“Staying home is easier than ever”

A qualitative study of experienced resistance at the pandemic workplace

Mohamed Hassan

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Degree of Master of Arts (120 ECTS) with a major in Leadership and Organization
Master thesis with a focus on Leadership and Organisation: Societal Challenges and Organisational Changes (OL675E), 30 ECTS.
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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to study changes that has happened regarding resistance, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose is to, from an employee perspective, study whether the pandemic has led to any alterations to the resistance that normally occurs in organizations. Mainly in terms of what employees’ experience are the reasons to perform resistance, what conditions they feel they have to carry out that resistance, and how resistance is expressed by them during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was conducted through seven semi-structured interviews and then analyzed through thematic analysis. One of the main results is that the participants of this thesis experienced that a lack of communication from their employers regarding the organizational changes regarding remote work versus work from the office, provoked dissatisfaction, and thereby willingness to perform resistance. A difference in preferences between employers and employees, where the participants who are employees tend to prefer remote work, is another aspect that leads to resistance. In terms of the conditions to perform resistance, one of the results is that the participants feel less monitored as their employer can not directly see what they are up to. The main point however, which also can be seen as a way to perform resistance is regarding symptoms. Participants felt like staying home and working remotely, and blaming it on having Covid-19 symptoms, was an easy way to have control over their remote working days, as employers would rather have them absent from the office if they have any symptoms, something that was not the case before the pandemic. Other ways to perform resistance when working remotely, such as spending time on social media, cooking, eating etc. can be framed in what is called routine resistance, which is the most common kind of resistance.

Keywords: Resistance, routine resistance, Covid-19, pandemic, organizational change, remote work
Table of contents

1. Introduction .........................................................................................................................................1
   1.1 Research Problem ..........................................................................................................................2
   1.2 Purpose of the Study .....................................................................................................................3
       1.2.1 Research Questions ................................................................................................................4
       1.2.2 Research Delimitations ...........................................................................................................4

2. Literature Review ................................................................................................................................6
   2.1 Relationships of Power ..................................................................................................................6
   2.2 Resistance in General ....................................................................................................................8
   2.3 Remote Work During Covid-19 ....................................................................................................10

3. Theoretical Framework .....................................................................................................................13
   3.1 Relationship Between Power and Resistance .............................................................................13
   3.2 Resistance to Change ..................................................................................................................15
   3.3 Routine Resistance ......................................................................................................................17
   3.4 Integrating Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................19

4. Methodology .....................................................................................................................................22
   4.1 Methods ......................................................................................................................................22
       4.1.1 Semi Structured Interviews ..................................................................................................22
       4.1.2 Selection of Participants .......................................................................................................24
   4.2 Philosophical Grounding ..............................................................................................................25
   4.3 Ethical Considerations ..................................................................................................................26
   4.4 Analysis Method ..........................................................................................................................27

5. Empirical Findings & Analysis ............................................................................................................28
   5.1 General situation during Covid-19 ...............................................................................................28
       5.1.1 Different Periods of the Pandemic .......................................................................................28
       5.1.2 Relationship with the employer ...........................................................................................30
   5.2 The reasons behind resistance ....................................................................................................32
       5.2.2 Communication of the changes ............................................................................................33
   5.3 Conditions to Perform Resistance ...............................................................................................36
   5.4 How Resistance is Expressed .......................................................................................................38

6. Discussion and Conclusion ................................................................................................................40

References:............................................................................................................................................43

Appendix ...............................................................................................................................................46
1. Introduction

The past couple of years prior to this thesis, are marked by a worldwide pandemic. The Covid-19 disease has since its rapid spread in the first quarter of 2020, changed the reality for many people through extensive restrictions with most restrictions being related to and resulting in social distancing. This new reality where countries and regions across the world have taken measures to increase the physical distance between people in order to minimize the spread of the virus, has more or less forced organizations to take action. In general, employers, who in this thesis refers to managers who have an employer role, have wherever the nature of the work allows it, sent employees home to conduct their work remotely (Contreras et al., 2020) which in turn has led to many new challenges in the way that work is organized (Habánik et al., 2021).

The work being carried out in virtual spaces instead of the office has led to a negative impact on the communication and collaboration between employees and their employers and also in-between colleagues, something that partly can be blamed on a lack of face-to-face interactions (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). To cope with this however, and to minimize impact on the operational side of things, organizations have been through radical digital transformations so that most of its processes can continue, even though organizational members are located away from each other physically (Contreras et al., 2020). This is a transformation which mainly is characterized by a drastically increased use of information and communication technologies (ICT) within organizations, such as online software, tools, platforms and network connections (Habánik et al., 2021). Interestingly, the use of ICT was increasing even before the Covid-19 pandemic (Contreras et al., 2020). Previously, there has been trends of organizations expanding their digital infrastructure, mainly due to globalization, fierce competition, and also the development of ICT which has made it all possible. The change has been drastically accelerated by the pandemic as employees are now working remotely (Contreras et al., 2020) but the fact that changes were already happening due to the improvements of digital infrastructure testifies that they are here to stay. This makes the new reality of remote work increasingly interesting to study and thus has contributed to it being an important factor in this study.
1.1 Research Problem

The pandemic has had an effect on and changed the culture within organizations and the relationships between the different stakeholders within it (Spicer, 2020). Having the recency of the unfolding events in mind, this is therefore a suitable period of time to study possible changes related to what differences there might be in the relationships between people in the organization and the conditions in the interactions between them.

To be able to analyse the interpersonal relationship that dictates behaviour in an organization (Spicer, 2020), we must understand previous research regarding the topic. Cayghill (2013) quotes Foucault who means that wherever there is a relationship, there is a relation of power and wherever there is power there is resistance. Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi (2020) give us an insight into why resistance is an interesting topic. Namely they claim on one hand that the performance levels are at risk of going down when working remotely, due to the fact that the nature of communications between for instance managers and employees have changed. On the other hand, they also mean that employees prefer and, in the future, will be keeping to preferring working remotely, more often, compared to before the pandemic. This creates a clear difference in the preferences of employers and employees, something that potentially can result in resistance (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Resistance is namely a topic and direction this thesis will head towards, and the purpose is to study whether there have been any alterations to the resistance that normally occurs in organizations as a result of the pandemic, and what that change might look like.

Resistance is partly a phenomenon that can influence an organization in a positive way as some preferences of individuals also benefits the organization, but it is also a phenomenon that costs organizations a lot, both in terms of efficiency and monetarily (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007). Therefore, it is vital to keep understanding it in a context that is changing, in a world effected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As mentioned, a lot has changed within several practices in organizations (Habánik et al., 2021; Contreras et al., 2020), and it is even arguable that those changes in addition to changes in organizational culture and use of technologies, has led to significant organizational change (McDonell & Beck, 2021), making organizational change theories another interesting perspective consider in the analysis. It is also closely related to the subject of resistance, as resistance is one of the main reactions to organizational change (Tavakoli, 2010), which
further justifies researching their connection in this thesis and furthermore how they influence one another.

The research topic is also inspired by personal experiences. Friends and previous colleagues to me, who have worked remotely to some extent during the period prior to this thesis, have expressed their opinions on their desire to either, work remotely when they have been ordered to come into the office, or desire to work from the office when they have been ordered to work remotely from home. This energy of some sort of dissatisfaction coupled with the likely existing disagreement between employer and employees, has increased my interest in looking closer to what changes there have been in the preferences of employees during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to before it hit, and whether those changes in their preferences have given them reasons to perform resistance. There are for instance some studies that show that since employees have been able to try out the new way of working from home, their opinions have tended to go towards a direction where they even prefer remote work, while there is also a group that prefers a hybrid between remote work and the office, as they see advantages in combining the two (Iershova et al., 2022; Hoskins, 2022).

As company policies regarding remote work have changed back and forth during the pandemic, mainly depending on what the social distancing rules set by governments look like, it has increased the likelihood of employees developing a stronger opinion about handling these policies, as the outcome of it affects their lives directly (Iershova et al., 2022). With the Covid-19 vaccines becoming widely available, there has been mostly reductions of restrictions, and since employers tend to prefer a return to the offices, it creates even more room for disagreement about the extent to which it should be done (Hoskins, 2022).

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

We can assume with the support of the previous research presented in this thesis, employees perform resistance. The goal, however, is to study any changes that has happened regarding it, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of the thesis is therefore to, from an employee perspective, study whether the pandemic has led to any alterations to the resistance that normally occurs in organizations.
1.2.1 Research Questions
- What are the experienced reasons for an employee to perform resistance during the Covid-19 pandemic?

- What conditions do employees feel they have to carry out resistance?

- How is resistance expressed and practiced during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.2.2 Research Delimitations
Covid-19 has caused devastating economic effects around the world (Mirnezami & Rajabi, 2021), but no considerations have been made in this thesis regarding the potential instability that might have brought to the labour market and what that means to the resistance of employees. Reason being that insecurity is not mentioned as one of the main reasons behind resistance by the literature reviewed in this thesis.

