)

The majority of the participants have indicated that they acted based on the situation since every case should be treated individually, especially in the circumstances of unpredictability and uncertainty. Managerial cognition is often associated with mental structures of managers that are based on the information and knowledge they receive (Helfat & Martin, 2015). Many respondents highlighted the importance of the updates they were receiving from the top management in the beginning of the pandemic:

*They had a plan on how to get prepared but it was so new that nobody knew how it would affect us so we were getting updates all the time.* (Respondent B).
One of the challenges that managers face is transferring knowledge from one context to another (Helfat & Martin, 2015). Given the unprecedented occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a challenge for managers to apply their previous knowledge onto the crisis.

The big change now was not being on site, it is quite similar when it comes to not being fully in control (Respondent A).

I have not experienced a crisis like COVID in terms of affecting the whole world (Respondent F).

Accordingly, the knowledge that managers gained during the pandemic enhanced their managerial cognition. Managers who had experienced change before the emergence of the pandemic, developed the ability to apply their knowledge structures in other contexts (Helfat & Martin, 2015).

During the transition to remote working, one of the main challenges that the employees of the organizations faced was the distribution of the time to the tasks. For the managers, the challenge included the struggle to monitor their subordinates. According to Delfino & van der Kolk (2021), remote work and inability to supervise the activities of team members in person forced managers to use digital monitoring platforms. The respondents admitted the struggle to let control go in order to allow the work progress.

As a manager having the employees spread out while you are not really in control, it has been challenging to let the control go. (Respondent A)

Working at the office is stricter on the time schedule and the brakes, something that people need to have total control over, when working from home. (Respondent H)

Something that was emphasized during the interviews was the time frame of working from home. Managers that mentored many teams, or a team with many members, had to make sure that remote work will not affect the communication within the team and mentoring process. The first months of the pandemic introduced a new reality for the employees, who had to take the responsibility and distribute their working time accordingly. The meetings were multiplied and were taking more time, which led to a stricter schedule that needed to be followed. In comparison to on-site meetings, managers mentioned that they had to conduct meetings both with the whole team, as well as with each and every one individual that constitutes the team.
I have a fairly sized team, they focus on different parts but we still work on common tasks as well. I interacted with everyone on a daily basis, through Teams, Zoom and normal calls. I have a strong relationship with my team, but across the team they do not really talk to each other. (Respondent E)

This initiative was mostly introduced by managers in order to ensure the well-being of the employees both on the personal and collaborative matters and ultimately to “maintain the team spirit”. One example of the different time frame of the online meetings:

(...) We had to collaborate between Finance, IT and HR. We do not have strong personal connections between departments, so I think the task could have been done faster in the office. (Respondent F)

Especially for the managers, the challenge to administer their employees was prominent:

As a manager it is harder to arrange the employees and arrange the time frame in comparison to having them in the office. (Respondent A)

One of the consequences was the lack of trust between the managers and their employees, as they could not monitor their progress:

You start to doubt the trust, then you need to start looking at the deliveries as well. Are the projects handed on time? Do they have a normal workload? That has been the hardest, changing the mindset. (Respondent B)

Thus, because the communicative technicalities took much more time and effort than usual, the time frame for the rest of the tasks was rearranged. In order to interact with a colleague, employees had to book a time slot which meant that meetings were characterized as a conventional procedure and formality.

Everyone has been fully booked, because in order to be sure that you get a meeting you need to book a time slot. (Respondent E)

Inevitably, that led tasks being more time consuming than before, over-time working hours, during lunch or after the normal schedule:

We have not failed but it took longer to complete the tasks. (Respondent F)
There have been a lot of meetings (...) You start at 6 in the morning until 6 in the afternoon, meeting after meeting. For me, since you didn't meet people you had to have meetings. Five minutes at work took at least half an hour. (Respondent C)

From the other hand, the organization is a fairly big corporation which means that going from one meeting to another could also take time, that was ultimately minimized during remote working:

The company has a big site so I used to spend some time getting from one place to another. If I was in one meeting, it would take almost 15 minutes to get to another meeting. (Respondent D)

This issue was one of the many that arose during the past two years, which was a challenge that managers were called to tackle, in order to protect the well being of themselves and their employees.

Overall, the team leaders agreed that in order to surpass a challenge in the working environment, adaptivity and flexibility are required. Additionally, trust plays a fundamental role in the change management (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019).

5.2.2 Communication in the Virtual Setting

Communication had undergone certain changes during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the specificity of virtual working settings. Previous research indicates that switching to remote work reduced regular meetings and calls (Yang et al., 2022). The respondents mentioned that the transition process was continuous and took several months, since the first months of working from home were characterized as complex and unfamiliar on many levels. Therefore, regarding the current conditions of working, the managers agreed that conducting meetings through online platforms is not seen as an obstacle for fulfillment of tasks. Throughout the discussions with the participants, the general impression is that virtual communication has improved, since the COVID-19 crisis has made it easy for everyone to conduct online meetings. Accordingly, remote work enables the employees to efficiently utilize their time and divide their tasks accordingly:

There are different kinds of tasks, some tasks are more efficient when you work remotely because no one can get by and talk to you so you sit on your own and
you can focus if you close some of the chat apps. I had a lot of tasks that I never had done and now they are easily done. (Respondent D)

On the other hand, the respondents indicated that virtual communication is more time consuming; a meeting of 10 minutes can last up to 30 minutes (Respondent C). According to Gifford (2022) sharing information in virtual teams is less effective due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. Consequently, because of the duration of the online meetings, many employees faced the issue of overbooked schedules, which has caused implications mostly regarding the “small tasks”, that would normally take 5 minutes to be resolved on-site. Furthermore, due to the long meetings, many managers had to work overtime in order to compensate and ultimately to complete the rest of their tasks:

As a manager it is harder to arrange the employees and arrange the time frame. That applies to the other way around as well, they have to reach out on several platforms and that leads to frustrations and thus it creates a snowball effect. We cannot measure it but we can see it is not as easy for the small tasks because the interaction is not the same. When you have an online meeting it is not that efficient. (Respondent A)

Initially, the tools that were suggested and provided by the organization were too many. The communication can be too rich and lead to confusion, which was mentioned by some of the respondents causing them to feel overwhelmed and ultimately less productive (Hantula, 2011).

