



Pandemic's impact on employees' motivation towards remote work

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The subject of this thesis was to study remote work's effects on employee motivation in a pandemic situation. The main objective was to figure out how different opportunities and desires to work remotely affect employee motivation, engagement and how those can be supported by the employer. Managing remote work and motivation provided a basis for the thesis. The research method of the thesis was quantitative and the author surveyed employees of the commissioning company. No managers were participating in the survey as the study focused on the subordinates' perspective.

The survey brought various, valuable, and comprehensive answers. All of the respondents worked in the same operational area and there had been various changes to their remote working policies due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The most valuable sources of motivation in remote work according to the respondents and theory were: atmosphere, including supervisor and colleagues, home-work life flexibility, sense of security, communication, and commitment.

The majority of the respondents felt that their eagerness to work remotely had increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, only half of them were allowed to work remotely according to that desire. In a conclusion from the employees' perspective, remote work isn't a desirable way of working constantly but in moderation, it increases the employees' motivation, engagement and work performance.

Keywords

Remote work, employee motivation, and employee satisfaction

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1 Introduction

This thesis concentrates on remote work, its effect on employees' work motivation, and the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the matter. Remote or hybrid teams which combine office and remote work have become more popular, compared to completely central office-based corporate jobs. The amount of remote work has been sped up by the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote work is a current phenomenon that offers a new viewpoint on employees' motivation, with its own challenges and benefits compared to traditional office work.

Remote work has been around for a while, but it is now becoming a more preferred and mainstream way of working, partly because the pandemic has increased the pressure for employers to figure out how to keep their business running even though their employees can't come to the office. There is a variety of research available on remote work, nevertheless, there are still aspects that can be further researched and explored for example due to the current situation there have been sudden changes in the way we work.

The subject of this thesis is how the possibility to do remote work impacts employees' work motivation and how the pandemic affected that. This thesis concentrates first on remote work, its challenges and benefits, and employee motivation. Later on, there will be a discussion on COVID-19 pandemics' effect on remote work and the managers' role in leading remote and/or hybrid teams. At the end of the thesis, the survey results will be presented and there will be further recommendations for the commissioner

1.1 Commissioner

Commissioner for this thesis is OP Korttityhtiö Oy: Arjen Talous Operaatiot. OP is one of the largest financial groups in Finland that offers a variety of services to private and business customers. In this case, the research will focus on Arjen Talous Operaatiot = Everyday banking operations which include back-office teams for OP's private customer sector.

The thesis aims to find out if the pandemic has had an impact on employees' motivation and desire to work remotely. As a result, the commissioner expects to have a better understanding of employees' internal and external motivation regarding remote work.

1.2 The reasoning behind the thesis

The working environment is on a verge of change, not only because of the pandemic but also because of technological advancements all work doesn't require working at the office,

which increases the amount of remote work. The commissioner's employees have different opportunities to work remotely based on their job descriptions. Roughly categorized into three groups. 1. Employees that can work remotely every day if they desire, 2. Employees that have to agree with others when they work remotely and they have this opportunity a couple of times a week, 3. Employees that don't have the opportunity to work remotely.

There has been recognized that the employees' desire to work remotely and the possibilities to do so doesn't always match. Some employees want to work at the office but because of the pandemic they have to do remote work and vice versa some employees want to work remotely but their job description doesn't allow it. The commissioner wants to find out if they desire to work remotely is internal and individual for each employee and has stayed the same despite the pandemic or has the pandemic impacted on that. Another question is that has the pandemic affected the employee motivation and eagerness to work because not all are given the same opportunities.

1.3 Aim of the thesis

In the past financial industry has been focusing on office-based working, but the pandemic has increased the pace that remote work has become more common and the amount of remote work just keeps on growing in the future. The commissioner wants to have a better understanding of employee motivation to prepare better for future changes in the working environment. These are the reasons why the aim is to find out if the pandemic has affected the employees' motivation towards remote work or if the motivation individual and internal.

2 Remote Work

Remote work is defined as working outside the employer's establishments. Working remotely isn't a completely new phenomenon since 2009 over 20 % of companies in Germany offered their employees a chance to work remotely at least a couple of days each month. Nevertheless, because development in communication and information technology has increased remote working and made it easier to organize. (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018. 70-71)

People are likely to be working remotely more than they're used to. Employees are seeking more flexibility to balance their work and personal lives. Technology has made it easier to work outside the traditional office. Partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic employers are realizing, that many traditional office-based jobs can be done from almost anywhere, but working outside the office brings its challenges. (Harvard Business Review, 2021)

Employees have to rethink everyday aspects of their job, from how to work ergonomically without a dedicated office space to figure out how to work as a team with colleagues they hardly see in person. Supervisors have to learn how to lead and support a distributed team members fairly even though they might be able to meet other employees more frequently. Working remotely can affect employees' physical, mental and emotional health because of the challenges of trying to maintain healthy work and home life balance. (Harvard Business Review, 2021)

2.1 Common Challenges of Remote Work

It is important to understand aspects that can make working remotely especially demanding. When employees start to work remotely especially without preparation to do so, their work performance and commitment can be affected negatively. There are four main challenges:

2.1.1 Less direct management:

A reduced amount of face-to-face communication raises often concerns both in employees and supervisors. Decreased access to managerial engagement and support creates additional stress to the employees. Research indicates that in certain jobs employees work more efficiently when they are remote, but still the managers are concerned that subordinates will not work as thoroughly. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

Sometimes the subordinates feel that the supervisors aren't supportive or necessary to get their job done, because remote supervisors don't know their needs. This means that

working remotely doesn't only require technical skills but employees have to become better with self-leadership. Managers have to learn how to adapt their leadership style if they want to be able to sufficiently manage and support distributed teams. The managers don't see their subordinates daily which increases the risk of not noticing their challenges in time for example possible burnout due to overworking. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

2.1.2 Lack of communication and information

When working remotely to communicate with each other, subordinates and supervisors has to utilize modern technology. To have remote employees the employers have to provide laptops, mobile phones, and virtual communication platforms such as email, quick chat, and video meeting technology. (Viktorovich, Rozentsvaig, Bakhteeva, Soshnikova;& Sherpaev, 2020, 23-24)

When working remotely it takes more time and effort to get information from colleagues. Getting an answer to even the most straightforward question can seem like a big hurdle because the colleague isn't close by. Communication issues can occur more often between colleagues because they are used to rely more on nonverbal communication, which taken out when communicating remotely for example via email. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

According to research, remote colleagues can have differences in "common knowledge" which has led to lower eagerness to give colleagues the benefit of the doubt in challenging situations. For example, you get a blunt email from your colleague, because you both work at the office, you know that the email is a product of their stressful day at the office. But if the email is sent by a colleague that is working remotely and you don't know their circumstances it is more likely that you take offense, or think the colleague is unprofessional. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

2.1.3 Social isolation

Remote work doesn't provide the employees the same social interactions as office work, which is the reason why loneliness is one of the most typical complaints about remote work. In short term, the extroverts might suffer more from isolation especially if they don't have opportunities to interact with others while working remotely. Nevertheless, in the long haul isolation can make anyone feel less part of their company which can even lead to heightened motive to leave the organization. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

2.1.4 Distractions outside the office

Family and home needs can interfere with remote work, it is common to hear that someone is working remotely at the same time as their spouse, children or someone else is at home. There isn't necessarily a dedicated working area at home, which means the employees work from their couch or kitchen table. Working at the office brings pressure to the employee to maintain a certain work ethic for example conducting private calls and personal appointments are done outside of the working hours. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

When working remotely the line between work and personal life gets narrower it is more tempting to get distracted by a call from a friend or continue working just a "little" longer because there is no time wasted on the commute to work. Needless to say, juggling between work and home distractions isn't very efficient. Employers should encourage their employees to create dedicated working areas, this would not only create a better working environment but also make it easier for the employee to maintain a balance between work and home life. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