Possible differences between men and women regarding the problem in an equality perspective have also not been considered, as the aim of the thesis is to be quite general in the analysis of resistance. On the other hand, the respondents have their professions relatively common, in order to be able to find themes relating to that particular group. But with a participant group that also mostly consists of men, the sample is not large enough to draw any conclusions or find any themes regarding gender.

Even if there are a number of different points of view regarding the topics discussed in the thesis, there is a significant weight towards an employee perspective both in the literature review, presentation of theories, in analysis and discussion. This increases the risk of potentially missing points of view that may be relevant from employers or other stakeholders. Partly because they are all just as involved, as likelihood of resistance is influenced by the power relationship between employers and employees (Cayghill, 2013) and that some of the differences in preferences that increases the risk of resistance relates to both managers and employees. (Bolman & Deal, 2017). But also, because the risk of performance levels going down, due to the changes in the way of communicating that the pandemic has brought, is not just down to the employees but also employers and other actors one might communicate with through the work (Diab-Rahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

Lastly, one research delimitation worth mentioning is that the study is conducted in a Swedish context as all the participants live and work in Sweden. We know by now, that Sweden dealt
with the pandemic in a different way, compared to many other countries (Bezuidenhout et al., 2022), mainly avoiding the strict lockdowns seen elsewhere (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). That raises questions about whether the experiences of people from other countries varies as the pandemic has looked different in terms of restrictions. However, when it comes to companies and workplaces, a significant effort has been taken, because most people who had the technical opportunity to conduct the work remotely did so, which meant that many employees started working remotely even though it was only a recommendation and not a requirement from the Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).
2. Literature Review

In the literature review section of this study, there will be a presentation of previous research regarding the relevant topics. The first part will include an introduction of how relationships of power in organizations is viewed in the literature, followed by a section defining some general aspects of resistance. Because a distinctive part of the Covid-19 pandemic is remote work (Contreras et al., 2020) the continuation will include a presentation of what remote work has looked like as a result of the pandemic.

2.1 Relationships of Power

Power is a social phenomenon that has been discussed by many famous philosophers and sociologists in the world, Aristotle, Marx, Weber, Dahl and Foucault to name a few. They have all offered important views on power but their way of seeing it was affected by the specific context in which it emerged from (Rollings, 2021), representing different times of the history. There is, however, a common view among previous scholars, which is that power is seen as domination or control where the key part is force or the exercise of power (Rollings, 2021). Someone that is often referred to when describing power is Robert Dahl (1957), who defines power as when A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B otherwise would not do. Dahl explains that power is a relation among people and describes the objects in the relationship as power actors. It could be either individual, groups, organizations such as companies, governments, nations and so on.

Michel Foucault (1981) went on to describe that the relationship of power between different actors becomes apparent only when power is exercised, and it can be exercised through various practices, techniques, and procedures. Therefore, it is not associated with a specific individual or an organization, but with the actions and practices that go on in or between them. In other words, Foucault means that power is not something that can be acquired, held on to or possessed, but rather something that can be used, through various practices, techniques, and procedures. To elaborate on why it is not acquirable or possessable, Foucault points out that power is mobile, and so is the relationship of power between different actors. It is mobile firstly because the inequal relationship it presupposes can change. For example, individuals can continuously gain or lose authority towards one another. Secondly, power is mobile because it is everywhere and comes from everywhere. In other words, this means that wherever there is a relationship, there is a relation of power (Foucault, 1981; Cayghill, 2013).
When discussing the concept of power in an organization, Bolman and Deal (2017) contributes with a point of view on how different perspectives can affect the view of power. They have developed a four-frame model looking at an organization and the practices in it from four different perspectives, namely the structural, human resource, political and symbolic perspectives, or frames as they call it. Individuals who have a structural view, also known as structural theorists, who generally focus on doing things based on strategy, tend to put extra emphasis on authority. They place great value on the power that comes with the legitimacy that gives organization members the right to make binding decisions, because they believe that even in the relationship between the organizational members is built on structure. In contrast, Human Resource theorists, who is of the view that an organization is mostly dependant on the skill, knowledge, and energy of all individuals within it, see some limitations of authority. Because they emphasize a widespread dependence within organizations, they see power as something that lies in participation, mutuality, and collaboration. The more there is mutuality, and collaboration in the relationships between the members of an organization, the more power they have, increasing their likelihood of reaching needed performance (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

As an interconnecting perspective, Bolman and Deal (2017) go on to describe that the political frame, similar to the structural frame, puts some emphasis on that power lies within authority but at the same time, similar to the human resource frame, points out the importance of the collaboration of groups in an organization. The reasoning within the political frame, however, is that the importance of collaboration comes down to the view of that coalition is a threat to the amount of power that can be exercised when having an authority. When viewing power from this perspective, the focus lies within what preferences individuals or groups in the organization have, as that lays the foundation for when, how and why power is mobilized, in the battle of getting one’s preferences met. Lastly there is the symbolic frame, where the importance of the symbolic values in an organization are highlighted. In short, the view is that power lies within the stories, rituals, metaphors, vision and values of an organization. More specifically, this means that the reason behind a certain action can described by the meaning or purpose of it, as the intention is founded in, and is dedicated to something symbolic. For instance, rituals are described by Bolman and Deal (2017) as everyday routines imbued with special meaning. Through revealing or highlighting the cultural values, they show the way to newcomers and connect them to the organization and the existing members but also delineate relationships between different roles in the organization. And in the case of stories and myths,
they also transmit value and meaning through being based on historical events within the organization and through that derives meaning from how things have been in the past, which contributes a vision to how things should be now and in the future. Thereby, in this perspective, power is distanced from the subject, and is rather dedicated to the long-lasting and traditional practices of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Mentioning these different frames or perspectives of power potentially helps with understanding how some of the events that organizations and its members have gone through during the Covid-19 pandemic as it shows that the power struggle going on within organization is not clearly distinguishable or easily identifiable. Because when looking at it, the conclusion heavily depends on what approach or perspective you take departure from explore it with.

There can be several different sources of power in an organization, as showcased by Bolman and Deal (2017). Firstly, there is the position of power, also known as authority, meaning the position an actor holds over another. It is what legitimizes and gives access certain actions and decisions, for instance managers position and authority over employees. Secondly there is the control of rewards, for instance being in control of an employee’s existence in a job and the compensation they thereby receive, followed by coercive power, which is when one has the capacity to constrain, punish or even block. Information is another source of power, as the knowledge gives one the upper hand in knowing the right thing to do. Foucault (1981) goes as far as saying that it is impossible to exercise power without knowledge, but also that power always creates knowledge and new information. Alliances and networks are according to Bolman and Deal (2017) also a source of power, as having allies within an organization makes it easier to have control.

2.2 Resistance in General
Resistance has for a very long time had a role within the interactions between people and organizations and in the past century, a lot of texts have been conducted on things revolving around the subject, such as what provokes or suppresses it (Cayghill, 2013). The many political and societal conflicts that have occurred during that time are part of the reason of why many authors have written about the provocation, sustenance, power struggle and repression that resistance brings. However, resistance itself is rather unanalysed, which is strange especially having in mind its influence on historical happenings as mentioned by Cayghill (2013). As a contradiction however, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) highlight the
fact that resistance has emerged as a studied topic within many different disciplines, for example gender, technology and political sociology. Interestingly though, they are of the opinion that authors that study the term of resistance might not even be talking about the same thing. Despite the following attempts to further define the term resistance, you can simply not talk about a single kind of resistance as it can look in many different ways (Cayghill, 2013).

Initially, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) mentions that scholars use the term resistance to describe human behaviours and actions in many different settings in life, with the workplace being just one of them. The variety of actions is pointed to be extensive, and everything from radical revolutions to something as simple as hairstyles can potentially be described as resistance. The variation is precisely what results in a lack of consensus in the use of the term resistance.

Prasad and Prasad (2000) divide resistance into formal and informal resistance, with the formal including strikes, collective protests and grievances etcetera, while informal resistance, also described as routine resistance being discrete as it is less visible and less direct. Examples of routine resistance includes actions within the everyday practices. The way of dressing, and dressing in a deviant way, can be an expression of resistance and so can horseplay and gossip (Prasad & Prasad 2000).

Lawrence and Robinsons (2007) describe resistance from employees within organizations, as workplace deviance. There are several stressors in an organization which can create frustration, among them financial, social, and working conditions. Workplace deviance is seen as the reaction to these frustrations and has its roots in that there is a difference between the perceived current state and the ideal state. Some examples of how resistance is expressed is gossip, favouritism, harassment, threats, or scapegoating, intentionally lowering the quality of one’s work, doing the bare minimum, taking excessive breaks, vandalism and sabotage, and some reasons they mention is why employees perform resistance is the need to feel justice, experience fairness and stand against anything that threatens their feeling of social identity (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007).
2.3 Remote Work During Covid-19

Global digitalization, together with the development of information and communication technology (ICT), the past few decades have paved way for the introduction of new ways of working (Sokolic, 2022). Haddud and McAllen (2018) mean that the technological development has led to organizations creating digital workplaces wherever it is possible, through the digital tools that exist, resulting in employees being able to perform work, only needing phones, computers, and internet. The digital workplace is in other words a space where knowledge, communication and collaboration are possible remotely.