A lot of tools for communication, a bit too many. At the beginning we were confused so the organization reduced the number of tools so to help us focus on one, they made some good divisions according to how many people are at the meetings, to use a specific tool. (Respondent E)

Accordingly, the need to intervene and make clear proposals on the tools that should be used was part of the adjustments that the organization took in order to create more effective virtual interaction and to increase efficiency in general.

Most of the participants indicated that online meetings ought to be used as a supportive communicative tool, since activities like small talk and brainstorming that can be beneficial for the achievement of a project did not occur through online meetings. Plus, unofficial
interaction on site helps to create unity among the employees, which ultimately acts as an
adjunct for team spirit and better collaboration. As it was mentioned:

*Small talk is what was missed the most since it provides space for social
interaction, apart from strictly professional.* (Respondent C)

Furthermore, online meetings make it harder to read body language and interact on a personal,
humane level (Standaert et al., 2021). Virtual communication obstructs the interaction
between the employees and thus people rather assume that others observe them as they speak
through the camera. Many managers faced this challenge with their colleagues, since virtual
interaction affected the communication and thus, the decision making process:

*When you are in a room physically you can kind of see and read a lot from
gestures but when you have digital meetings it is more difficult.* (Respondent B)

Communication has had an impact on the working flow, since there was a slight struggle with
choosing a preferable platform for scheduling meetings, discussing work tasks and arranging
informal chats. Unclear instructions on messenger usage led to late replies, poor performance
of tasks and misunderstandings:

*When employees want to reach out to me or to other colleagues, they have to
reach out on several platforms and that leads to frustrations which has an impact
on productivity, and thus it creates a snowball effect.* (Respondent A)

Lack of social interaction has also impacted the overall performance since a great amount of
work in the organization is done through informal coffee breaks and meetings. Moreover,
people who are more extroverted by nature, need to physically interact with colleagues in
order to carry out daily activities. From the other hand, people who tend to isolate themselves
and distance from the community was a top priority, since the past two years have inevitably
affected their social capacity:

*You always have people that do not perform, some people don't feel well if they
don't have their colleagues around:you need to focus on these people and actually
bring them into site, a community,maybe they lose themselves and that has an
impact on productivity in the long run.* (Respondent E)
Based on that fact, most respondents concluded that one of the major drawbacks of remote working was missing this social interaction, which made them look forward to being on-site. Even though working from home has been a pleasant experience overall, most of the participants mentioned that some procedures should solely take place physically. Consequently, the social aspect was the most impacted and according to the respondents it could not be replaced by virtual initiatives:

(...) you need interaction, even if you meet virtually, it is not the same.
(Respondent A)

Therefore, the communication shift was and still is one of the most challenging factors regarding remote work. The managers had to make an extra effort in order to boost the digital communication

As a manager it is much harder to find or see the small things that you normally see within a team. You hear things and you see people and understand if something is going on, when you see them physically. That is much harder on video. (Respondent E)

Ultimately, the lack of physical interaction impacts the efficiency of the communication and is a distinct factor of on-site working.

5.2.3 Remote Work and Social Interaction

Our respondents have mentioned the importance of social interaction in building the spirit of unity and trust within the Large Enterprise. Therefore, this section will elaborate more on this aspect.

Due to the transition into the digital world, the employees at the Large Enterprise have seen the social interaction with their colleagues altering. The importance of social bonds for managers is reflected in the social capital component as part of the dynamic managerial capabilities. Managerial social capital covers the interrelations within an organization and the bonds between employees that promote the feeling of trust and confidence in the organization (Widianto et al., 2021). Interpersonal communication and informal discussions had been part of the working process in the Large Enterprise long before remote work became possible. As indicated by Helfat & Martin (2015), informal professional ties are as important as formal
professional ties and can be a source of necessary information for managers that can help them seize new opportunities. One of the participants have noted that:

\[ \text{The culture earlier at the company was such that you just go by desk and ask people, or you take a little break and go to the coffee machine but take the issue with you, so that you can discuss and that is a more relaxed way of communicating. (Respondent D)} \]

Even though there are platforms for informal interaction which the Large Enterprise have tried to engage the employees into coffee breaks, it did not work well as it is a different setting from the office environment:

\[ \text{What the managers have tried to do is to get all of the employees to connect on a specific day of the week so people could socialize and drink some coffee, (...) it did not work that well. (Respondent C)} \]

After two years of remote work, the organization is planning to implement a hybrid work schedule where their employees will work in the office some days, since people miss the social interaction and the formal environment of the office:

\[ \text{I am convinced that you need interaction, even if you meet virtually, it is not the same as meeting in real life. (Respondent A).} \]

According to some of the participants, the flexibility that will be provided through the hybrid working model is prominent for the satisfaction of both the social, personal and professional aspect. Working both from home and on site is the best combination for the well being of the employees:

\[ \text{Combining the peace of working from home and the social aspect of working on site is the best. (Respondent A)} \]

\[ \text{The hybrid model is quite flexible. (Respondent E)} \]

5.3 Challenges of Remote Work

In this section we will review the experience of the respondents in dealing with the resistance they encountered from their team members when switching to remote work, as well as how the engagement was affected by the virtual environment. As noted by Battisti et al., (2022)
both managers and employees become more demanding as a result of the transition to remote work. Lack of compromise and disagreement caused by switching to a digital work environment required managers to undertake a new approach in order to address the resistance from their team members. As we have mentioned in the dynamic capabilities theory part, the element of human capital covers the skills and knowledge of the manager obtained during previous education, learning and training (Widianto et al., 2021); such qualities of a manager working in the Large Enterprise had helped them to overcome the resistance from their subordinates and to engage them in the virtual settings. Therefore, this section will explore the phenomena of resistance and engagement within the organization and how managers have employed their personal qualities in order to deal with the changes.