2.2 Managerial support in remote work

It is even more necessary to keep an eye on work motivation and engagement when supervisors and their subordinates work in separate locations. There are relatively inexpensive and quick ways that managers can alleviate remote employees' challenges and ensure their work motivation. The starting point is to offer low-threshold support and create a safe environment for open communication. (Wiik, 2020, 13-14)

Successful supervisors schedule regular check-ins with their subordinates. The form of how the check-ins are conducted can vary from individual meetings to team calls based on the job characteristics and the needs of the employees. Key point is that the check-ins happen regularly and they offer a safe forum where employees can raise their concerns and consult the manager regarding any questions they might have. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

Offering the employees multiple ways of communicating through technology will lead more fulfilling remote working experience. For example, video meetings offer a possibility to have a face-to-face experience with colleagues which can increase the "common knowledge" discussed earlier in chapter 2.1.2. Lack of communication and Information. Video meetings can also decrease the feeling of social isolation and they can be exceptionally useful in more delicate discussions because it seems more personal than written communication. Offering faster and less formal ways of communicating (Microsoft Teams,

Zoom, etc.) eases the barrier to get in touch with the colleague, which comes especially handy in time-sensitive matters. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

Working remotely becomes more productive and rewarding if the supervisor has set expectations for frequent meaningful communication for example daily meetings where the team goes through what they expect to accomplish that day. The subordinates should also know the best time and way to get in touch with their supervisor in different situations for example if the issue isn't time-sensitive it can be communicated through a message. The manager should keep track of the communication between subordinates to ensure that they are sharing information and acting professionally towards each other. There are different ways of communicating but the most important aspect is that the same expectations towards communication are shared by all team members. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

While working remotely the employees should be offered ways to interact socially with their colleagues and have informal discussions about topics not related to work. The simplest way to organize social interaction is to have spare time in the beginning and/or end of the meeting where team members can share for example their weekend plans with each other or discuss other topics not related to work. Managers can also organize for example virtual coffee or lunch breaks which can seem artificial at first but the experience can promote a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

When working remotely it is easy to dismiss the fact that the employee for example stressed or anxious because they might not be communicating about their concerns. This is why the managers should take more of the initiative to ask their employees daily how they are doing. Managers' reaction towards challenging situations determinates how the employees will react. Efficient managers take a two-pointed approach, both acknowledging the negative feelings that employees may have in challenging situations, but also providing confirmation of their confidence in the team, for example using a phrase such as "even though it's tough, we can do this." This kind of support increases the employees' chances to tackle the challenge with a sense of focus and purpose. (Larson, B., Vroman, S. & Makarius, E., 2020)

2.3 Pandemic's effect on work-life

Organizations worldwide had already been used to provide their employees the opportunity to work remotely to some extent, but the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 quickly turned working remotely into a "new normal" and more preferred way of working. The

amount of remote work was especially amplified when governments advised and/or demanded that people would practice social distancing. However, there still are jobs that require working at the "office" such as jobs in the health care and hospitality industry. Economies' development level also affects the rate that societies can adapt to working remotely, particularly in situations that consider the majority of the population. (Wiik, 2020, 42-43)

It would be preferable that organizations would have defined remote-work policies and training in advance, however, this kind of preparation isn't obtainable in crisis and/or fast-changing situations. To survive the pandemic financially companies had to stay operational which meant that they had to adapt quickly to changing situations and regulations. COVID-19 has made it compulsory for companies to figure out how day-to-day remote work is maintainable and effective for the long term. Therefore, companies need to invest more in technology and keep an eye on their employee engagement. (Jackson, 2020)

While working remotely employees are not only required to adjust practically to the new situation, but they also have to mentally adapt by being open-minded and positive towards the new normal. When a transition to remote work is sudden, there is a much greater chance that employees contend with substandard working situations and spaces. Quickly adapting to a new remote working culture can be especially difficult for older employees because they typically have more working experience and are more used to work at the office. This can lead to unequal positions between generation groups. (Guantario, 2020)

Family and home demands can interrupt remote work even in normal situations, which indicates that these distractions are even greater during this sudden remote work transition. Now families had to stay home with each other because of the social distancing advised by the governments. This leads to multiple challenges for example lack of workspace and privacy because both spouses are working from home and/or the children are in a remote school. Spending more time at home and probably having fewer activities can make children more restless. This can affect the parents' stress levels and working performance because it is likely that the children disturb them while they are working remotely. (Guantario, 2020)

On the other hand, social distancing and remote work can bring beneficial privacy to employees that live alone. Their job performance can increase because common interruptions that would happen at the office are eliminated. Nevertheless, remote employees often experience feelings of not belonging, loneliness, and isolation social which means social distancing and spending the whole workday alone can harm employees' mental health. (Keeling;Clements-Croome;& Roesch, 2015, 880-898)

Fundamentally the pandemic has proven to organizations worldwide that working remotely is easier to organize and isn't as unproductive as thought. It is still out in the open when the restrictions can be removed which means that the people will be working remotely probably for quite some time and by doing so they will get more familiar with it. The positive side of this challenging time is that it drives companies to constantly improve their remote working practices to make them as productive and beneficial as possible. (Wiik, 2020 13-14, 42)

3 Employee motivation

A common definition of motivation is the psychological power that creates complex processes of goal-oriented behaviors and thoughts. These actions circle around an individual's private psychological and external forces that determinate the direction, endurance and magnitude of personal behavior targeted at a particular goal. (Kanfer, Frese & Johnsson., 2017).

Motivation is a psychological condition associated with a precise situation, which determines why someone acts. More specifically; how strongly, actively, and with what diligence someone works and where their focus is directed. Motivation derives from the word motive. Motives are usually referred to as needs, desires, celebrations, penalties, rewards, and internal incentives. Motives create a space which is called motivation. (Ruohotie & Honka 2002, 13.) In the working environment, work motivation is "a set of energetic forces that originate within individuals, as well as in their environment, to initiate work-related behaviors and to determine their form, direction, intensity and duration" (after Pinder, 2008, p. 11).

Interaction between individual diversities and the environment where those happen create work motivation. In addition, employees' personality, needs and job suitability affect work motivation which creates different attitudes and results for example engagement, satisfaction and company culture. (Shkoler & Kimura 2020, 1-2.) Motivation is the reason behind committed employees because commitment and motivation are tied to each other. A satisfying work environment and motivation are the most important factors for a committed employee. (Ruohotie & Honka 2002, 13.)

Often work motivation is broken down to two main concepts intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can be seen as the internal force that gives employees feelings of excitement, satisfaction and accomplishment, joy which are derived from the work processes and their results. Extrinsic motivation is created and maintained when the company, the work and the working environment influences individuals' external drive to work. Roughly categorized employee is extrinsically motivated when they rather focus on the service of the activity than the activity. (Shkoler & Kimura 2020, 1-2.). There is more discussion on these topics in the following chapters 3.1. Extrinsic motivation and 3.2. Intrinsic motivation.

3.1 Extrinsic motivation

Motivation is often split into external and internal motivation. This division into two concepts isn't as clear today as it used to be. Motivational aspects are rather seen as complementary to each other rather than exclusive as seen before. Both of these aspects are part of creating a complex and complete individual motivation for each person. Extrinsic motivation is created and maintained when the company, the work and the working environment influences individuals' external drive to work. In this case, the person behaves due to external consequences and incentives of work, for example getting a promotion, position, or reward (Rockmann and Ballinger 2017, 11-13.).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are seen independent with their own antecedents and outcomes. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that intrinsic motivation is more effective than extrinsic motivation they are better seen as opposite aspects of one continuity. According to Rockmann and Ballinger (2017) individuals can simultaneously experience extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for doing their work because financial incentives exist alongside interesting tasks.