The conditions that have been created have resulted in the fact that the physical presence of employees no longer is a prerequisite to get work done. Work from distance, remote work, also known as telecommuting, has therefore increased in quantity during the past decade (Contreras et al., 2020). It was however with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, that the concept of remote work expanded drastically (Sokolic, 2022) mainly because of restrictions implemented by governments, to mandate social distancing (Mirnezami & Rajabi, 2021). Companies more or less became forced to send their employees home to work remotely, with some of them having little to none experience with remote work, prior to the pandemic (Contreras et al., 2020). Sweden, where this thesis is conducted dealt with the pandemic in a different way, compared to many other countries (Bezuidenhout et al., 2022). The country mainly avoided lockdowns, unlike many other countries, and communicated in terms of recommendations, rather than strict restrictions, although the restriction path increased more and more as the pandemic went on (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). The Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021) recounts how they implemented the recommendations and restrictions as the number of infections, the number of hospitalizations and the number of deaths rose and fell, where the first strong recommendations to exercise social distancing came in March 2020, followed by the easing of recommendations following reduced numbers in the summer months of 2020. It was however during the next wave that the recommendations came together with more severe restrictions regarding social distancing. However, the reduction of those later on, in 2021 was marked by the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccinations.

Remote work is possible to a greater degree in knowledge-intensive professions, reason being that ICT is used to a lesser extent in low-skilled jobs (OECD, 2020). However, regardless of the profession in which it is practiced, there is a common conclusion regarding the productivity, with studies from both USA, Japan and Europe showcasing a varying drop in
productivity (Behrens et al., 2021; Sokolic, 2022). Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi (2020) similarly point out that there in general is a connection between remote work and lower performance levels within companies. They partly blame that on lack of communication which could decrease employee’s organizational identification. Employees are more likely to feel professional isolation as they are less knowledgeable of what is going in in the organization. Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi (2020) go on to describe that the lack of communication also can result in weakening of the manager to employee relationship but also the employee to employee relationship, because of the reduced number of face-to-face interactions and a smaller probability to communicate with each other through technological means rather than directly when physically in the same place. This results in reduced likelihood of receiving and giving prompt feedback in both directions, decreased cooperation, coordination, friendship levels and a higher risk of unreasonable division of tasks between colleagues (Diab-Rahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

However, it is not clear to an extent where you can say that remote work automatically means something negative and contributes to reduced performance in organizations. Reason being, that it is possible to partially overcome some of the disadvantages mentioned, by creating frameworks, conditions and strategies that favour communication between organizational members. But also, because there are cases where the advantages of working from home are played out to an extent that they outweigh the disadvantages (Diab-Rahman & Al-Enzi).

As just said, there are from both employers and employee’s perspectives, a number of benefits with remote work. Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi (2020) claim that allowing employees to work remotely increases the likelihood of them having higher job satisfaction, resulting in fewer sick days and lower turnover. As a contrast, however, there are studies that show that the weakened relationship between employees and organization can increase the risk of higher turnover (Sokolic, 2022) However Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi move on to point out that it partly comes down to employee’s spending less time commuting to work, and therefore saving on travel expenses and having more time for family, giving them a higher capacity to manage family-related issues. Another benefit mentioned by the authors, although slightly controversial, is the increased likelihood of employees working in case of sickness, especially those who in advance have a strong commitment.
More recently, the restrictions of the pandemic regarding social distancing have both decreased and increased throughout the world, but mostly decreased as a result of Covid-19 vaccines becoming widely available (Hoskins, 2022). It has thus resulted in companies increasingly demanding a return of their employees to the office, something that has increased the likelihood of employees developing a stronger opinion about handling these demands, as it effects their working and living conditions significantly (Iershova et al., 2022).

With that in mind, it is also interesting to mention a group that is currently growing larger and larger among the workforce, namely those who prefer a hybrid between remote work and office work, where they can both take part in the above-mentioned benefits of remote work such as time-saving, but at the same time feel a sense of togetherness and a willingness to cooperate when they are in the office (Iershova et al., 2022; Hoskins, 2022). If the hybrid way of working is planned out in a way where employees have an influence of when to work from home, it will add to the probability of increased job satisfaction, as it gives a boost to their flexibility in the work life balance (Sokolic, 2022). And lastly, as an extra point of view, we can also mention that OECD (2020) expect the amount of remote work to be the reality in a larger scale in the future than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, mainly in a form of hybrid work, and they mean is a concept that is here to stay and even become more well established.
3. Theoretical Framework

In the following section there will be presentations of theories regarding power and relationship, organizational change and resistance, and lastly the most common type of resistance, namely routine resistance (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). The section will then be concluded by a sort of summary where the theories shortly are integrated more closely for the upcoming analysis.

3.1 Relationship Between Power and Resistance

Wherever there is a relationship, there is a relation of power and wherever there is power there is resistance (Cayghill, 2013) and in this section, there will be taken a closer look at the relationship between the two, taking departure from Lawrence and Robinson (2007) who present their theory of the relationship between power and resistance from a managerial action and employee resistance perspective. Initially they state that all organizations are sites of power and resistance, as structures, systems, and cultures within the organizations function as a use of power to control the action of the members within the organization, further strengthening the importance of studying how power and resistance interplay with one another.

They start by discussing the power in organizations and the relation between the actors within it, by dividing it into two modes, episodic and systemic power. They firstly describe episodic power as being rather discrete and is mainly initiated by self-interested actors. One form of episodic power is force, which is when an employee is treated as an object, by for example being moved, directed, or restrained, without having a choice. The other form is influence, which means that an employee is persuaded into doing something they otherwise would not do. This includes moral suasion, negotiation and rational persuasion (Lawrence & Robinson 2007), possibly facilitated by the position power or control of rewards over the employee as demonstrated by Bolman and Deal (2017).

The other mode of power described by Lawrence and Robinson (2007), systemic power relates to the routines, practices, and systems within an organization, such as socialization processes and technological systems. It is not necessarily connected to a specific actor, but rather to the organization as a whole. Some examples are compensation, training, surveillance.
and pay systems within the organization. Systemic power includes two different forms of power, namely discipline and domination. Discipline is what shapes the identities of the employees and leads them to act a certain way, although they still have a choice. Domination, however, relates more to the routines and practices that determine how employees act, depriving them of all kinds of choice.

Lawrence and Robinson (2007) then continue with presenting their theory by referring to Robinson and Bennet (1995) who divides resistance, or as they call it, workplace deviance, which can be conceptualized as a form of resistance, into two dimensions. These dimensions are severity and target. Severity is to which extent resistance is exercised and how much it goes against the existing norms in an organization. The less severe forms include actions such as social loafing and groundless absenteeism while major forms include theft or even physical aggression. Target is who the resistance is targeted towards and if it is targeted at an organizational member or the organization as a whole. Because when employees have a negative experience, they will most likely seek to direct their frustration in some kind of direction. Resistance directed at an organizational member is for example gossip, favouritism, harassment, threats, or scapegoating, while resistance towards an organization could be intentionally lowering the quality of one’s work, doing the bare minimum, taking excessive breaks, vandalism and sabotage. Here it is important to point out that the focus of this thesis is not resistance directed towards other organizational members, but rather the kind of resistance that is directed towards organizations.

Lawrence and Robinson (2007) then go on to describe the relationship between power and resistance by stating that resistance is a reaction to organizational power. The kind of power that occurs and also how power is perceived by an employee affects their likelihood to commit resistance, what kind of resistance they perform and also the intensity of it. The use of power when an employee is treated as an object, for instance when being dealt with by force, leads to them feeling a lack of agency. When being treated with force, the perceived lack of agency can then result in the employee feeling unfairness, leading to them being frustrated or even outrageous. For this reason, force is more likely to lead to more destructive or severe forms of resistance.
As Lawrence and Robinson (2007) further presented systemic power, unlike episodic power, is more embedded in the practices, routines and systems of an organization, the resistance it provokes is more likely to be directed to the organization, rather than a specific actor within it. Discipline, the form of power that tries to shape organizational members, is likely to provoke less severe form of resistance, because the employees are treated as subjects and still have a choice and furthermore a sense of autonomy. The other form of systemic power domination, however, strictly determines how organizational members act, treating employees as objects and therefore stripping them of that choice and sense of autonomy. This is likely to provoke more severe resistance.

One more perspective that potentially is needed on the relationship between power and resistance concerns the digital aspect of remote work. Cayghill (2013) has a theory that digital resistance, resistance that takes place with digital means over the internet, is more extensive in its variety, because the person exercising his or her power by carrying out resistance, has a greater variety of opportunities to express their resistance, including through sabotage or dissemination of information regarding, for example, demonstrations or strikes.