5.3.1 Resistance

When the Large Enterprise had decided to switch to remote work, employees were reluctant to change due to the unprecedented situation of being forced to work online. The initiation of the policy created mixed feelings for the employees, who were not immediately affecting the decision making process. According to Herzig & Jimmieson (2006), middle managers face a lot of issues in times of change, such as conflicting and contradictory messages from senior management and subordinates, which often complicates successful change management. The respondents noted that it was difficult to implement the policies issued by the senior management because their team was reluctant to accept the changes.

It has been difficult to motivate because people are different, some agree but some resist the policy. (Respondent A)

Some people were very afraid about working from home, they didn't know how to, and actually the one who was the most resistant in my team is now the one that loves working from home and doesn't want to go back. (Respondent E)

According to our interviewees, team leaders are the intermediary link between the decision makers of the Large Enterprise and employees. The middle-level managers act as agents of change due to their intermediate position between different actors and domains (Wooldridge et al., 2008). As we have been informed, employees resisted more to remote working if their managers were skeptical about working from home:
If managers do not like to work from home, employees are more reluctant to work from home. That is what we needed to take control of, have equal things, it did not matter if you were a manager or an employee. (Respondent C)

Additionally, since the organization was following strict and identical regulations around the world, wearing masks and keeping distance were mandatory. Even if that was a normality for most of the other countries, in Sweden it was quite controversial, since the need to wear a mask was solely mandatory inside the Large Enterprise:

We met some resistance from workers when we switched to remote working and they did not want to wear face masks. (Respondent D)

During the COVID-19 crisis, employees were allowed to work some days in the office, if they preferred so. The team leaders had to be present as well, or at least one of the team leaders of all the teams needed to be at the office in order to mentor them. The issue was that some employees preferred to be on site every day because of different reasons, such as inability to work from home with kids, or their partners were also working from home. This has caused a certain degree of resistance from workers that did not want to be on-site during the transition:

We always had employees on site so we needed to have managers on site, and I wanted to have a rotating schedule so everyone was there but then there were some that volunteered to be there every day. (Respondent C)

Employees were also resistant to informal conversations with each other; there was an established organizational culture in the Large Enterprise where coffee breaks were part of the working process. Creating similar routines through online means had not succeeded and people opposed to artificial socialization:

(...) in terms of mental health. We also had a plan for that, we had digital fika, those who had time could join and see other colleagues for half an hour. But people did not connect that much. (Respondent B)

In general, employees at the Large Enterprise resisted any change, whether it was shifting to remote work or returning to the office. Such resistance had created challenges for leaders who had to come up with various strategies and adaptive methods in order to engage their team members:
I think I need a relaxed approach now because I do not want to think that I question their work. (Respondent D).

Such a relaxed approach and decreased control over employees was noted by Wohlgemuth et al. (2019), who indicated that employee engagement requires a certain degree of trust, therefore managers have to loosen monitoring and encourage independence in work.

Employees resist any alteration, regardless of the change. Accordingly, the managers realized that their teams were not willing to go back to the office once restrictions were lifted.

People resist when I try to gather everyone on a certain day to meet physically. It has been such a long time and people are set in their own routine and I want to go back again but there is no danger. (Respondent F).

Switching to a hybrid regime is not an easy process, employees are now used to working from home. Therefore, it is important to include team leaders in the process of planning schedules and meetings, who are the intermediary link between senior management and employees (Wooldridge et al., 2008). The insights of managers should be taken into account when “planning face-to-face activities, recognizing that it takes more effort to maintain relationships in virtual environment” (Gifford, 2022, p. 109)

5.3.2 Engagement

As previous research indicates, remote work caused decreased engagement among employees (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). One of the main challenges caused by remote work was to retain the activity of employees through online tools. Since it was hard to convince people to be active during meetings, team leaders had to come up with various techniques and strategies to maintain a proper level of engagement. Employee engagement requires a certain degree of trust, therefore managers have to loosen monitoring and encourage independence in work (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019). Engaging employees through virtual communication seemed to be the most challenging task due to the shortages of the interaction through video calls:

When you are in a room physically you can kind of see and read a lot from gestures but when you have digital meetings it is more difficult. Not everyone uses their cameras, but now our management encourages us to use them. (Respondent B)
Camera is more structured in the way you talk and you need to let different people talk and need to monitor otherwise it would be just a few people that always talk.

(Respondent C)

One of the consequences of remote work that affected employee engagement was multitasking during the virtual meetings. While conducting the interviews, it was mentioned that remote work is a situation where it is easy to multitask and simultaneously work on many tasks. That was happening either because of the nature of online communication, which provides the ability to multitask while attending a meeting, or because of the duration of the meetings, which has been extended, so as to compensate for the lack of physical interaction.

_The strategy was to communicate often and be as honest as possible, we did not want to hide anything. Therefore we had a lot more meetings than before._

(Respondent H)

This phenomenon was generally observed during the pandemic (Karl et al., 2021) and it was highly related to the lack of physical interaction. According to Cao et al. (2021) multitasking was common especially in videoconference meetings, since approximately 30% of the meetings included email multitasking. According to the participants, the ability to multitask and the lack of time to fulfill the rest of the tasks made the interaction harder to maintain:

(...)_everything takes longer, all the meetings and small things are much harder._

(Respondent E)

Inevitably, employees utilized the time in order to finish complementary tasks that were left behind because of the schedule rearrangements:

_Since you don't have time to do your work, you start working parallel with the meetings. If I look at myself, in some minutes I'm not that focused. If I had been at work and sat with my colleagues it would be different._

(Respondent C)

As the respondents have mentioned, that may have a negative impact on the connection with the other colleagues, since it made it challenging to deeply communicate during an online meeting and rather reflects a more distant form of interaction:
When a lot of colleagues join a meeting, you can multitask, which is both good and bad. Maybe you can do more things during the meeting, but on the other hand you cannot focus that well. (Respondent B)

Additionally, the personal intimacy that could be created during meetings was dependent on the number of the participants in a meeting, since the more people that were involved made it harder to interact without interrupting someone else, causing an overall frustration:

In the beginning it took time to learn how to involve everyone, to be active in the meeting, to participate actively and not to be passive. (Respondent B)

That conclusion is highly referring to the first months of working from home, which means that after the familiarization with remote working, the negative implications of virtual communication were eliminated.