3.2 Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation can be seen as the internal force that gives employees feelings of excitement, satisfaction and accomplishment, joy which are derived from the work processes and their results. The aspect of internal motivation is that the done job can act as a reward to its maker because people do the work because of themselves. (Shkoler & Kimura 2020, 2-4.).

To achieve and maintain employees' internal motivation, the goals should be achievable, appealing, and positively challenging (Robbins 2000, 50-51). Inherent motivation refers to the pleasure of working while the work is the motivator, which leads to the employee's, career development, mental growth, expanding responsibility, and performance at work (Robbins 2000, 47-48). Certain directions and actions can be led by internal forces there is more on this in chapter Chapter 3.4. Maslow: The hierarchy of needs theory.

3.3 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of motivation, also referred as motivation-hygiene theory or dual-factor theory, was a outcome of a research done in the 1950s that analyzed 200 engineers' and accountants' responses about their positive and negative feelings towards their work. (Souders, 2021.) Herzberg recognized that employees' satisfaction and motivation at work was influenced by two main factors:

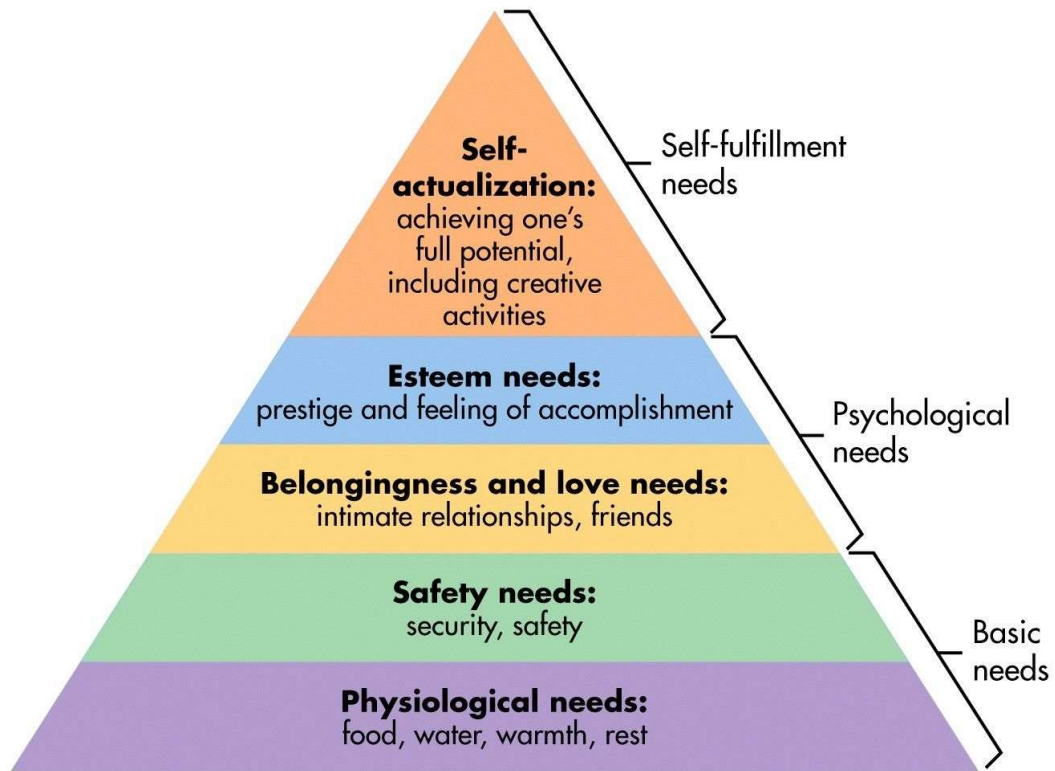
1. Motivator factors that can motivate employees to work harder and create job satisfaction that consist of feeling of recognition, enjoyment, engagement and career progression.
2. Hygiene factors that in their absent can possibly cause dissatisfaction and a lack of motivation. These are such as sufficient organization policies, adequate benefits, suitable compensation and good relationships with supervisors and colleagues. (Souders, 2021.)

Motivator and hygiene factors appear to work independently, even though both of these factors influence motivation. Herzberg recognized that absence of motivator factors didn't necessarily cause dissatisfaction even though they increased employee motivation and satisfaction. Similarly, the absence of hygiene factors caused an increase in dissatisfaction but their existence didn't appear to grow motivation and satisfaction. (Souders, 2021.)

This theory indicates organizations have to improve both factors in order to have the most satisfied and productive employees. To increase and maintain employee motivation, it is suggested that the companies make sure all employees feel appreciated and supported, are given constructive feedback and have the confidence and the knowledge of how to proceed in their career. Hygiene factors have to be considered in order to prevent work dissatisfaction for example creating the best possible working environment and offering adequate salary. (Souders, 2021.)

3.4 Maslow: The hierarchy of needs theory

Maslow Abraham was an American psychologist who studied human behavior and actions to find the motivation behind them. According to Souders (2021) Maslows Hierarchy of Needs theory "proposed employees become motivated along a continuum of satisfaction of needs from basic physiological needs to higher-level psychological needs for growth and self-actualization". The pyramid of Maslow's theory is presented below to clarify the different stages of progressive satisfaction of human needs.



Picture 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (www.simplypsychology.org)

Maslow suggested that certain needs go ahead of others and employees' are motivated to achieve some of them. There are five levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. When level is achieved the reason of motivation rises to the next step, all the way continuing to the top. The first aspect that motivates employee behavior is physical survival and referred as step of Physiological needs. Physiological needs are biological requirements such as shelter, drink and food. These make employees feel comfortable at work but lack of them can cause low motivation. If there is a lack of satisfaction in physiological needs, an employee may not be able to move on to the next level of the pyramid. (Mcleod, 2020.)

After employees physiological needs are satisfied, they move on to the next step which is Safety needs. Employees want to experience security, predictability and control in their work and personal lives. These needs can be for example emotional, financial, social and health related. Employer can provide support towards these aspects for example by providing healthcare, insurance and fair salary. (Mcleod, 2020.)

When we reach the third step; Love and belonging, we examine the most important things for building a committed culture. The feeling of belonging motivates employees to collaborate, support, and communicate with each other. Typically committed employees have close and supportive friends at work. Offering alternative evening events or other ways to spend free time together outside work improves the togetherness and relationships of employees. Then the employee can reach the pyramid's fourth step Esteem which includes

self-worth, accomplishment and respect. In Maslow's theory esteem is divided into two factors: esteem for itself and the want for reputation or respect from others. (McLeod, 2020.)

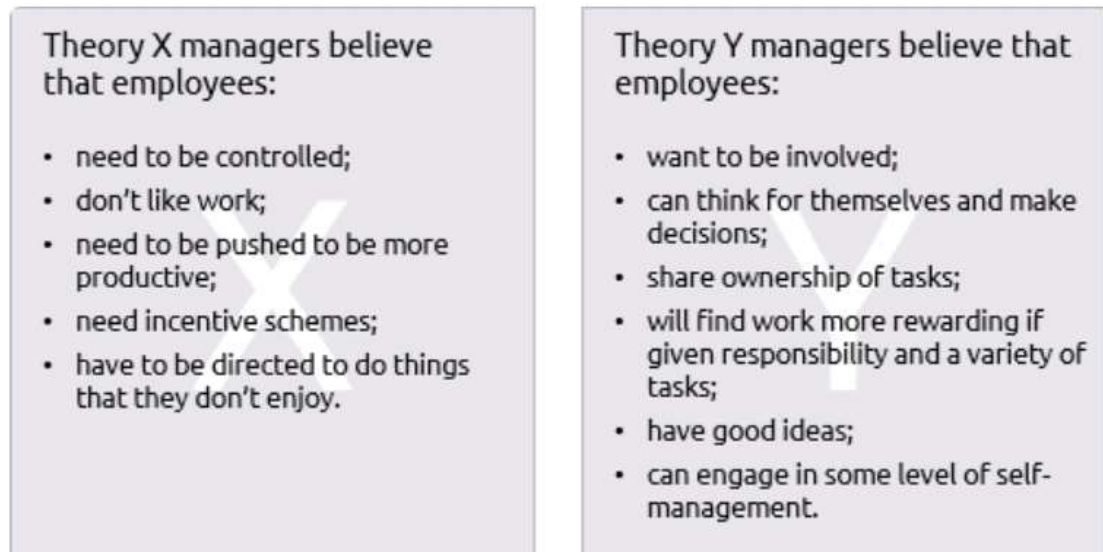
Once all previous needs are fulfilled on the self-actualization level employee can reach their full potential. Intrinsic needs are motivational aspects. The employee can feel empowered and trusted, by doing their best and achieving the set goals. In this question, we conclude that a certain employee is sufficient and suitable for a certain position. The work challenges must be motivating and appropriate for an employee. (McLeod, 2020.)