On the other hand, Cahill (2013) explains that the one in the power relationship with the most resources has a greater opportunity to control and dominate with the help of technology. If it is applied to the case of this thesis, it can be said that it means that employees have the opportunity to express power and resistance in a number of different ways, even remotely, but on the other hand, employers with the organization's resources on their side, have great opportunities to monitor and control employee behaviour in the work.

### 3.2 Resistance to Change

As the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and restrictions requiring social distancing increased, a lot has changed within several practices in organizations, as they sent their employees home to work remotely (Habánik et al., 2021; Contreras et al., 2020). Ever since the first lockdown in 2020, these restrictions have meanwhile both increased and decreased, depending on infection rates going up and down and the spread out of Covid-19 vaccines. This has resulted in that organizations simultaneously have changed their policies regarding remote work, raising
voices from employees who are affected by and therefore wants to be involved and control (Hoskins, 2022; Iershova et al., 2022). It is even arguable that those changes in addition to changes in organizational culture and use of technologies, has led to significant organizational change (McDonell & Beck, 2021). For these reasons, and because resistance is a usual reaction to change (Iershova et al., 2022), we will take a look at some classic organizational change theories, and what they contribute to research about why change provokes resistance.

Two theories, that are widely accepted within organizational change theory are Lewin's model and Kotter's eight-step model and these theories manly describe how to execute organizational change in a way where the organization can continue after it with well-functioning and hopefully developed practices with organizational members who are satisfied and might also even develop from it (Singh et al., 2022).

To start it off, we have Kotter’s eight-step model (Kotter, 1995), which states that, to overcome the challenges of an organizational change you should follow eight steps, namely creating a sense of urgency, putting together a guiding coalition, developing vision and strategies, communicating these visions, removing barriers to action, accomplishing short-term wins, building on the change and lastly making the change stick. In relation to resistance, Kotter's (1995) explanation of the first point, creating a sense of urgency is interesting. He means namely that it is a starting point to expect resistance from an organization's members, and that you therefore need to get them on board by pointing out the need for the change, in order for them to accept it.

The steps regarding developing and communicating a vision are important according to Kotter (1995) as having an unclear picture of what is going on and where the organization is headed, increases the risks of organizational members feeling confused or alienated, and thereby increasing their willingness to perform resistance to get back their sense of belonging. A well-executed communication is, according to Kotter (1995) one of the most important most important aspects of minimizing resistance, as employees become more likely to make personal sacrifices in order to facilitate the change.

The step regarding removing the barriers is the one, which most of all refers to resistance from organizational members but this step has a clear managerial perspective because the goal is to identify and find ways to counteract resistance. The more interesting steps for the employee perspective, and which rounds off Kotter's (1995) model for us, is to build on the change and make it stick. If you continue to build on a change according to the strategy, it
also increases the level of acceptance and reduces resistance from employees. Getting the change to stick by showing how well it has worked, also makes the employees more easily aware of the positive parts and thus reduces resistance (Kotter, 1995).

The other model, Lewin’s three-step model includes 1. Unfreezing, 2. Moving (changing) and 3. Refreezing (Lewin, 1947). With the first step Lewin demonstrates that preparations through creating a plan and communicating that plan is important before going ahead with a change as it, similar to Kotter’s (1995) statements, means that the people affected by the it is more likely to accept it. However, Lewin (1947) also points out that involving everyone affected, in the process of the planning, or the unfreezing as he calls it, makes them feel more connected to the change and therefore are less likely to resist against it.

During the moving step when the change is happening, Lewin (1947) states that one way to minimize resistance is to facilitate the opportunity to discuss the change, as it will make it easier to detect things that are not working or where there is dissatisfaction.

And lastly, regarding the third step of refreezing, Lewin (1947) means that there is an importance in creating a new permanency of the new. With that the indication is that the change needs to get used to by everyone that is affected by them. It can therefore be argued that the changes during the Covid-19 pandemic, where restrictions regarding social distancing and policies regarding remote work have changed back and forth (Iershova et al., 2022), have not been executed in line with the “refreezing” step of Lewin’s model (1947).

### 3.3 Routine Resistance

A part of the purpose of this thesis is to study how resistance is performed and what it looks like, which makes it interesting the thesis to give some attention to what kinds of resistance there are. Several historical events have shown that discrete resistance is the most common, but also the most difficult to point out because of its vague nature (Cayghill, 2013). The term discrete resistance is closely related to how Prasad and Prasad (2000) discuss the term routine resistance. They also state that it is the most occurring form of resistance, not just in organizations but in general. In their study where they present a theory on informal resistance, or routine resistance and its ability to limit managerial control. When describing what resistance is, Prasad and Prasad (2000) divide it into two different types, formal and informal resistance. They state that formal resistance is organized, planned and intentional in its nature and takes place for instance through strikes, collective protests and grievances etcetera.
Routine resistance however is discrete as it is less visible and less direct and takes place within the everyday practices going on in an organization.

As said, Prasad and Prasad (2000) mainly focus on routine resistance. They point out the difficulty of studying routine resistance, because a significant characteristic of it is its hidden nature. The reason or intention behind a resisting action can be mixed with other reasons, and it is therefore not immediately recognizable as resistance by different actors and is therefore often disguised, with one way of disguising it being making it appear like legitimate actions.

To showcase this Prasad and Prasad (2000) puts forward the example of dressing. On one hand, the way of dressing, and dressing in a deviant way, can be an expression of resistance, but it can on the other hand, also be because of not knowing the rules or simply having a different aesthetic preference. Prasad and Prasad (2000) also argue, in relation to the work itself, that an employee’s innovative efforts to simplify certain practices, through bypassing the rules laid in place, is resistance. But on the other side of the coin, it is beneficial for the organization as the work is done in a more effective, which in turn paves way for improvements.

The point made is that you cannot refer to all everyday actions as being resistance. This ambiguity also leads to routine resistance being rather easy to conceal, because it is a challenge to perceive the intention behind a disruptive action. With that in mind, and as the nature of remote work involves less physical presence and fewer face-to-face interactions, resulting in poorer possibilities to monitor employees (Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi, 2020) one could therefore wonder whether concealing routine resistance is even easier when working remotely.

Prasad and Prasad (2000) do not just describe what routine resistance can appear like. They also present a theory of three different ways in how routine resistance discursively emerges in the workplace and who constitutes what type. The first way in which routine resistance emerges is what they call owning resistance. It is enacted primarily by employees in non-managerial positions and is basically when the actor has a clear intention of being confrontational, oppositional, and maybe even hostile, in what was deliberate attempts to gain some sort of control in the organization, at least regarding things that revolve around their assignments. An example on when employees want to control the difficulty or the volume of their tasks. If they perform really well, they feel like there is a risk that they get assigned with more difficulty or volume, so they enact in resistance to make the workplace more
comfortable for themselves. Prasad and Prasad (2000) go on to state that one main trigger is technological changes, for instance when assignments who have previously been done manually, now can be done automatically with the help of technology. This sometimes leads to employees doing these tasks manually, and in those cases where they are warned, just continue to do perform routine resistance by doing it manually when not being monitored. The employees that enact with owning resistance also tend to be the individuals that point out flaws, for example with the technology being used, and these attempts to actively look for something to complain about can also be described as a way to perform routine resistance (Prasad & Prasad, 2000).

Another way in which routine resistance can emerge according to Prasad and Prasad (2000) is naming resistance, which is described as when certain actions get labelled as resistance. More specifically, it is when something negative happens and there is a possibility that it can be attributed to an actor and then attributing or blaming that occurrence to or at someone in the organization. Employees however do not identify themselves with to other, known, or unknown, colleagues. This kind of routine resistance can be enacted both by employers and employees but from the employee perspective however, a reason to name resistance is that managerial authority potentially can be shaken by it, as they seem to have less control over the workplace.

A third way in which routine resistance can be constructed is indirect resistance, which can only be enacted by individuals in managerial positions. Namely, it has to do with when managers interpret employees’ actions as resistance, despite knowing that it might not be the case (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). However, as this point of view has a managerial angle, unlike this thesis who focuses on the employee perspective, it is not as relevant to elaborate on it.

3.4 Integrating Theoretical Framework
The main subject in this thesis is resistance and the purpose of the theoretical framework in this case is therefore to work as a support for the arguments that will be used in this thesis. In the introduction of the thesis departure was initially taken from Cayghills (2013) quote of Foucault who stated that wherever there is a relationship, there is a relation of power and wherever there is power there is resistance. That relationship between power and resistance, is therefore a significant part of the theoretical framework, as some theories revolving around that subject were presented.
A significant weight of the section lies within the theory developed by Lawrence and Robinson (2007) who mainly state that resistance, from an employee’s perspective, is a reaction to power exercised by the company they work at and that the nature of how that power is exercised is a strong source when trying to explain why they want to perform resistance and how severe the resistance might be. The description by Lawrence and Robinson (2007) of what kind of power provokes resistance, and the division they do, in where they explain that the kind of power where an employee is treated like an object is likely to provoke more severe resistance, and when employee is treated as a subject likely provokes less severe resistance, is therefore a strong contribution to this thesis.