It was harder at the beginning, you had to engage with people through phone calls or online meetings which was challenging. (Respondent A)

Additionally, the efficiency of the meetings was dependant on the type of projects, which was comprehended through the time of exclusively remote working:

There are different kinds of tasks, some tasks are more efficient when you work remotely because no one can get by and talk to you so you sit on your own and you can focus if you close some of the chat apps. (Respondent D)

Overall, the setting of remote work has made it possible to combine activities and tasks, which thus has made it hard to engage in the meetings and communicate efficiently. The process of adapting to the new reality contributes to organizational learning, both for the upper management and for the employees.

Moreover, the non-verbal communication has affected the quality of work. Due to the nature of online meetings, people tend to be less involved in the discussion and often even absent from the meeting. When asked which was the bigger challenge in the engagement process, the lack of physical interaction was remarked for the recruitment process as well:

Another part that we are missing is that it's hard to introduce new people to the organizational culture. Before it worked fine but now introducing people during
the pandemic was not that good. It was hard for people to get to know the colleagues and get to know how to find different things. (Respondent E).

I would say, to lead every team online, digitally, and to be able to catch those signals it took time, because you do not see people the same way as in a conference room. (Respondent B)

The main solution that managers came up with was delegating and sharing the responsibility of conducting online meetings with their subordinates. Within the theory of dynamic managerial capabilities, managerial cognition refers to the analytical mindset of a manager which allows for better planning and problem solving through collaborative strategies and comprehensive analysis (Widianto et al., 2021). The approach undertaken by the managers at the Large Enterprise had allowed for a more engaging conversation between employees and increased the interest from workers to be present and active during online meetings:

I provide support for my team. I have tried to be involved in the overall decision making, based on the experience of HR, how we should move forward and try to come up with different solutions. (Respondent F)

Everyone is encouraged to speak up, to take initiative, everyone should develop personal leadership. I can see in my projects that sometimes you do not need to be a strict leader, people take responsibility, people are proactive. (Respondent B)

Even though it was possible to maintain the employees’ engagement during online meetings over time, the managers have informed us that they feel relieved now since people are returning to the office. It is much more challenging to keep persuading people to be active online than when conducting meetings in person. Ultimately, this is the reason why the hybrid model becomes a dominating working model (Carroll & Conboy, 2020), since the attributes of both remote and on-site work come with challenges and benefits.

**Chapter 6. Discussion**

In this chapter we discuss and conclude the results of our research. We want to provide answers to the queries that were initially established in the first chapter.

The results of this research shed light on the personalized experiences of middle level managers, based on an organization with headquarters in Sweden. Utilizing literature that
focuses on Change Management and Dynamic ManagerialCapabilities, we explore the experiences of managers during a challenging and demanding period. We are informed on their perspective on their organization’s ability to respond to change, which defined the direction that the organization chose to follow; working fully remotely from April of 2020 till March of 2022. For that purpose, we also utilize literature related to the remote work setting, as well as the hybrid model that is in general rising during the last years.

According to the respondents, the Large Enterprise followed a certain path and possessed certain prerequisites to proactively initiate change when the pandemic started. This decision opposed the general Swedish regulations that did not coerce the society to stay home (Bengtsson & Brommesson, 2022), as we have seen in most of the other European countries.

Ultimately, in order to address the research questions that were established in the first chapter of this research paper, we provide answers related to each question separately:

1. How did the middle-level management in the Large Enterprise experience remote work during the COVID-19 period?

As we were informed by our participants, the middle management in the Large Enterprise received necessary resources to better lead their teams, which assisted for a balanced transition to remote working for all of the employees. These resources regard the support, infrastructure and constant updates on the situation, which provided both the middle management and the lower level employees with security and safety in order to cope with the change. The Large Enterprise put emphasis both on the local and global factors, which derived from the fact that the regulations in the Swedish department were stricter than the Swedish society. Therefore, the organization understood the irregularity of the situation and wanted to update their employees in order to make them feel confident about the decision that the management took at the beginning of the pandemic. Overall, the inclusion of the middle management on the strategic decision of the Enterprize was beneficial for the trust that was necessary for the endurance of the challenge. This feature aligns with the belief that middle management holds a significant position inside large organizations, especially in periods of uncertainty, since they hold the communication between upper and lower levels (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006)
Additionally, seminars and meetings that were targeting the education of the managers on how to work from home and still administer their employees, assisted in the confidence and security of the managers. The briefing on the day to day activities was crucial for the smooth transition, since nobody was prepared for a radical change where remote working and virtual communication were the only options. This irregular situation required managers to let off control and emphasize trust and reliability between colleagues. (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019). Furthermore, the investment on the constant learning and training that was initiated by the organization helped the managers to better cope with the resistance from their subordinates (Widianto et al., 2021), who also needed to adapt in an unfamiliar working model.

Moreover, provision of mental health care was a milestone for the employees, since they and their families could actively ask for help regarding the mental implication of COVID-19. Struggling during the transition was not a taboo for the organization, since the potential challenges that the workforce may have faced were predicted and embraced. The organizational guidelines during the transition developed the feeling of safety, which was the number one goal for the Large Enterprise. Based on the interviews, we understood that the organization’s support regarding mental health issues was highly appreciated and valued by the employees (Bruce & English, 2020), which therefore helped the employees to have a positive perspective on the change.

On the other hand, virtual communication was one of the most prominent challenges that was demanding to surpass. Exclusive virtual interaction makes team building and small talk more challenging (Standaert et al., 2021), which has an effect in the execution of collaborative tasks. Even though the organization took initiatives for virtual social interaction, the managers admitted that they did not like the leadership adjustments that needed to be taken. They claim that traditional interaction cannot be replaced, which is explained by the lack of uninterrupted interaction and face to face communication (Gifford, 2022) For that purpose, most of them agreed that the hybrid working model is the future for the organization and will be embraced through new policies for all the employees.

2. What is the perspective of the managers on the Change Management of the organization?

Change management prepares an organization for a smoother transition when either organic or radical changes occur (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). Policies and procedures that are
structured in an adjustable and flexible manner, provide organizations with the resources for a milder transition. Namely, the cultural background regarding change management affects the consequences when an unpredicted change arises (Franken et al., 2009). Ultimately, a positive attitude to change as well as constant reconstruction and reorganization of a corporation educates and prepares the workforce for transitions, which acts positively in the incidence of a forced, unpredictable change (Kahkonen et al., 2021).