Maslow's needs theory suggests that to engage with employees their needs must be met. The higher motivation can be reached by considering and taking care of all the parts of the employees' needs. This is why the theory is exceptionally good to transform companies that struggle because their supervisor focus too much on lower level needs instead of focus on the concept of self-actualization. (Souders, 2021).

3.5 Theory X and Theory Y

McGregor Douglas suggested two theories to illustrate managerial perspective on employee motivation: Theory X and Theory Y. These immensely different perspective of employee motivation have extremely different ramifications for management. McGregor divided leaders into Theory X managers who believe most employees dislike responsibility and avoid work and Theory Y managers who think that most employees enjoy working and thrive when they manage their responsibilities at work. (Souders, 2021.)

To motivate Theory X employees McGregor suggested that companies should enforce rules, implement punishments and control their staff. On the other hand, Theory Y employees are self-motivated, able to self-management and seem to consciously choose to be involved in their job. This indicates that the managers' responsibility is to develop a supportive workplace and create opportunities where employees can take on responsibility and show their creativity. (Souders, 2021.)



Picture 2. Theory X and Theory Y. (<https://positivepsychology.com>)

According to the theory some of the most effective ways to build a thriving companies are to make company practices that support a sense of belonging, create autonomy and competence. Offering feedback, providing decision making responsibilities, sharing information and decreasing incidents of impoliteness are some examples of these practices. Negotiation isn't being told what to do. When employees have a sense of work autonomy it creates an empowering environment where employees can make decisions that affect their job which makes them more likely to thrive and succeed. (Souders, 2021.)

Competence is a psychological need that can be satisfied by getting feedback. When colleagues value employee's work, the employee will also appreciate their work and work harder because of that. Opportunities of learning are created by open, frequent and constructive feedback. Positive feedback encourages the employee to pursue their full potential. Getting recognition can improve health because it reduces stress whereas lack of appreciation is psychologically exhausting. Positive employee experience requires recognition from the manager and the colleagues. This is why it would be recommended to reward the whole team instead of giving recognition towards one employee. (Souders, 2021.)

3.6 Importance of motivated employee

Committed employees are seen as very important for the company's success. For the company to survive with its resources their employees need motives. Employees' health and well-being are also heavily connected to their motivation. Nowadays it isn't typical to hire the most skillful applicant. Potential employee's eagerness to learn, personality, and high motivation can oust expertise and skill level. (Smith 1994, 89)

If employees are not committed to the set goals and the mission, staff turnover tends to be higher and more resources are required in shorter employments. Employee engagement and motivation are strongly connected. It is important to strive to minimize employee turnover because it enables the employers to focus resources on other important issues which help to achieve their goals. (Shkoler & Kimura 2020 2-4). The employee can't succeed at work if they have no inherent motivation or desire to achieve the set goals. Among others, Shkoler & Kimura (2020) have claimed that there are certain benefits of highly motivated employees which I visualized in a figure below.



Figure 1. The benefits of a highly motivated employee. (Laakko, 2021)

There is multiple long-term benefits of having a motivated employees such as lower employee turnover and absentness, employee retention, better employee relationships, improved quality and job performance. Motivated employees are more like to work than take less sick days or days of and they are more like to stay with the company which leads to lower employee turnover which again means less recruitment and training are required. On the long run all of these lead to savings on the companies' finances and other resources. Improved quality and work performance can better existing customer relationships and create new long-lasting ones because of the increased value produced and customer satisfaction. (Kanfer, Frese & Johnsson., 2017).

4 The Research

The research question of this thesis is "How working remotely in a hybrid team impacts employees' work motivation?" and the sub-question is "Has the pandemic had an impact on the previous?" As discussed in the introduction the commissioner of research is OP Group's Daily Banking Operations team, which consists of three sub-teams; Accounts, Payments, and Sellers support teams. All together these teams have 28 team members; 7 in Accounts, 13 in Payments, and 8 in Sellers support. In the Daily Banking Operations team, there two different employee roles: customer advisors (asiakkuusneuvoja) or specialists (asiantuntija). In this group of employees, there are various opportunities to work remotely for example some cannot work remotely at all and some can work the whole week from home if they choose to.

It is important to collect data directly from the team members to get genuine information about their experiences on employee motivation. The data collection was chosen to be done by a survey to have the least effect on the teams' performance and schedule. The team members were informed about the survey a couple of days earlier and all together, they were given 7 days to participate in the survey. They were also told that participation is voluntary, the responses are collected anonymously, and that the survey can be completed during working hours. The team uses Finnish as their common working language which is why the survey was conducted only in Finnish.

The Remote Working Survey (written in Finnish), which was used to collect the data, can be found in Appendix 1. The survey starts with background questions such as how long they have been employees in the company and which is their role at work. Later on, the respondents follow three different paths on the survey depending on can they work remotely: Path 1. An employee can work remotely, Path 2. An employee can't work remotely and Path 3. An employee can work remotely but chooses not to. The last part of the survey is mutual to all of the respondents as it focuses on employee motivation and the pandemics' effect on their work-life. There are questions such as if the respondent thinks working remotely in a hybrid team has affected their work motivation and communication with their team.

The results of the survey were expected to have slightly negative comments towards remote work and indicate a need for improvements. Nevertheless, it was also anticipated that the results would be somewhat variable. Not all of the employees in the team had previous experience from working remotely in a hybrid team which can indicate that necessarily not all of the best practices have been found yet. In addition, the employees have different life situations which means various remote working experiences and challenges

for example unfavorable working conditions at home can cause negative feelings about remote work.

4.1 Response Rate & Background Information

The survey was sent to all of the 28 team members discussed in the previous chapter. The response rate turned out to be lower than expected because there were 6 team members out of work during the period of the survey. Altogether, the response rate was over 60 % because 18 of the total 28 team members responded to the survey. There were 11 respondents from the Payments team and 7 respondents combined from the Accounts and Sellers Support team (under 5 respondents teams were combined to protect the respondents' privacy).

According to the background information, there were respondents from four different age groups: 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, and 56-65. However, the majority of respondents (10) belonged in the age group of 26-35. Altogether, the survey received 12 responses from customer advisors and 6 responses from specialists. All of the respondents had been working in OP Group for more than a year, but most of them (30%) had been working for the company for 2-5 years. The most common commute to work was 10-20km (30%) and typically the commute was done either by public transport (40%) or by driving own car (40%).

4.2 Remote work possibilities

The majority of the respondents (61%) said that they have an opportunity to do remote work, 28% said that they don't have the opportunity to do remote work and 11% said that they have the opportunity to work remotely but they choose not to. The employees had some presumptions before starting the remote work such as would the noises at home be a disturbance, would it be lonely without co-workers, would the technical systems work properly, would they remember to have breaks and end working when the hours are full. Positive expectation towards remote working was that it would bring more flexibility which would give more productivity to office days.