As the context of the thesis is mostly characterized by the Covid-19 pandemic, the changes in organizational culture and use of technologies, and thereby the significant organizational change it has led to (McDonell & Beck, 2021), increased the reason and relevance to include organizational change theories in the theoretical framework of the thesis. Firstly, through the eight-step model of Kotter (1995) and the three-step model of Levin (1947) there is support for the statement that well-executed communication is vital to minimize the amount of resistance from employees. Kotter (1995) states that that good communication brings a sense of belonging, increasing the possibility of employees going as far as making personal sacrifices to facilitate change. Levin (1947) further stated that communicating with employees, and even including them in the planning, discussion and decision-making of the change also contributes to them getting a sense of belonging and also decreases the risk of them performing resistance.

The main part of organizational change theories that is brought as support for the upcoming argumentation thus becomes the importance of communication. Something else that will also be brought is the statements Levin (1947) makes regarding the refreeze phase of his three-step model where he claims that the permanency of the new and getting used to the changes is a vital part of the organizational change to go well. The argument for why that is an important aspect of this thesis, is that the restrictions regarding social distancing and policies regarding remote work have changed back and forth during the Covid-19 pandemic (Iershova et al., 2022), which potentially has reduced the possibilities to reach some sort of permanency or getting used to the change, before it is time to change again.
One of the research questions concerns how resistance expressed and practiced, which is the main reason for why the theory of Prasad and Prasad (2000) revolving around the appearance of resistance is used in this thesis. They mainly state that routine resistance is the most occurring kind of resistance and also cover several different ways it can be expressed in. But by also discussing several different ways in which resistance can occur, for instance when employees see a possibility to control the difficulty of assignments, Prasad and Prasad (2000) also contribute with support to the upcoming attempts to understand the conditions employees feel they have to carry out resistance, which is another of the research questions. In th

In summary, the theories have contributed to the understanding of different aspects of resistance and as presented, some main takeaways are regarding how different modes of power provokes resistance differently, the importance of communication and inclusion regarding change, and the different ways resistance can occur and be expressed in. Addressing the aspects mentioned here contributes to a greater understanding, now that these the topic of resistance is to be discussed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. Methodology

In this section, there is a presentation of the research methods used to conduct and analyse the research material of this thesis. Starting of with reflections regarding the type of methodology used, other parts that will be presented include a reflection of the philosophical grounding, selection of participants, ethical considerations and a presentation of the analysis method used in this thesis.

4.1 Methods

As the purpose of this study is closely related to a certain event, the Covid-19 pandemic, and how employees view and experience the different things it has resulted in, there will in this thesis be applied a qualitative approach as it is better suited to study a subjects view or feelings regarding certain happenings (Bryman, 2018). Quantitative research on the other hand, generates quantitative data, statistics and numbers, and is better suited for quantifiable phenomena and variables, such as age, weight, years, and so on (Bryman, 2018), aspects which are not in line with the research questions of this thesis. Instead, it is studying social interactions, and meanings behind certain phenomena in their natural environment, that is relevant in this thesis, which is in line with the benefits of qualitative methods (Bryman, 2018).

Another reason for why a qualitative method has been used is the richness in points. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) state that the opportunity for the participants to develop insights, give the researcher a chance to problematize the established ways of thinking, and also gives the data more breadth and depth in a way where it can be interacted with.

4.1.1 Semi Structured Interviews

The data collection method for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews. My method was to take departure from certain themes that were intended to be gone through during the interviews and that the interviewees were simultaneously allowed to design their own answers without being influenced by me, which is consistent with Bryman's (2018) definition of semi-
structured interviews. The different themes that the interviews were based on were rooted in the study's research and the literature on resistance.

Because the research questions examine employees’ experiences regarding resistance, the consideration made was that a semi-structured interview was the most suitable method as it provides the conditions for full and detailed answers that are needed for when the data is going thematically analyzed. As well as achieving the positive effect that Bryman (2018) highlights when the respondents are allowed to roam into different directions and address what they feel is the most relevant to explain different behaviours, events, or patterns. The data material in the study had to be comprehensive enough that all research questions were covered and answered.

The interviews in this study were conducted via the app Microsoft Teams, which enables interviewees and the interviewer both see and hear each other, provided a good connection, which it was in this case. Bryman (2018) highlights the strengths and weaknesses of virtual platforms like this, where some of the strengths that he highlights are that there is an opportunity to save both time and money regarding travels, but it has also enabled me to have interviewees all over Sweden.

Furthermore, the convenience of Microsoft Teams is a factor that compared to in-person interviews, can result in more interviewees choosing to participate in a study, which I got a first-hand experience of as it was easier to get the interviewees to participate as soon as it was mentioned that it would be done remotely, with 3 of the interviewees even partaking on their lunch breaks. However, Bryman (2018) also highlights three weaknesses associated with online interviews. The first is that respondents are more often absent from Microsoft Teams interviews than from traditional interviews, after having agreed to participate. The other one is that it is more difficult to find respondents who are willing to participate in Microsoft Teams interviews than in telephone interviews. The third and last weakness that Bryman (2018) highlights is technical interruptions, or disruptions due to network. Fortunately, none of these three weaknesses affected the collection of data nor did it affect the number of respondents who participated in the study, as the conduct of the interviews went smoothly without any significant disruptions.

Some other aspects that can influence the quality of the conducted data when using a remote platform are the lack of both body language and informal communication before and after the interview, which is limited when the interaction takes place remotely through a screen (Long
et al., 2012), and thereby increases the risk of some important information being missed out on.

4.1.2 Selection of Participants
Having in mind that remote work is possible to a greater extent in knowledge-intensive professions (OECD, 2020), one of the criteria’s used was participants who have completed a university degree. Another consideration that was made was finding participants who are not in a managerial position, as this thesis has an employee perspective and participants who are working at the same company as before the pandemic, as the interest of this study lies within their experiences relative to what things used to be like, something that proved to be a challenge as many of the potential participants I was in contact with have changed jobs within the past year or two.

Participants who have been able to work remotely is also a criterion that was used, as that is a point of view this thesis is taking, and lastly participants who are in similar professions. The similarity in professions enabled me to omit the the role and the assignments being a factor in the potential differences of the participants and be able to compare the experiences with each other without other irrelevant factors playing too much of a role. However, an opportunity that unfortunately is reduced by not examining the problem from several different professions is to potentially discover phenomena in a different work context, where, for example, the relationship between the organizational members and the nature of the work looks different.

Unintentionally, but probably because of the nature of my network, all participants came from the labour market and HR industry, working either as recruiters trying to fill positions with candidates, as mentors helping job seekers, also known as clients, with finding jobs or in HR working as a support function to the organizational practices. They all had assignments which can be done remotely, as the clients or candidates can be contacted, communicated with, and interviewed, with technological equipment.

The empirical material consists of seven participants, who were anonymous. To ensure their anonymity, pseudonyms were used instead of their personal names and company names were excluded and instead replaced by a span of the number of employees, as presented in table 1, to minimize the risk of the companies being identified. They for the presentation of the participants in the table below is to facilitate a clear and fluent reading of the Empirical Findings and Analysis section (5).
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of employment</th>
<th>Current position</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recruiter</td>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josef</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>300-500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfonso</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recruiter</td>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100-200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100-200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Recruiter</td>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lars</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Philosophical Grounding

Phenomenology implies that individuals are aware of themselves and that the awareness and experiences of what is happening in the world shape their way of looking at the social aspects of their lives (David & Sutton, 2016) and as the focus of this thesis has to do with the worldly events of the pandemic, and also with resistance being a form of social interaction (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004), it has been chosen for the thesis to have a phenomenological view of reality.

To develop the explanation of the philosophical grounding of this thesis, it is relevant to also mention that a perspective used is social constructionism. It is a perspective that has its roots in phenomenology. As mentioned, departure within phenomenology is taken from the awareness and experiences of an individual and the similarity can thereby be seen as the view in social constructionism is that reality is not something that is naturally given, but rather
something that is subjectively socially constructed by individuals (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

Then it is also worth pointing out that a popular approach within sociological studies, that in turn has its roots from social constructionism is hermeneutic epistemology. Because with a hermeneutic epistemological approach, the idea is that new knowledge can be acquired by gaining access as a researcher to how people experience a phenomenon (Westlund, 2009), and thereby viewing reality as something that is socially constructed. The study generates knowledge through empirical research that leads to an understanding of why individuals carry out resistance during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also how they experience their conditions to do so. That is the reason for why the study uses a hermeneutic epistemology, to obtain knowledge about their subjective meaning about the issue. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), in hermeneutic epistemology, knowledge is created through understanding and in this thesis that knowledge is created through understanding the experiences of employees.