The remote working choice was in place before the pandemic, which has therefore greased the wheels of the new way of working when social distancing became a requirement for everyone. From that sense, the participants felt prepared for the change that occurred because of COVID-19, even if no one knew how long the policy would last. Inevitably, the drastic difference from remote working some days per week to strict off-site working created the need for alternative ways to monitor the employees through virtual tools (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021). Overall, the managers admitted that the trust was challenged because of the inability to monitor the working progress but eventually, they had to let control off and provide their teams with independence, so to overall surpass the challenge and survive the two-year strict working policy.

Managers that prioritize their employees’ wellbeing provide the advantage of trust and transparency, which creates a feeling of protection in the workforce (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). Especially in times of social insecurity, employees that feel appreciated and included, work for a better future for both themselves and the company they work in (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019). That was the interpretation that the managers provided us with, since they put a lot of emphasis on the trust that needs to exist, for the remote and therefore the hybrid working condition.

Consequently, the proactive change management and the inclusion of the middle level managers from the upper management developed a positive response for our respondents. This reaction was further communicated to the lower levels and concludes why middle management holds a crucial function, especially regarding change management (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Overall, the managers expressed their satisfaction regarding the way that the organization decided to act. Even if there were initial challenges, the problem solving initiatives and the progress that was made during the pandemic, provided the respondents with a feeling of success regarding remote working and its implications.
3. What are the challenges that the managers identified during remote working?

Our respondents highlighted several aspects that they had struggled with during remote working. According to the participants, the biggest challenge related to remote work was the implementation of the change policies that they were receiving from the top management. Middle managers face a lot of issues in times of change, such as conflicting and contradictory messages from senior management and subordinates, which often complicates successful change management (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). The respondents noted that it was difficult to implement the policies issued by the senior management because their team was reluctant to accept the changes. Given the intermediary position of the middle-level managers, they carried the responsibility of delivering the information and updates during the pandemic. Middle management can be seen as agents of change due to their intermediate position between different actors and domains (Wooldridge et al., 2008).

Communication is another aspect that was affected by remote work. The interviewees claimed that virtual meetings were rather inefficient and time consuming. According to Gifford (2022) sharing information in virtual teams is less effective due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. Due to ineffective communication, the number of meetings increased, which resulted in stricter schedules regarding the distribution of time. The empirical data confirmed the findings of previous research stating that the virtual environment and inability to supervise the activities of team members in person forced managers to use digital monitoring platforms (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021).

When it comes to their roles as team leaders, the respondents highlighted the challenge of engaging their team members, especially during virtual meetings. According to Pass & Ridgway (2022), the engagement level among employees decreased while remote working. According to Wohlgemuth et al. (2019), employee engagement is closely related to trust, hence managers have to loosen monitoring and encourage independence in work. Engaging employees through virtual communication seemed to be the most challenging task due to the shortages of the interaction through video calls.

Finally, informal interaction was mentioned by the respondents as a crucial component of remote work challenges. Inability to socialize during coffee breaks and build stronger personal connections with colleagues affected the feeling of unity within teams. Informal
professional ties are as important as the formal ones in order for managers to receive necessary information that can help them seize new opportunities (Helfat & Martin, 2015).

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed at exploring the experiences of middle management while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the research is the subjective experience of middle-level managers. We have covered the perspective of the middle-level managers on change management initiatives undertaken by the Large Enterprise and their opinion in working as team leaders in the remote work settings. Alongside, we dive into the experience of the middle management during the pandemic in the Large Enterprise and what challenges they encountered when working and leading their teams in a virtual environment. The previous research and theoretical framework have shaped the descriptive analysis based on the empirical data retrieved through in-depth interviews. The social constructivist approach has allowed us to interpret the information provided by the respondents (Bryman, 2012): we do not question the importance of the experience of remote work by middle-management, instead the research is constituted by our interpretation and understanding of the empirical data.

Due to lack of research on the experience of remote work by middle management during the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be helpful to readdress the topic from other perspectives. Since this paper focuses on the experience of the middle-level managers and their perspective on remote work, it has not explored a more objective approach. Further research might contribute more on the topic where the subordinates of the middle-level managers would share their insights and experience during the pandemic. Since our research focused on the subjective perspective of the middle-level managers at the Large Enterprise, further research from the perspective of employees might shed light on a more spherical perception of middle management in remote work settings.

Furthermore, since remote work has inspired and caused the rise of the hybrid working model (Carroll & Conboy, 2020), it would be insightful to consider the implications of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic for the future research on the hybrid regime. According to the respondents, switching to the hybrid working model has addressed some of the challenges of remote work, such as shortages of virtual communication and lack of social interaction.
In conclusion, the combination of working from home and on-site, is seen as a positive step forward by the middle management at the Large Enterprise. This inference complies with the idea that the hybrid model is becoming a dominating working model (Carroll & Conboy, 2020).
References

   https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446268353

2. Andersson, P., Movin, S., Mahring, M., Teigland, R., Wennberg, K., McGettigan, K.,
   *SSE Institute for Research, Stockholm School of Economics.*

   International Journal, 11(1)*
   https://doaj.org/article/536654e151d2463a9e8c96f3dc2516fa

   Exploring Strategic Change (3rd ed.). *Prentice-Hall.*

   transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic: Economic–financial impacts and
   https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.06.010

   Contingencies and crisis management.* https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12391

7. Bruce J., & English L. (2020). The challenge of change fatigue on workplace mental
   https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-07-2020-0067


   Press.*

10. Cao, H., Lee, C.-J., Iqbal, S., Czerwinski, M., Wong, P., Rintel, S., Hecht, B., Teevan,
    J., Yang, L. (2021). Large scale analysis of multitasking behavior during remote
    meetings [Paper presentation]. *ACM CHI 2021, Yokohama, Japan.*
    task.pdf

    work practices under pandemic time pressure. *International Journal of Information


Appendix A. Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Aim: To capture and comprehend the experiences of the middle-level managers working remotely in a Large Enterprise in Sweden.