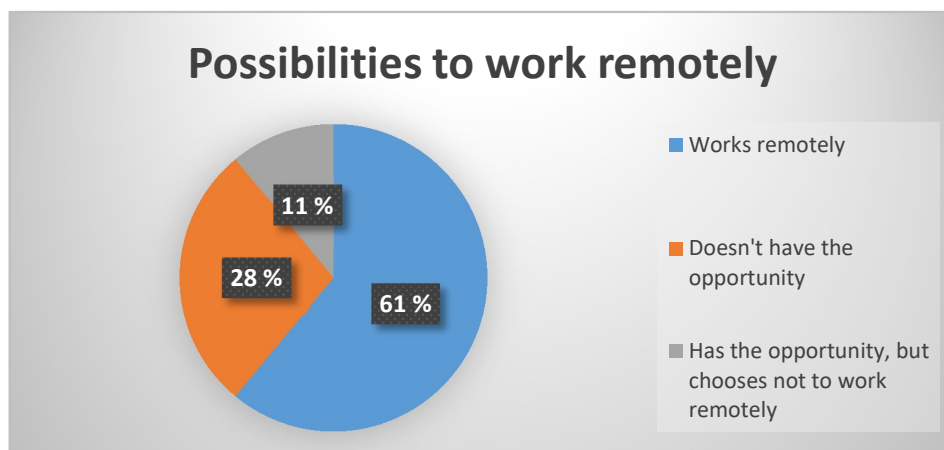


Figure 2. Employees' possibilities to work remotely.
Laakko, 2021.

The amount of remote work and if the employee was able to decide themselves when they work remotely different between remote workers. Most commonly (22%) the employees work remotely 2-3 days/week, but at least 1 day a week. Those who answered that they can work remotely less than 1 day a week said that they follow closely work situations and are willing to be flexible towards office work if it is required due to hectic work situations. However, they would prefer to work remotely as often as possible. The majority of the remote workers (64%) consider that the amount of remote work is sufficient. Nevertheless, 46% of the remote workers would like to do more remote work, because it reduces time spent on commuting, there is less disturbance at home which means more productivity, it brings more flexibility, welfare, and endurance for the employee.

Most of the remote workers (81%) consider that remote work is very pleasant or pleasant and it has a positive impact on their work and time management. The remote workers saw reduced commute time (81%), fewer contacts during the pandemic (63%), and work-life flexibility (36%) as positive sides of remote work. Maintaining ergonomics (63%), change in the social aspect of working (55%), and maintaining a balance between home and work life (27%) were seen as the challenging aspects of remote work.

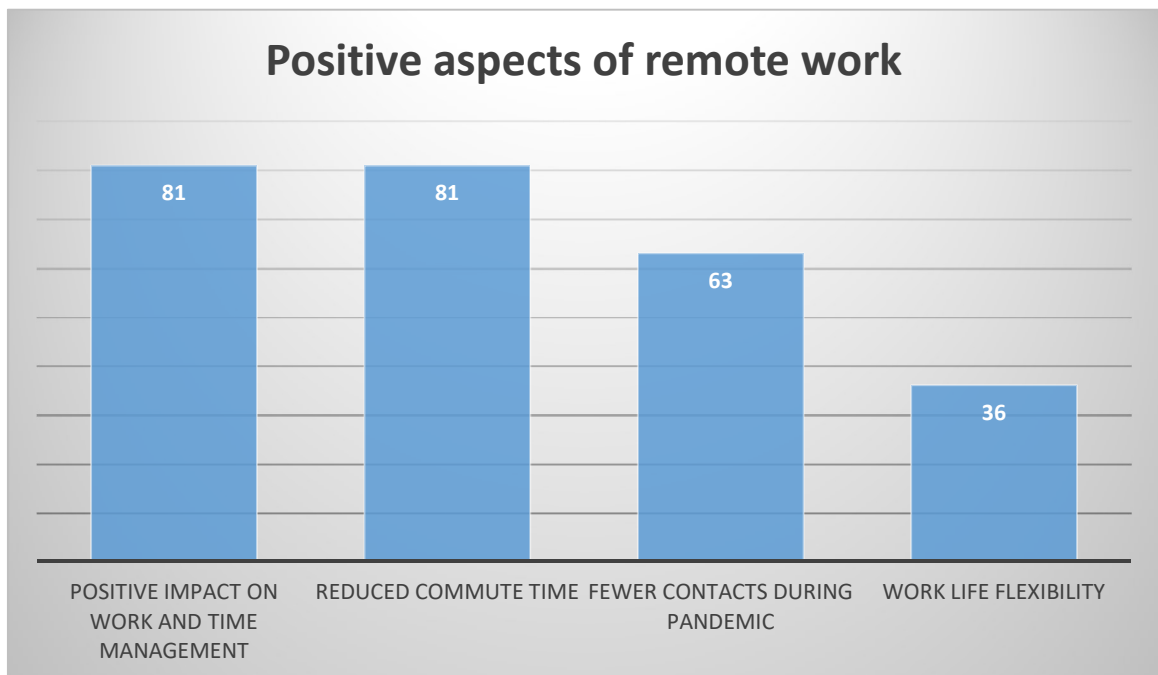
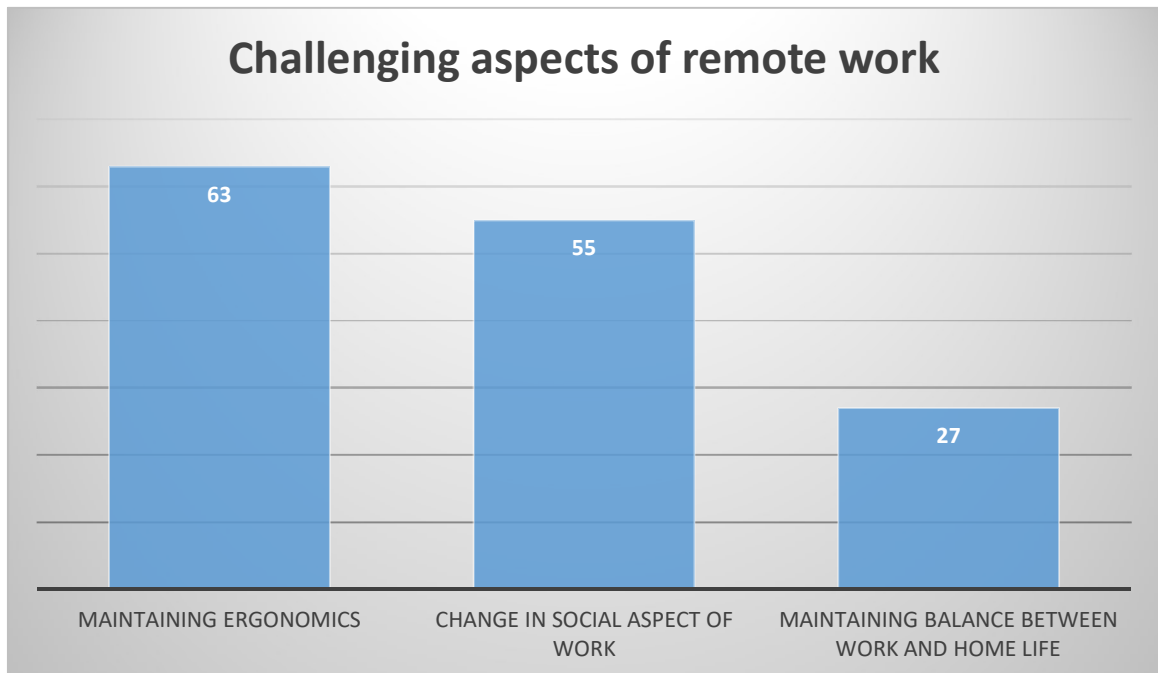


Figure 3. Positive aspects of remote work. Laakko, 2021.