4.3 Ethical Considerations
Saunders et al. (2009) mention the importance of considering some ethical aspects when conducting a study, and especially having in mind to do it in a responsible and morally defensible way. That includes things like clarifying the research topic, research design and the references that are used, handling collected data with high confidentiality, and informing participants of what questions or topics to expect before they partake in the interview (Saunders et al., 2009). A form of consent with information regarding the conditions, including the fact that they can withdraw themselves from the study before, during or after the interview, was sent out, signed, and handed in, before the interviews went ahead.

Resistance is often viewed as something negative and destructive (Cayghill, 2013) which makes the topic rather sensitive. The participants have therefore been promised anonymity as what they say could hurt their positions in their companies if for instance colleagues or managers at their workplace finds out who they are and what they have said in relation to this interview.
4.4 Analysis Method

As a method to analyse the empirical material, thematic analysis has been used. It is a method well suited to qualitative methods, including interviews (Braun, 2021) which have been used in this study. It has the potential to create, rich, detailed and complex data and also has its strengths in its flexibility, as it enables researchers to generate new concepts, but also its simplicity because there is a well-guided step by step path to follow (Braun, 2021). Thematic analysis is namely going through a dataset by identifying patterns and then coding them systematically to then derive themes (Braun, 2021). After conducting the interviews, they have been transcribed to then try to identify patterns in the data. The coding of the data thereafter was set based on those patterns. According to Braun's (2021) practical guide In conducting thematic analyses, the following step is to group together these codes into themes, that can say something meaningful about the research topic, with a point being made that it is important to have enough data to back a theme up. The main goal with the thematic analysis is to have a narrative that tells a story about the data, and through that also be able to make an argument for the claims that are presented. One way to help with making those arguments, or strengthen the narrative, is the use of quotes from the individuals that take part in the study, which is the reason for why quotes are being used.
5. Empirical Findings & Analysis
The purpose of this section is to present the empirical data and findings of the semi-structured interviews. Simultaneously, an analysis is made, with support drawn from the theoretical framework and literature presented in sections 2 and 3.

The section is initially divided into parts where the first part works to contribute with understanding the general situation in the Covid-19 pandemic from the perspective of the participants. The following parts are then consistent with and stays close to the three research questions. The section then grows through that into several themes within the initial division, which were produced through using the thematic analysis method and deriving the themes from the coding that was done on the semi-structured interviews.

5.1 General situation during Covid-19
An initial focus of the interviews was revolving around the situation that participants have gone through at the workplace. The Covid-19 pandemic led to employees being sent home from their workplace to conduct their work remotely (Mirnezami & Rajabi, 2021) which led to the increased use of information and communication technologies (ICT) within organizations, such as online software, tools, platforms and network connections, to facilitate that change (Habánik et al., 2021). This is something that all participants of this thesis went through, as they all had increased amount of remote working days with Alfonso stating the following:

As soon as the first restrictions came, we were sent home with our laptops and phones, from one day to another, drastically. The interactions that I got so used to during my career with colleagues and candidates, all went from face-to-face to now being mainly through Teams. But it was fine because the first priority was our health, and it felt like the whole organization agreed that we should go through with these drastic changes.

5.1.1 Different Periods of the Pandemic
The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic was thus marked by employees starting to work remotely. However, something that emerged in most of the interviews is that since then it has
gone in waves when it comes to working from home versus the office. Peter representatively explains:

There was the first wave where everyone, including my employer and myself, felt panic as we seemed to be attacked by a virus that we didn’t know anything about. Then I remember in the summer of 2020, an office where suddenly there were colleagues, who, however, tried to keep their distance from each other. I continued to meet our dear candidates online. Then came the second wave and we thereby returned to remote work. There were however policies in the company about the maximum number of people in the office, so you did the company a favour by working from home. However, it all ended in 2021 when we got vaccinated. The boss simply started to dare to demand us back one by one.

There was however varying experience regarding the timeline of the pandemic and the policy of the companies, with the description of Beatrice as a varying example:

The policies have been rather unclear throughout the pandemic, but in the beginning of 2020 where Covid just had come, there was just a lot of confusion until eventually it was decided by the company that we bring all of our working tools, mainly the phone and computer, to our homes. It remained like that until the rollout of the vaccines, so it more or less went a whole year before I met my colleagues during office hours. When we were vaccinated however, the expectation was to come back and start working from the office and start to meet clients physically. But the slightest symptom and it is preferred that we stay at home. Lately however, we’ve been allowed to work from home a day or two a week, that's the new normal.

Another example of an experience that differs is the one of Robert who slightly shook his head and let out a small laugh as he was thinking about how to phrase himself, before he said:

We were basically the last to be sent home and as soon as the infection numbers decreased, we were ordered back to the office. It's stupid because I didn't meet the candidates during that whole period anyway. But in any case, it went back and forth with some short periods when we had to work from home. But now I've mostly been in the office since the vaccine arrived. The only thing is that you can stay at home if you have symptoms, but otherwise you must come in.
The experience in the beginning of the pandemic, of panic described by Peter and confusion described by Beatrice is consistent with the period when covid-19 was declared a pandemic in the first quarter of 2020 as people were all of a sudden urged to physically distance themselves from each other (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021) and employees across the world started working remotely to a very large extent when the nature of the work allowed it (Contreras et al., 2020). It is also known that recommendations and restrictions in Sweden regarding social distancing have increased and decreased in waves in connection with the change in infection numbers, hospitalizations and deaths, as well as it is known that the recommendations and restrictions also gradually decreased as more and more people got vaccinated (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). That timeline is something that is reasonably consistent with common experience among the candidates, but something that we will take with us in the continuation of this thesis is that company policy during the Covid-19 pandemic and how it has been carried out during these waves, differ among the participants, partly exemplified by the quotes of Alfonso, Peter, Beatrice and Robert.

5.1.2 Relationship with the employer
Considering that the way the relationship is between organizational members, is something that can affect the power relationship between them and thus the possible provocation of resistance (Cayghill, 2013), an attempt was made to get a brief understanding of how the relationship has looked between employees and employers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A recurring theme that emerged during the interviews is that there is an experience among the participants that the relationship with the managers had weakened, especially during the periods when they have not met face-to-face. Beatrice said:

*I didn't know as much what was going on in her life, although of course we communicated in teams and had some meetings during the week, but then the whole team was involved. We didn't have as many informal conversations between the two of us. This is something I have noticed recently is important for the relationship because now we suddenly have a better relationship while we meet more at work. I don't think that's a coincidence.*

The experienced weakening that participants have of the relationship with their managers, and Beatrices experience and suggestion that it is not a coincidence, is supported by Diab-Rahman
and Al-Enzi (2020) who go stated that the lack of communication also can result in a weakening of the manager to employee relationship, because of the reduced number of face-to-face interactions and a smaller probability to communicate with each other through technological. There are namely several interactions that might have happened throughout the working day, for instance at the coffee or writer machine or as Josef stated:

*I went from eating breakfast and lunch with my colleagues, to eating breakfast and lunch by myself, or my girlfriend if she was home.*

Another experience that emerged as a common theme was that of the relationship with the employer regarding the permission to work from home or the office. Because meanwhile policies regarding remote work supposedly changed in different ways during the pandemic, some participants felt like it was somewhat unclear, and that the closest manager is the one who sometimes had large influence over the decision making regarding the remote work policy Alfonso shared the following:

*Throughout the pandemic it has felt like my employer had a greater control over my life. The life puzzle is different when you work from home versus the office, so the fact that we in one month we were asked to work remotely, only to be asked to come into the office the next month simply made you feel a little smaller. It was also not black and white that we are now doing this, but the whole thing was a bit unclear and depended a lot on what the boss said from one time to the next. This made the relationship with the boss more like "please can I work from home" or "please can I go into the office". You simply have to ask more for permission.*

This experience says something about the position the employer holds over the employee. Bolman and Deal (2017) describe that position as having authority, which is a source of power that legitimizes and gives access certain actions and decisions, in this case regarding whether employees should work from home or the office.

The power relationship is something that gets us closer to understanding why resistance occurs (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007), which is why we now will get more into answering the research question concerning what the experienced reasons for an employee are to perform resistance during the Covid-19 pandemic.
5.2 The reasons behind resistance

It has now been demonstrated that some employees during the pandemic have experienced that, on several different occasions they have got changed instructions from their employers regarding whether they should carry out their work from home or from the office, something that from the employers’ point of view can be seen as an act of power, through using the authority over the employees (Bolman & Deal, 2017). As an introduction to the phenomena of resistance, a mention will be made to Lawrence and Robinson (2007) who state that resistance is a reaction to organizational power. Something that emerged during the coding of the interviews is that a recurring experience of the participants is that the power exercised by the managers often led to dissatisfaction. Max shared his experience of his dissatisfaction with how the remote work policy has been handled:

"I don't like the fact that what the employer decides has so much influence on things outside of work. One thing is the time. During a long time in the pandemic, it was not as easy to use public transport, as before the pandemic, because buses did not run as often, and it therefore took longer to get to and from work. It is therefore someone else who can decide whether I spend that time traveling to work or as my free time."