Definition of Key Concepts:

Dynamic Managerial Capabilities - ability to build, integrate and configure competencies and resources.

Change Management - strategic initiatives that aim to alter, transform and innovate the activity of an organization.

Remote Work - the practice of working outside the physical location of an organization while utilizing digital platforms.

The Structure of the Interview Guide

Creating a discussion around the matter of remote working as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, while focusing on the individual factor and the subjective opinions of the participants. The queries regard the change management of the transition, as well as the administration of the employees from the middle management.

Part 1. Remote working as an Organizational Change

1. How did you react to the restrictions and how did it affect your work?
   a. How did you view the strict policy that was initiated in April of 2020?
   b. Do you think that the organization has enforced measurements that were not necessary?

2. How do you feel about the new model of remote working?
   a. How did remote working affect the internal communication?
   b. Can you give us an example where remote working has affected the fulfillment of a task?
3. How prepared do you think your organization was to react to the COVID-19 challenges?
   a. What strategies or policies do you think were the most efficient?
   b. Has organizational performance changed in comparison to pre-pandemic times?

4. What was the perspective of the organization on change management before the pandemic?

**Part 2. Administration of people**

1. Regarding the administration of the people, what would you say was the most challenging task?
   a. What role have managers played during the transition?
   b. What qualities did you have to develop in order to deal with the change?
2. How have the relations between the employees changed?
   a. How has the HR department assisted employees in their challenges?
3. How did the organization prepare you before the transition?
4. How cooperative were managers and employees during the transition process?
   a. How important is the hierarchy within the organization?
   b. Were there any failures during the transition process and what have you learned from them?
5. Have you met any resistance to change from employees/management during the transition?
   a. If yes, how have you overcome this resistance?
6. How did you experience the mental complications and how did you deal with the impact on the employees?