The majority of remote workers (81%) didn't think that they are working remotely too often because of the pandemic. However, 27% of the respondents felt that they don't get to work remotely as often as they wanted during the pandemic, they considered that 2-4 remote days a week would be sufficient in comparison to the few random days they get to work remotely at the moment. When asked what would increase their welfare while work-

ing remotely most common answer (72%) was better ergonomics and workspace for example electric table, in addition to that there were remarks on having reminders to keep



breaks and better technical systems which would reduce stress.

Figure 4. Negative aspects of remote work. Laakko, 2021.

All of the respondents that don't have the opportunity to do remote work said that the reason why they can't work remotely is that their job includes payment transfers that can't be done remotely due to company policy. The majority of these respondents (60%) would work remotely if they would have the opportunity. The reasoning behind this want is that remote work would reduce their commute time, decrease social contacts during the pandemic and reduce the feeling of work burden because the employees would be able to for example sleep longer. 20% of the respondents said they would maybe consider remote work if given the opportunity, they hesitate because of lack of a proper working environment at home. Even when allowed to work at home 20% of the respondents wouldn't take it because they like workplace lunches, their significant other works at home which means there isn't proper space for both of them and there is a far better working environment at the office.

Those respondents that have the opportunity to work remotely but they choose not to said that the reasoning behind their decision is that working at the office enables them to change tasks during the day and help their colleagues for example in tasks that can't be done remotely. Office work also provides them with the opportunity to socialize and maintain the balance between work and personal life. However, the respondents raise a point that they would work remotely during days when they can be sure that they wouldn't be

needed at the office and/or their whole day is full of virtual meetings which can be conducted anywhere. The respondents also said they have felt more energized and positive after a remote day. Nevertheless, they would be more eager to work remotely if they would feel more confident about being as efficient at home and would be able to maintain the same social interactions as at the office.

4.3 Remote working and the pandemic

The respondent was split in have when it comes to the opportunities to work remotely before the pandemic; 50% had the opportunity and 50% didn't have the opportunity. 44% of the respondents say that the pandemic has increased the amount they work remotely and 39% say that the pandemic hasn't had an impact because their work can't be done remotely. The majority of the respondents (78%) said that the pandemic has increased their eagerness to work remotely, and half of them have been able to work remotely according to their wish, and half of them haven't.

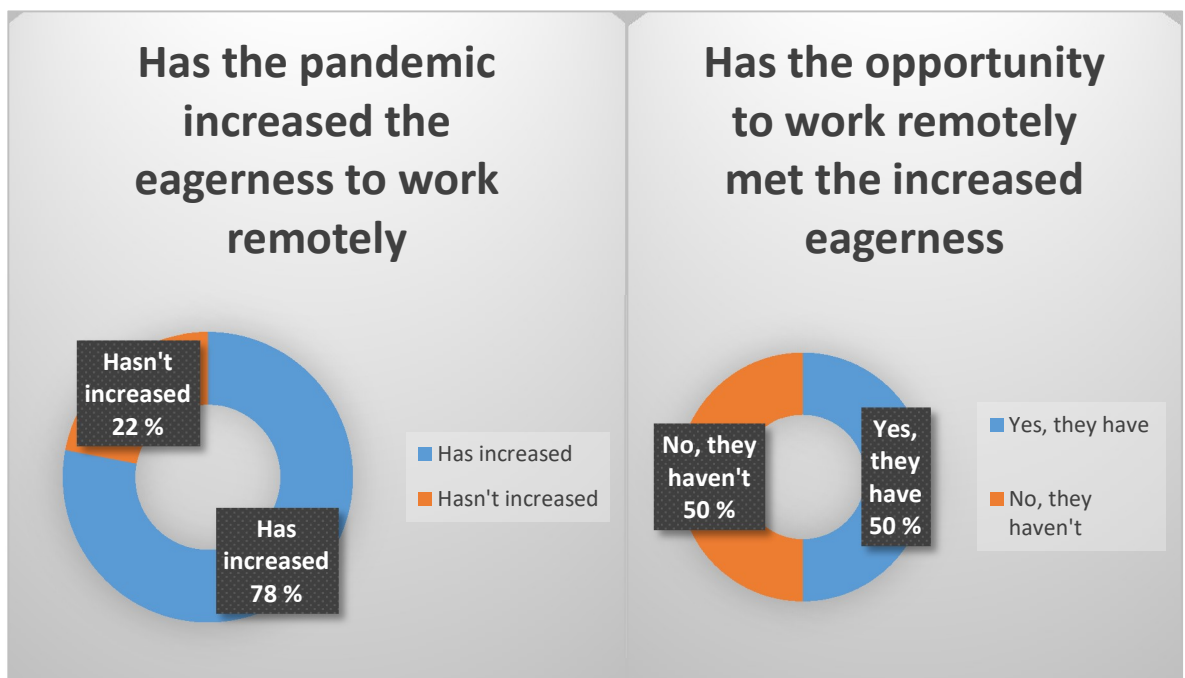


Figure 5: Has the pandemic increased eagerness to work remotely. Laakko, 2021.

Figure 6: Has the remote work opportunity met the increased eagerness. Laakko, 2021.

4.4 Communication and motivation in remote work

The respondents were divided into three groups when asked about how working in a hybrid team and/or remotely has affected the work atmosphere and team spirit: 39% thought that there hasn't been an effect at all, other 39% thought the effect has been somewhat negative and 22% thought that the effect has been somewhat positive.

44% of the respondents thought that the communication between team members has been sufficient during remote work and the other 44% considered that there could be more and better communication between the colleagues. The majority of the respondents (56%) considered that the communication between the supervisor and the team members is efficient regardless of remote work and 39% believes that the communication could be improved.

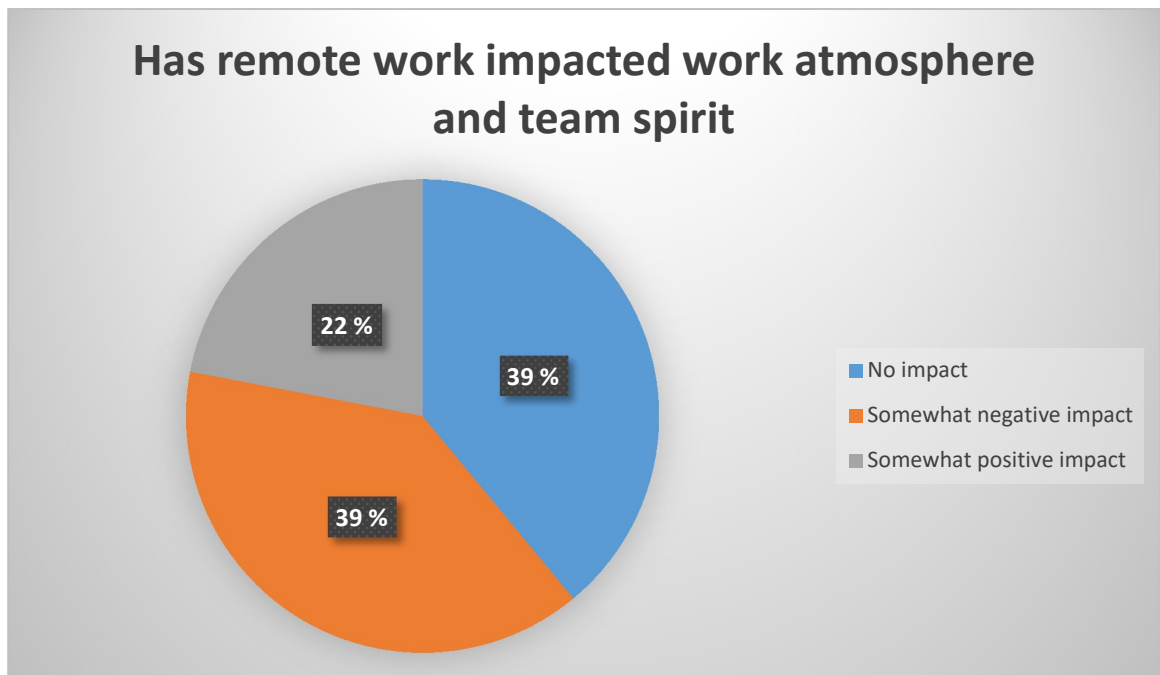


Figure 7. Has remote work impacted the work atmosphere and team spirit? Laakko, 2021.