The time factor is interesting regarding why the participants seem to prefer remote work as Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi (2020) claim that allowing employees to work remotely increases the likelihood of them having higher job satisfaction, resulting in fewer sick days and lower turnover which partly comes down to employee’s spending less time commuting to work, and therefore saving on travel expenses and having more time for family, giving them a higher capacity to manage family-related issues. The experience of work-life balance is something that is mentioned by Alfonso who previously stated that he felt like the employer had a greater control over his life and then developed his description:

"Although there was a lot to do out on the town during certain periods, I got a lot done at home instead of spending that time commuting to work"

Further, Robert also indicates a degree of dissatisfaction with the employer by stating the following:
As I said before, it's strange that we've had such long periods where we've been forced to be in the office, because I haven't even had face-to-face meetings with the candidates that I interview, for much of the pandemic.

A growing tendency among the participants is that they during the pandemic has had a preference towards remote work while the employers have preferred to have the employers present at the office, which is understandable considering that performance levels risk going down during remote work (Diab-Rahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). That difference in preferences however, is something that risks increasing the power struggle between employer and employee, and thus gives employees to perform resistance (Cayghill, 2013).

In the case of Robert, he experienced that force was exercised against him. That is potentially one reason for performing resistance. Lawrence and Robinson (2007) namely state that force leads to the and can then result in the employee feeling unfairness, leading to them being frustrated and therefore willing to perform resistance. It can also lead to perceived lack of agency and is therefore more likely to lead to more destructive or severe forms of resistance.

Influence, which by Lawrence and Robinson (2007) is described as another form of power and is when someone is persuaded into doing something they otherwise would not do, potentially leading to a feeling of being manipulated and therefore producing frustration and thereby resistance. The trend so far is that the participants prefer to have the opportunity to work remotely, for various reasons as mentioned. However, as this form of power treats employees as subjects and gives them a sense of choice, and therefore does not have a severe effect on their perceived feeling of agency or fairness, it is more likely to lead to less severe resistance.

5.2.2 Communication of the changes
Something that was noticed during the thematic analysis of the interviews is that the participants tended to have a perception that the communication regarding the changes in the organization regarding policies on remote work was not communicated uniformly. Alfonso for instance stated that it was a bit unclear and depended a lot on what his manager said regarding whether he and his colleagues should work remotely or come into the office, instructions that apart from being unclear, continuously changed over time. The experience
regarding the communication from the employer is also exemplified by the following quote from Lars:

_A few times there were clear guidelines from management regarding remote work. Especially the times we weren't supposed to work from the office and instead do all the work from home. On the other hand, during the return to the office, I found it much more unclear. Sometimes the manager announced that the office was open to those who needed to run errands from there. Sometimes he said that there could be a certain number of employees in the office and a schedule was created around who would go there on which days. However, it was unclear whether one had to follow those instructions or if it was voluntary. At a later point when things started to open up again, I feel like the expectation of working from the office increased, but although the feeling was there, it was not entirely clear officially, that one should get there. As you can hear, it's all a bit messy._

The experience of unclarity in the communication is something that was also testified by Beatrice in the quote already presented above:

_The policies have been rather unclear throughout the pandemic, but in the beginning of 2020 where Covid just had come, there was just a lot of confusion until eventually it was decided by the company that we bring all of our working tools, mainly the phone and computer, to our homes. It remained like that until the rollout of the vaccines, so it more or less went a whole year before I met my colleagues during office hours. When we were vaccinated however, the expectation was to come back and start working from the office and start to meet clients physically. But the slightest symptom and it is preferred that we stay at home. Lately however, we've been allowed to work from home a day or two a week, that's the new normal._

There is support to draw to the participants' experiences, from theories regarding changes in organizations in relation to how they are communicated. Through the eight-step model of Kotter (1995) and the three-step model of Levin (1947), we have learned that well-executed communication is vital to minimize the amount of resistance from employees. Kotter (1995) states that that good communication brings a sense of belonging, increasing the possibility of employees going as far as making personal sacrifices to facilitate change. Alfonsos experience contributes with a demonstration for that because when he in the beginning of the pandemic
was sent home from his employer, the clear communication regarding that occasion, made him feel like it was a lot easier to accept the change. It can however be argued that the tendency of the preference being more towards remote work, rather than work from the office, has also contributed to that acceptance.

Levin (1947) also stated that not just communicating with employees, but even including them in the planning, discussion and decision-making of the change also contributes to them getting a sense of belonging and also decreases the risk of them performing resistance. A common pattern among the participants, however, is that they did not feel like they had much influence regarding the decisions revolving around remote work policy. Max explained the following:

Neither I nor my colleagues, both those who have worked here for a long time and for a short time, have been particularly involved in the decision-making regarding remote work. We have expressed our views, absolutely, but there are many times where they have not been considered. It is so easy for the employer to simply refer to the Public Health Agency's recommendations, or that the number of infections has decreased.

The employers' referrals to the Public Health Agency of Sweden, give attention to something else that testifies to the lack of well-executed communication. Some of the participants namely felt that these references were not particularly consistent. Lars is quoted saying:

Something that my boss threw out from time to time is that we do certain things because we listen to the public health agency's recommendations. I want to recall that the times where we were encouraged to work from home also coincided with increased recommendations but what I also remember is that there were times when during the latter part of the pandemic, in case of similar recommendations from the public health agency, a different reaction was made from the company's side, and we would work from the office either way. In the end, they simply did as they wanted. So, they weren't worth much, those recommendations.

The point that is made here, supported by the theories mentioned, is the dissatisfaction with the handling of the overlapping changes of company policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is based on the interviews one of the most prominent reasons for making resistance that, something that can be described by the lack of a well-executed communication regarding the
changes in the organization, coupled with the lack of employee involvement in the decision-making, contributes to increased reasons to perform resistance. Another reason to perform resistance, mentioned in this thesis, is regarding the power struggles that emerge when there is a difference in preferences between whether remote work should be allowed or not, with employees preferring the former.

5.3 Conditions to Perform Resistance
The second research question is regarding what conditions employees feel they have, to carry out resistance, in the context during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main changes of the pandemic are characterized by a drastically increased use of information and communication technologies within organizations, such as online software, tools, platforms and network connections (Habánik et al., 2021). The common patterns that emerged during the analysis of the interviews is that the experienced conditions among the candidates have been affected by these changes, as the relationship and collaboration between employees and employers have changed. A clear division is made, in line with most of this thesis, as a comparison is made between the conditions when working from the office versus when working remotely from home.

To begin with, there is consensus among the participants’ experiences that the conditions differ. The main view is that the minimization of face-to-face interactions and being physically present at another location, gives increased opportunity to perform resistance, as the perceived managerial control is decreased when working remotely. For employers, lack of face-to-face interactions, has indeed resulted in poorer possibilities to monitor employees (Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi, 2020). As an example, there is Lars’s explanation of the following:

There is absolutely a difference between those possibilities. No one sees if I’m always sitting in my office at home or if I have something else to do. The only thing I need to think about is that I will try to be available as often as possible if colleagues or the boss try to get hold of me, via the phone or teams.

Another condition that emerged through the interviews are regarding symptoms. Something that was described by the participants, as earlier presented, is that their employers until now, would rather have them staying home if they have any of the Covid-19 symptoms. Most of the participants see this as a chance to use it to their advantage. Because the experience is that it is
widely accepted in their companies to stay at home if one has symptoms, they did so and blamed it on the symptoms, whenever it fit their need. Beatrice describes it as follows:

*Staying home is easier than ever. It actually feels very nice to have that opportunity. Because regardless of whether you actually have symptoms or not, it's not every day that it feels optimal to go to work. The symptom card doesn't give any feelings of guilt as my boss would rather, I stay at home. I think her perception is that I had come into the office with a bit of a sniffle before the pandemic, so I don't get the sense that she's questioning whether I get sick often.*

So, working remotely and blaming it on symptoms is a way of performing resistance, but there are however more ways of performing resistance presented in the next section (5.4).