**Part 3. Additional questions**

1. If tomorrow things get back to pre pandemic times, what do you think would stay the same?
2. If it was up to your choice, would you choose to work solely from home?
### Appendix B. Coding Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Quote</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working from home was not standard two years ago. It was hard to adapt the mindset, since it is easier to be on-site and have normal day to day conversation instead of chasing people on phone or social platforms.</td>
<td>Remote working was not common earlier, easier to work on site.</td>
<td>Remote working is difficult</td>
<td>Remote Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a small fear whether people would take the responsibility and use the time for work only.</td>
<td>Fear that people will not work properly at home.</td>
<td>Fear of inefficient when working remotely</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency and utilization depends on how you look at it. It was harder at the beginning, you had to engage with people through phone calls or online meetings which is more challenging.</td>
<td>It is challenging to engage people through phone calls or online meetings.</td>
<td>Challenging to engage people remotely</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at the office is stricter on the time schedule and the brakes, something that people need to have total control over, when working from home. It was usual to compensate with working late at night, if you did not manage to finish your projects during the normal working hours, which was not that frequent before.</td>
<td>It is harder to manage projects and finish them in time when working from home.</td>
<td>Worse time management when working remotely</td>
<td>Remote Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am convinced that you need interaction, even if you meet virtually, it is not the same as meeting in real life.</td>
<td>Social interaction is important even when meeting virtually.</td>
<td>Social interaction is important</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, we cannot be remote all the time, because for example if you hire new people that you have never met, introducing them through a video puts an extra demand in comparison to sitting next to each other and discussing.</td>
<td>It is hard to introduce new people to the organization through a video.</td>
<td>Remote working is difficult for new stuff</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When employees want to reach out to me or to other colleagues, they have to reach out on several platforms and that leads to frustrations which has an impact on productivity, and thus it creates a snowball effect.</td>
<td>People communicate through different platforms and it affects productivity.</td>
<td>Different platforms decreases productivity</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going from that to having the employees spread out and not really in control, it has been about letting the control go, trusting the people and looking at the result. So, delegating, following up.</td>
<td>Delegating and trusting people was part of the remote working process.</td>
<td>Delegation and trust due to remote working</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They put up the rules, e learning, how to manage in crisis, how to manage Covid-19, how to be a leader remotely etc.</td>
<td>The organization provided rules, e-learning, and crisis management, COVID-19 management, and remote leadership workshops.</td>
<td>Workshops on remote working management provided.</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, trying to listen and the big learning for me was that before starting implementing the policies to the employees, think about the outcome and how you can be proactive in order to avoid certain reactions.</td>
<td>Active listening and planning the outcomes helped implement the policies in order to avoid negative reactions.</td>
<td>Active listening to avoid resistance.</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best thing is to be on site 2-3 days and the rest you are from home. Combining the peace of working from home and the social aspect of working on site is the best.</td>
<td>Working remotely and in the office would be the optimal solution.</td>
<td>Flexible working schedule is optimal</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was mainly engineers and people that could work remotely, the production people were not allowed to work from home and the departments that were critical for business, such as the ones working closer to the customer or to market companies, were advised to stay in the office.</td>
<td>Some departments could not work remotely due to the job responsibilities and activities.</td>
<td>Remote working does not suit everyone</td>
<td>Remote Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We were receiving updates from above quite often. They had a plan on how to get prepared but it was so new that nobody knew how it would affect us so we were getting updates all the time.</td>
<td>Plan and updates were received from upper management in order to cope with the crisis.</td>
<td>Updates to cope with changes</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the pandemic started in 2020 the company assigned a special team, a special department that would work with the new way of working and from that department we were receiving all the information.</td>
<td>A special department was launched in the beginning of the pandemic to deal with the new way of working.</td>
<td>Department created to address new challenges</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had a combined policy, they were</td>
<td>The company applied</td>
<td>Government and internal</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking into consideration the rules of each government in each company but we also had the global restrictions that applied to all of our offices all around the world.</td>
<td>both government restrictions and internal restrictions for all offices.</td>
<td>policies applied</td>
<td>management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since we had the pandemic for quite a while now, we had a plan and we were provided with good equipment and we could even get some hardware, like screens, to work from home. We got allowance to buy some office chairs, to work from home. It is actually working quite ok.</td>
<td>Hardware, allowances, office furniture were provided for employees to work from home.</td>
<td>Hardware, allowances, office furniture provided</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you are in a room physically you can kind of see and read a lot from gestures but when you have digital meetings it is more difficult. Not everyone uses their cameras, now our management encourages us to use them.</td>
<td>Non-verbal communication decreases in digital meetings compared to in person meetings.</td>
<td>Non-verbal communication decreased</td>
<td>Remote Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another thing is that when a lot of colleagues join a meeting, you can multitask, which is both good and bad. Maybe you can do more things during the meeting, but on the other hand you cannot focus that well.</td>
<td>During online meetings multitasking is an advantage but it is difficult to focus.</td>
<td>Multitasking during online meetings reduces focus</td>
<td>Remote Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not think that performance went down, they made a safe place in the office for those people that have to do their job at the office. But for those that can just work from home, I do not think their work has become less productive or their efficiency went down.</td>
<td>Overall performance was not affected, employees were allowed to work in the office if necessary.</td>
<td>Performance did not decrease</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the beginning it took time to learn how to involve everyone, to be active in the meeting, to participate actively and not to be passive because when you have a digital meeting it is very easy for someone to sit silently. As a project leader you have to involve everyone in the meeting.</td>
<td>Managers had to learn how to involve everyone in digital meetings because employees were silent.</td>
<td>Difficult to engage everyone in digital meetings</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never put people down, I use humble management. Even if someone is having incorrect input, it is still an input. I think this encourages people to speak up.</td>
<td>Humble management encourages people to speak up, no matter the input.</td>
<td>Humble management promotes engagement</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is encouraged to speak up, to take initiative, everyone should develop personal leadership. I can see in my projects that sometimes you do not need to be a strict leader, people take responsibility, people are proactive.</td>
<td>Employees are encouraged to speak up, to take responsibility, to be proactive.</td>
<td>Employees are encouraged to speak up</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We became much more creative, we started to do something we did not do before. Many things are more efficient. A lot of adjustment, a lot of problem solving.</td>
<td>Remote working promoted creativity, adjustments and efficiency.</td>
<td>Remote working promoted efficiency.</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sales staff and product owners were not there so in the communication it was quite hard because people did not pick up their phones, they did not turn on their camera so you did not know if they actually participated or if they were doing something else, so it was a bit of a chaos.</td>
<td>Communication suffered due to the transition to remote working, people did not pick up their phones.</td>
<td>Communication suffered due to the transition to remote working</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had this policy before covid also. You could work from home for two days if you had an agreement with the manager so that has been a policy in the past and I think it will be the same in the future.</td>
<td>Remote working was possible even before the COVID-19 crisis if you had an agreement with your manager.</td>
<td>Remote working was allowed before the pandemic</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity in some areas has really gone down because IT could check how much we are using our computers and what we do and we could see that some are not active and some are too active and working too much.</td>
<td>Productivity was possible to track through IT tools and some work too much, some did not.</td>
<td>Productivity decreased in some areas.</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The productivity and working together is more silos. We have had a lot of mistakes in the handover phases since people dont talk to each other.</td>
<td>There were a lot of mistakes during handover phases due to lack of communication.</td>
<td>Communication affects productivity</td>
<td>Change Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small talk is what was missed the most since it provides space for social interaction, apart from strictly professional.</td>
<td>Small talk is useful and beneficial.</td>
<td>Communication on.site in contrast to remote</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likewise if managers don't like to work</td>
<td>If managers want to work</td>
<td>Managers and their</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from home employees are more reluctant to work from home. That’s what we needed</td>
<td>in the office, employees are more reluctant to work remotely.</td>
<td>employees’ will to work remotely coincide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to take control of, have equal things, it didn’t matter if u had manager A, B or C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We always had employees on site so we needed to have managers on site, and I</td>
<td>Rotating schedule would help people with working remotely since some</td>
<td>Rotating schedule would help people with working remotely</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanted to have a rotating schedule so everyone was there but then there were</td>
<td>people could not work from home.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some that volunteered to be there every day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the managers have tried to do is to get all of the employees to come on a</td>
<td>Informal communication was affected by remote work; digital platforms</td>
<td>Remote working affects informal communication</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific day of the week so people could socialize and drink some coffee, the</td>