When it comes to getting feedback while working remotely, 33% consider that they get enough and 33% raise a need for more feedback from their colleagues and supervisor. The majority of the respondents 39% say they rarely feel socially isolated from their remote team members, however, 33% of the respondents say they sometimes feel socially isolated. Equal remote working opportunities, socializing with coworkers, better working environment, not having to bring the laptop to home every day, safer commute, and public transport ticket benefit are considered factors that would increase motivation towards office work.

4.5 The conclusion and recommendations for the commissioner

As expected in the beginning there were some negative feelings towards the uneven remote working opportunities in the team. As a recommendation it would be preferable to go through each individual's opportunities and desires towards remote work, this would maybe enable to shift some team members into positions where remote work would be possible and vice versa to move employees that don't want to work remotely into positions that require working at the office.

As discussed in chapter 2.2. Managerial support in remote work, it would be also important that the manager communicates with the team members about the positive and negative feelings of remote work. This would perhaps decrease the number of employees (39%) that are now unsatisfied with the amount and/or the quality of team communication at the moment.

From the background information and the survey results we can see that the autonomy of decision making regarding remote work differs between employees. As discussed in chapter 3.5. Theory X and Theory Y, employees that have more autonomy towards their work tend to be more motivated and efficient. This is why it would be recommendable in the future to offer all employees an opportunity to work remotely if they so desire.

Currently, 33% of the respondents have feelings of social isolation, this could be reduced by encouraging and organizing relaxed social moments for example virtual coffee breaks as mentioned previously in chapter 2.1.3 Social isolation. It would be also recommended to offer some kind of additional support regarding the ergonomic challenges employees face while working remotely. This could include for example encouraging visits to the work physiotherapist or some kind of aid towards home office furniture.

Most of the respondents said that they would like to work remotely 2-3 times a week and they prefer to come to the office from time to time, but due to the pandemic they feel insecure for example traveling with public transport and getting an increasing amount of social contacts. It would be most crucial to take actions that ensure the employees' feeling of safety and security, because as spoken in chapter 3.4 Maslow's hierarchy of needs the feeling of security is the second step on the ladder and goes on to basic needs. This means that if this issue isn't addressed rapidly it can lead to decreased employee motivation and work performance.

To conclude most of the experiences towards remote work and motivation were rather positive, but there is a dire need for equal opportunities, a better sense of security, and increased communication. There has definitely been an increased interest of wanting to work remotely due to COVID-19 however it still seems that the desire to work remotely in this group of respondents is instrict and individual to each employee. From the respondents' perspective, remote work isn't a desirable way of working constantly, but in moderation, it increases their motivation, engagement, and work performance.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the team members of Daily Banking Operations had been mostly satisfied with working remotely in a hybrid team. Altogether, 83 % of the respondents would like to work remotely to some extent in the future. However, if the COVID-19 virus would decrease soon, employees would like to have the opportunity to flexibly choose whether they work at the office or remotely.

Employees have different personalities, which indicates that some of them have a more suitable attitude towards remote work than others. Thus, to support employee performance and satisfaction companies should offer variable remote working opportunities. In the longer term employees' motivation and work capabilities are improved if employers can ensure that their employees can adapt to remote work and enjoy it.

The survey respondents experienced challenges in remote work especially ergonomics and lack of proper working space which could lead to increased stress. However, the majority of the respondents encountered positive impacts of remote work towards their work-life balance and motivation. The research data provided the commissioner valuable knowledge on employees' preferences and experiences towards remote work.

5.1 Reflection on the research process

This thesis' research data was collected in a form of a survey. The survey questions could have been improved and there could have been an addition to whether the team is going to continue with remote work or if there future changes on the matter. It could have been beneficial to do couple qualitative interviews in addition to the survey. The interviews could have provided an opportunity to spread a light on individual employee's experience because they would have provided an opportunity to ask more specific questions regarding each individual's situation.

The Remote Work Survey did provide valid and reliable results because the response rate was over 60% even consider that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the target group wasn't working at the time of the survey. The study was conducted anonymously among team members of the same employer, OP Group Daily Banking Operations which made the results further comparable. Anonymity gave the respondents confidence to share their honest experiences without the risk of revealing their identity.

As we can see from the data collection the amount of respondents is sufficient for this operational team and for the commissioner. However, the number of respondents could

have been greater and the survey could have been done to a wider pool of employees. This could have affected the value that the collected information brings to this specific commissioner and group of employees.

The results could be applied for similar operational teams, especially financial back office teams based in Finland. However, it is important to recognize that the number of respondents was under 20, mostly female and all Finnish which means that order to utilize this research in other remote teams requires further research. The same goes for if the data would be utilized by remote teams working abroad or in different industries, it would demand research within those target groups.

The original research timetable for the thesis was to start the process in January, write a theoretical framework in February, collect the data in March and finalize the writing in April. However, the writer had some personal challenges during the thesis process which led to less desirable writing and research schedule. This had an impact on the quality of the work and research. As the research continued the writer has been able to utilize the findings in her work which led to a finished research project. In all honesty, the process hasn't been easy or went the way it was expected but on the way, there were some valuable lessons to learn. The most important lesson was that you can always get help and guidance you just need to be brave enough to ask for it.

In conclusion, the thesis and the research project would have benefited from better time management, self-leadership, and organization. Having those aspects would have increased the productivity of the writer which would have made the thesis process more sufficient and there would have been more valuable time to reflect and conclude on the topic.

5.2 Further research on the topic

Working remotely has become a more typical and preferred way of working among employees. There are multiple benefits to both employers and employees, employers can have wider talent selections because the work isn't tied to a specific location, and employees on the other hand can have more flexibility in their daily life. Nevertheless, working remotely offer its challenges such as difficulties to maintain separation between work and personal life, and reduced communication between coworkers. There is still research to be done on remote work's effect on employees' quality of life, particularly employees who are living alone. This is why in further research it would be beneficial to study remote work's effects on employees' mental health and quality of life in the long term.

The societies' development stage unquestionably affects their ability to adapt a remote work which can to some extent explain how some organizations' rapid change to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic was more successful than others. To overcome those challenges and succeed, companies must be aware of both remote work's positive and negative aspects. Companies would benefit if governments support, but to provide support governments would also have to develop and improve their remote work policies.

Nevertheless, further research could be done about remote work in different industries to utilize the results in various organizations. This kind of data collection is important because it provides companies a view of their employees' needs which increases their chances of developing a successful remote work system that accommodates their employees' needs. It is important to remember this thesis provided concrete answers and recommendations only to the commissioning party, as each organization's workforce consist of different teams who have their own needs and motivating factors.

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Picture 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html#gsc.tab=0>

Picture 2. Theory X and Theory Y. <https://positivepsychology.com/improving-motivation-at-work/>

Figure 1. The benefits of a highly motivated employee. Laakko, K. 2021.

Figure 2. Employees' possibilities to work remotely. Laakko, K. 2021.

Figure 3. Positive aspects of remote work. Laakko, K. 2021.

Figure 4. Negative aspects of remote work. Laakko, K. 2021.

Figure 5: Has the pandemic increased eagerness to work remotely. Laakko, K. 2021.