It is worth to note that there were a few candidates who mentioned a specific aspect regarding the conditions, that got my attention. Namely, they shared a feeling that their manager made more attempts to monitor over them and their performance regarding the work assignments, something that is well exemplified by Josef:

*If you are in the office, it feels like the manager is more relaxed. She knows that I am there and that there is therefore not much else I can do but work. When I'm home, however, the experience is that she tries to keep a better eye on me and my colleagues. Things like if you respond to emails and messages quickly enough and so on. I've even heard her say that she wonders what one of my colleagues are doing because it says on Teams that she's been absent for half an hour.*

This experienced behaviour of the employer could perhaps be in order to counter the reduced possibilities of monitoring, that naturally come with remote work (Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi, 2020). Something that caught my attention, however, is the way Lars, when asked about resistance, described an incident where his manager pointed out that one of his colleagues were absent, just because it said so on Teams. It reminds me of Prasad and Prasad’s (2000) description of that resistance can emerge from naming it. They stated that naming resistance is when a certain action, something negative, that possibly can be attributed to an actor, gets labelled as resistance. There is nothing that automatically indicates that the colleague of Lars
indeed was absent, as she for instance might just have been in a phone call. The way Lars attributed the alleged absence of his colleague as resistance, agrees well with the statement of Prasad and Prasad (2000) that employees do not identify themselves with resistance, but attribute it to others.

5.4 How Resistance is Expressed
One way, in which resistance is performed is already presented in the section above (5.3) as there was a description of that some participants stay home and conduct their work remotely and blame it on Covid-19 symptoms, although they might not have it.

This section will look at a few ways that resistance is performed while working remotely, as the focus of this thesis is the differences the Covid-19 pandemic has brought regarding the issue.

When working remotely, the participants perform resistance in many different ways. Beatrice said the following:

*It's small things like checking the phone and social media little more often, talking to friends, eating breakfast in front of the computer, not getting dressed the same way I would if I was to go to the office etc. I also tend to have the TV on in the background, which takes some of my attention every now and then.*

Alfonso then described how he got a lot done regarding his private life:

*You have time for so much more in life. During lunch, I have time to cook and eat it while spending time with my wife. However, I will be honest and say that sometimes (laughs), often, start preparing the food a little before the lunch break. It can also happen that I start work a few minutes into regular working hours. Then it also happens that I leave a few minutes early, to pick up children and such. It's not like I'm doing it on purpose, but as I said, it's just easier to have time for a lot.*

Prasad and Prasad (2000) divided resistance into two different types, formal and informal resistance. They stated that formal resistance is organized, planned and intentional in its nature and takes place for instance through strikes, collective protests and grievances etcetera,
while informal resistance however is discrete as it is less visible and less direct and takes place within the everyday practices going on in an organization, so they call it routine resistance. Beatrice and Alfonso’s experience seems to be closer aligned with the description of routine resistance, as it takes place in their everyday practices and does not seem to be direct or intentional in its nature.

I also felt like the participants in general struggled to explain how they perform resistance. That is however not something that comes as a surprise, especially when having in mind that routine resistance, the most common form of resistance, is difficult to identify because of its vague nature (Prasad & Prasad, 2000)

One aspect that emerged as a theme during the analysis of the interviews concerns the difficulties in the work tasks. I will firstly demonstrate it with the following quotes. Peter first said:

*I have some tasks that I receive from my boss. And we can say this, I complete them fairly quickly but not too quickly. It is a privilege to work from home and then it is important to take advantage of it.*

Similarly, but with a bit more reasoning, Robert told the following:

*I't's stupid to work as fast as you can during working hours. It increases expectations and you hardly have time to do anything. It is important to do well enough to keep the boss happy, while at the same time being able to take things a little more calmly at home. It's not just me. The colleagues also do the same and thus the expectations of us as a team are not as high.*

Prasad and Prasad (2000) explained that employees sometimes try to control the volume of their tasks because if they perform really well, they feel like there is a risk that they get assigned with more difficulty or volume, so they enact in resistance to make the workplace more comfortable for themselves. That statement helps support the case of this thesis, where we can see examples of employees who try to control the difficulty of their tasks and can therefore strengthen the claim that they do it in order to have more time for other things outside of work, that they can do because they are at home.
6. Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, regarding the reasons for what employee’s experience is reasons to perform resistance, the clarification, supported by the theoretical framework, is that the dissatisfaction with the handling of the overlapping changes of company policies during the Covid-19 pandemic is something that should be paid attention to. It is based on the interviews one of the most prominent reasons for making resistance that, something that can be described by the lack of a well-executed communication regarding the changes in the organization, coupled with the lack of employee involvement in the decision-making, contributes to increased reasons to perform resistance. Another reason to perform resistance, mentioned in this thesis, is regarding the power struggles that emerge when there is a difference in preferences between whether remote work should be allowed or not, with employees preferring the former. Here it is also worth mentioning that some participants preferred to work from home, not just because they had to spend less time commuting to work, but also so that they could get more things done at home, for example spending time with their spouse.

It is also interesting that some of them went as far as controlling the difficulty and volume of the assignments, so that the time they spent on other things during the working hours, did not become too apparent for their employer. This is one of the ways resistances was performed by the participants of the empirical data. Another way that emerged as a way to perform resistance was spending time on things in one’s private life or spare time, during working hours. Most of these actions were, however, quite discreet in nature, in line with Prasad and Prasad (2000) description of routine resistance which they state is the most common kind of resistance. Some examples mentioned by the participants was spending time on social media, watching TV, cooking, eating and leaving the house early.

It can be argued that one of the most significant conclusions that can be drawn has to do with the participants' experiences of using Covid-19 symptoms as a resistance tool. Since the experience is that during the pandemic, their employer would rather have them staying home if they have symptoms instead of coming to the office and risking infecting colleagues, the participants used this to their advantage and blamed the symptoms even though they may not have had them.

What makes this so interesting is partly that it was a clear theme among the participants, but mainly because it was not possible before the pandemic. Remote work was a phenomenon
that already existed even before the pandemic (Contreras et al., 2020) so some of the ways to resist have potentially existed before. But this blaming on symptoms in order to stay at home, is a completely new way of resisting.

There were also some points made regarding another condition to perform resistance. As previous literature showed that a lack of face-to-face interactions when employees are working remotely resulted in poorer possibilities to monitor employees (Diab-Rahman and Al-Enzi, 2020), a connection was made to the interviews where a common pattern was that the participants felt like they were able to other things during working hours as their employer did not have the same opportunity to keep track of what they did, as they could not see them directly. On the contrary however, it is worth mentioning that some participants felt that their employers compensated that by increasing their attempts to monitor their performance regarding the work assignments.

During the semi-structured interviews, a few of the questions were revolving satisfaction, and there is indeed literature that supports a claim that allowing employees to work remotely increases the likelihood of them having higher job satisfaction (Diab-Rahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Sokolic, 2022). However, asking specifically about satisfaction, while the participants knew that the interview is about resistance could potentially have hinted that there is a connection between their satisfaction at work and the willingness to carry out resistance. Therefore, my point is that it may have caused them to subconsciously reinforce that connection.

One difficulty discovered during the interviews has to do with the context in which they were conducted, and the time period described by the participants. The idea for this thesis, beforehand, was to investigate resistance in a context where you work from home, but as the participants generally explained that they are now back in a situation where most of the work is done from the office, adds an aspect that I wasn't really prepared for at the beginning of the creation of the thesis. It may have partially affected their ability to recall their experiences a year or two ago, given that they have a different experience in the current situation when conducting the interviews.
One way to avoid this surprise could have been to conduct pre-interviews, to get an improved picture and understanding of the target group. The difficulty with that, however, is that the preparations of this thesis were going on at the same time as the latest wave of Covid-19. So, when it then was time to conduct the interviews later on, it was in a context where the normality for the participants was that a majority of the work being done from the office.

A last consideration made is that the results could have been affected by the fact that the participants have been employed ever since before the pandemic. This was a prerequisite for them to be able to compare the situation before the pandemic to the current one, but it could potentially also have led to their preference to work remotely being higher. Because a rather new employee on the other hand, might have been wanting to get used to the working environment, colleagues and employer, and thereby preferred to work more often from the office.
References:


Appendix

Interview guide

Interview guide, taking departure from the purpose of the thesis, including themes such as remote work, resistance,

- **Situation**

General information? I.e number of employees at company, number of years in the company in current position or similar, number of colleagues and managers in team, managers

Policies regarding remote work during the pandemic?

- **Work**

What does your workplace look like (working environment, use of ICT, both office and home).

What is the nature of your assignments?

Who are the different stakeholders that you regularly are in contact with and how?

- **Relation**

What is your experience of your relationship with the organization?

What is your experience of your relationship with the manager(s)?

What is your experience of your relationship with the colleagues?

- **Remote work**

What has the pandemic looked like in your company, regarding remote work vs. office work?

What are your experiences with working remotely?

Have you gone back to working from the office? If yes, how have you experienced that to be?
- **Resistance in general**

How do you experience your satisfaction at work?

Are there things you are satisfied with at work?

Are there things that you are dissatisfied with at work?

How do you experience regarding your level of influence in the company?

Have you experienced a need to perform resistance intentionally?

Have you experienced yourself performing resistance unintentionally?

Have you noticed some sort of resistance from colleagues?

Have you noticed some sort of resistance from managers?

What are your experiences regarding conditions in which resistance can be performed at the office?

What are your experiences regarding conditions in which resistance can be performed remotely?