<td>did not solve this issue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working chat. We tried to have it through Webex but it now works that well.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strategy of aligning and talking to the whole world at the same time was</td>
<td>Aligned communication helped get everything in control.</td>
<td>Aligned communication promotes productivity</td>
<td>Change Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the most efficient way to get everything in control.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half a year after the beginning of the pandemic we had a call service, EAP,</td>
<td>The organization engaged assistance programs with nurses,</td>
<td>Assistance programs were engaged to help employees.</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Assistance Program, it is another company that has nurses, psychologists,</td>
<td>psychologists, financial people and COVID people. You can call them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial people and COVID people. You can call them anonymously or you tell them</td>
<td>anonymously or you tell them your name, you need to tell them the name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your name, you need to tell them the name of the company you call from and then</td>
<td>of the company you call from and then you get assistance from them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you get assistance from them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earlier we were allowed to work 2 days a week from home but it was not common.</td>
<td>The Large Enterprise is planning to switch to the flexible work</td>
<td>Flexible work arrangement is replacing remote work.</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You had to agree with your manager and explain why you have to work from home.</td>
<td>arrangement to work both from home and in the office.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now we will have a flexible work arrangement and it will be announced again for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all of the organization.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that the org is big and some stuff didn’t move fast, but when we really</td>
<td>Difficulties in reacting because of the size of the company.</td>
<td>hard to react</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needed to go fast we delivered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our department in China and Italy was quite hurt from the beginning, we got a lot of info about these countries.</td>
<td>brief on the crisis from other departments.</td>
<td>learning in order to react</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization was quite fast to learn and adopt, according to what was happening globally, even if Sweden was not yet affected. We knew what was ahead of us and used that info to protect the employees</td>
<td>Quick response from the organization so as to be proactive.</td>
<td>being proactive</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have our own health care and they were from the beginning welcoming us to call them and ask for help.</td>
<td>Mental health assistance was embraced and emphasized.</td>
<td>mental health is important</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You could see that there was a lot of effort to secure the staff and that felt good.</td>
<td>Being strict and protecting the employees was appreciated by the staff.</td>
<td>the organization protects the workforce</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think you need to know the individuals in order to do remote work.</td>
<td>Remote working demands to know the workforce and is hard when you don't know the employees.</td>
<td>easy to remote work when you know the employees</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You always have people that do not perform, some people don't feel well if they don't have their colleagues around; you need to focus on these people and actually bring them into site, a community, maybe they lose themselves and that has an impact on productivity in the long run.</td>
<td>Emphasis on the people that need a stronger organization culture so as to boost productivity.</td>
<td>emphasis on people that need it the most</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it's hard to introduce new people to the organizational culture, it was hard for people to get to know the colleagues and get to know how to find different things.</td>
<td>It is hard to hire new people when remote working.</td>
<td>communication is harder when remote working</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization says that the transition process was great but we didn’t really expand, we didn't have new people in.</td>
<td>During the past two years the organization did not hire new people.</td>
<td>remote work affects the recruitment process</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we are at the same or even higher level actually. That's also dependent on the branch, the engineers can work on their own. That's very different for other parts of the organization. There are some that</td>
<td>Productivity was affecting some departments, depending on the tasks.</td>
<td>engineering is not affected by remote work</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't perform well at all.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything takes longer! All the small things are much harder.</td>
<td>Remote work makes procedures take longer.</td>
<td>remote work affects the time frame</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think everybody will work from home now on. The hybrid model is quite flexible.</td>
<td>remote work was introduced during covid but it will stay permanently.</td>
<td>hybrid model is embraced</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another thing is that as a manager you need to look after your employees, some people can't stop working and that's another risk.</td>
<td>It is hard to keep track of the working hours of the employees when remote working.</td>
<td>leadership needs to adapt</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was difficult to maintain the team spirit.</td>
<td>Challenges of the managers to engage employees.</td>
<td>leadership challenge</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but across the team they do not really talk to each other unless there is an issue to discuss, whereas in the office they would have coffee together and talk</td>
<td>Remote work affects the weak ties between the employees.</td>
<td>remote work impacted communication</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would have been more difficult if we had new people in our team.</td>
<td>Hard to maintain team consistency with new hires.</td>
<td>new hires are hard to adapt</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company took good care of us, we had courses on managing remotely.</td>
<td>Employee training to tackle the challenge of covid.</td>
<td>training was implemented</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When we are in a zoom call with 12 people it is not the same as being in the same room with 12 people.</td>
<td>Virtual communication is not the same as physical communication.</td>
<td>communication is affected because of remote work</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the big picture we were prepared but in a smaller picture we were not prepared for. Overall we did great but we could have thought better in terms of smaller things. The first 6 months were not perfect.</td>
<td>The forced change has affected the organization and the process took time.</td>
<td>change takes time</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People resist when I try to gather everyone on a certain day to meet physically</td>
<td>Employees do not like to be brought back at the office</td>
<td>remote work sets different working standards</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has been such a long time and people are set in their own routine.</td>
<td>The two years period has initiated different routines.</td>
<td>employees work differently because of remote work</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you can see the reaction from people when you propose something in a room. You lose some dynamics in digital discussions.</td>
<td>Virtual communication changes the dynamics.</td>
<td>it is harder to communicate online</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before we did not use digital tools that much, now we use it more. I think that has enhanced our team, we take care of smaller collaborations in a better way. But deeper collaboration is difficult to replicate.</td>
<td>Remote work is helping with some tasks since it provides learning while also making some tasks harder.</td>
<td>remote work helped with the familiarizing to digital tools</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..we had to collaborate between Finance, IT and HR. We do not have strong personal connections between departments, so I think the task could have been done faster in the office. We have not failed but it took longer to complete the task.</td>
<td>Hard to collaborate between departments while working from home.</td>
<td>remote work makes some tasks harder</td>
<td>DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think in February 2020 we created a workgroup in Sweden. We had nothing from the global perspective, so it was a local decision how we are going to manage the pandemic.</td>
<td>Embrace the challenge in order to tackle it.</td>
<td>quick response to the forced change</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have had a project team running all the way, we still have weekly meetings after 2 years handling the pandemic.</td>
<td>crisis management is important, even after the end of the restrictions.</td>
<td>change is a constant process</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have weekly updates from the global perspective and we have weekly updates from the local perspective.</td>
<td>constant updates on the global and local news.</td>
<td>emphasis both on the local and global factor</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We knew quite early in the pandemic that we have to lose for a long time, we aimed to have constant communication.</td>
<td>the change takes time and communication is important</td>
<td>communication is important for change initiatives</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have had a lot of training for our managers, how to have good communication with employees working remotely.</td>
<td>training of the employees and managers for a smooth transition to remote work.</td>
<td>the organization assists with the provision training</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have our own healthcare center in Lund, we had the employee assistance program for each employee and their family members.</td>
<td>mental assistance from the organization for the safety of the employees,</td>
<td>mental health of the employees is emphasized and protected</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Quote</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We made it clear in the beginning of the pandemic that we are taking the responsibility and nobody questioned it, I think they even appreciated it. I think that was one of the success factors.</em></td>
<td>the company takes the initiative to tackle the challenge so the employees feel safe.</td>
<td>embrace of the challenge</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We are introducing a new procedure - flexible working arrangements. How we as the employer see working from home in the future.</em></td>
<td>covid initiated a flexible working schedule which will be useful for the future.</td>
<td>introducing flexible schedule as a permanent solution</td>
<td>Remote working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We have had a learning phase among the group members, of course. We can start working right away, we don’t have to learn and get to know each other.</em></td>
<td>the already existing crisis management team helps with the tackling crisis ahead.</td>
<td>preparation for the crisis management is useful for the future</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I think we will get up running quite fast when it comes to the Ukrainian crisis and that is the learning we got from the COVID crisis.</em></td>
<td>quick response to the Ukrainian crisis because of the experience of the covid crisis.</td>
<td>Covid helped for the preparation for the Ukrainian crisis</td>
<td>Change management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>