Figure 6: Has the remote work opportunity met the increased eagerness. Laakko, K. 2021

Figure 7. Has remote work impacted the work atmosphere and team spirit? Laakko, K. 2021.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Remote work survey

Etätyö Arjen talous operaatioissa

* Required

1. Tiimi *

- Tilit
- Maksaminen
- Myyjän tuki

2. Ikä *

- 18-25
 - 26-35
 - 36-45
 - 46-55
 - 56-65
 -
- Other

3. Missä roolissa työskentelet? *

- Asiakkuusneuvoja
 - Asiantuntija
 -
- Other

4. Kauanko olet työskennellyt OP Ryhmässä? *

- 0-1
- 2-5
- 5-10
- 10-15
- 15-20
- 20-30
- 30+

5. Kauanko olet työskennellyt Taustapalveluissa ja/tai Myyjän tuessa (nyk. Arjen talout operaatiot)? *

- 0-1
- 2-5
- 5-10
- 10-15
- 15-20
- 20-30
- 30+

6. Kuinka pitkä matka sinulla on töihin? *

- 0-5km
- 5-10km
- 10-20km
- 20-40km
- + 40km

7. Millä kuljet työmatkasi? *

Jalan ja/tai esim. pyörällä

Julkisilla kulkuneuvoilla

Autolla

Other

8. Onko sinulla mahdollisuus tehdä etätöitä? *

Kyllä

Ei

On mahdollisuus, mutten tee etätöitä omasta päätöksestäni

9. Polku 1: Oliko sinulla mitään ennakko-oletuksia etätyötä kohtaan ennen sen aloittamista? *

10. Kuinka usein sinun on mahdollista tehdä etätöitä? *

1 pv/vk etänä

1pv/vk lähityöskentelyä

yleensä 2-3pv/vk etänä, mutta vähintään 1pv/vk

Voin itse päättää kuinka usein olen etänä

harvemmin kuin 1pv/vk

11. Kuinka usein yleensä olet etänä, ja milloin valitset tekeväsi etänä toimistolla olon sijaan? *

12. Kuinka usein, ja saatko päättää itse, koska olet etänä vai määräytyykö se työtilanteen mukaan? *

13. Koetko, että etätyön määrä on riittävä? *

- Kyllä
- Ei, haluaisin tehdä lisää etätöitä

14. Paljonko haluaisit tehdä etänä verrattuna siihen mitä teet nyt?
Minkä takia haluaisit tehdä enemmän etätöitä? *

15. Oletko pitänyt etätöiden tekemisestä *

- Erittäin paljon
- Paljon
- Joskus
- Harvoin
- En ollenkaan

16. Millainen vaikutus etänä olemisellä on työsi tekemiseen esim. ajanhallintaasi? *

- Positiivinen
- Jokseenkin positiivinen
- Neutraali, en koe että on vaikutusta
- Jokseenkin negatiivinen
- Negatiivinen

17. Mitä hyötyjä olet huomannut etätyössä?

(Halutessasi voit valita useita, sekä kirjoittaa avoimeen kenttään) *

- Työmatkaan käytetty aika vähentynyt,
- Vähemmän kontakteja pandemia aikana
- Joustavuutta esim. työajan suhteen

Other

18. Mitä haasteita olet huomannut etätyöskentelyssä?

(Halutessasi voit valita useita, sekä kirjoittaa avoimeen kenttään) *

- Ergonomian varmistaminen kotona
- Työn sosiaalinen puoli on muuttunut, kun ei näe työkavereita
- Vapaa- ja työajan erottaminen

Other

19. Koetko, että teet pandemian takia enemmän etätöitä kuin haluaisit? *

- Kyllä
- En

20. Paljonko haluaisit tehdä etänä verrattuna siihen mitä teet nyt?
Minkä takia haluaisit tehdä enemmän lähitöitä? *

21. Koetko, että saat tehdä riittävästi etätöitä pandemia-aikana? *

Kyllä

Ei

22. Paljonko haluaisit tehdä etänä verrattuna siihen mitä teet nyt? *

23. Mikä lisäisi hyvinvointiasi etätyötä tehdessä? *

24. Polku 2: Minkä takia sinulla ei ole mahdollisuutta etätyöhön? *

Työni sisältää rahatapahtumien tekemistä, joita ei linjauksen mukaan voi tehdä etänä

Muu syy sille, ettei työn tekeminen etänä ole mahdollista?

En tiedä miksi työssäni ei ole etätyön mahdollisuutta

25. Mikä muu syy? *

26. Haluaisitko tehdä töitä etänä, jos se olisi mahdollista? *

Kyllä

Ehkä

En

27. Kuinka usein ja minkä takia haluaisit tehdä etätöitä? *

28. Minkä takia valitsit ehkä? *

29. Minkä takia et haluaisi tehdä etätöitä? Mikä lisäisi motivaatiotasi etätöitä kohtaan? *

30. Polku 3: Mistä syystä olet päättänyt, ettet halua tehdä etätöitä? *

31. Mikä lisäisi motivaatiotasi ja halukkuutasi tehdä etätöitä? *

32. Oliko sinulla ennen pandemiaa (n. 03/2020) mahdollisuutta työskennellä etänä? *

- Kyllä, sain itse päättää koska teen etätöitä
- Kyllä, 1pv/vk
- Kyllä, vaihtelevasti työtilanteen mukaan (väh. 1pv/vk)
- Kyllä, mutten tehnyt etätöitä omasta päätöksestäni
- Ei, mutta olisin halunnut tehdä etätöitä
- Ei, mutten olisi halunnutkaan tehdä etätöitä

33. Onko pandemia-aika vaikuttanut tekemääsi etätöiden määrään? *

- Kyllä, etätö on lisääntynyt
- Ei, sain päättää jo ennen pandemiaa paljonko teen etänä
- Ei, koska työ ei salli etätöitä esim. rahatapahtumien takia
- Etätöiden määrä on muuttunut muusta syystä esim. työnkuvan muutos

34. Mistä syystä? *

35. Koetko, että pandemia on lisännyt halukkuuttasi tehdä etätöitä? *

- Kyllä
- Ei

36. Oletko päässyt tekemään etätöitä toiveesi mukaisesti? *

37. Millainen vaikutus tiimin jäsenten työskentelyllä eri paikossa on mielestäsi työilmapiiriin ja tiimihenkeen? *

- Positiivinen
- Jokseenkin positiivinen
- Neutraali, ei vaikutusta
- Jokseenkin negatiivinen
- Negatiivinen

38. Toimiiko kommunikointi mielestäsi tiimiläisten kesken etänä/eri paikkakunnilta)? *

- Kyllä
- Kommunikointia voisi olla enemmän ja/tai se voisi olla parempaa
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa
-
- Other

39. Toimiiko kommunikointi mielestäsi esimiehen ja tiimiläisten välillä mielestäsi etänä? *

- Kyllä
- Kommunikointia voisi olla enemmän ja/tai se voisi olla parempaa
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa
-
- Other

40. Saatko mielestäsi tarpeeksi kehittävää sekä positiivista palautetta työskennellessäsi eri paikassa kuin tiimiläisesi/esimiehesi? *

Kyllä

Haluaisin enemmän palautetta

Ei

En osaa sanoa

Other

41. Kuinka usein tunnet olosi yksinäiseksi/eristäytyneeksi muista tiimiläisistä sen takia, että työskentelemme eri paikoista? *

En koskaan

Harvoin

Välillä

Aika usein

Usein

42. Mikä lisäisi motivaatiasi lähityöskentelyä kohtaan? *

43. Mitä hyötyjä ja/tai haasteita sinusta on siitä, että tiimiläiset työskentelevät eri tahoilla? *

44. Mitä kehittämiskohtia näet tiimillä olevan etä- ja lähityöskentelyä kohtaan? *

45. Tuleeko sinulle muita ajatuksia etä- tai lähityöskentelyyn liittyen? Tähän saa myös laittaa tarkennusta ja kommentteja aiempiin kysymyksiin liittyen

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