



Employee Motivation in Hybrid Work

How Motivational Needs Have Changed After Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examined the changes that have happened in employee motivation at work since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. The aim was to present the findings on changed motivational needs and showcase what companies can do to improve their employees' motivational levels during a time where working conditions are shifting. This was done under the research questions of *How hybrid work has affected overall employee motivation?* and *How can companies improve the level of employee motivation in the hybrid work era?*

The topic in question is extremely relevant and prone to an increasing amount of research due to its newness. It is vital for organizations across the globe to learn and know how to care for their employees in order to retain talented workforce. This is incredibly important at a time like this following the pandemic, as more and more employees are leaving their placement of work due to unmet motivational needs.

Due to the recentness of this topic on motivation in hybrid work, there is a lack of research in recent knowledge on how this has affected employees and how to move forward in organizations. That is why this thesis has utilized online sources as a way to bring together current information on the topic and analyse these together with academic motivational theories.

This thesis hopes to bring attention to employee wellbeing from a motivational point of view. Employers should seek to invest in their employees and create trust for a thriving work environment where there is no lack of motivation, even if people are working from different locations.

Key words: work motivation, employee motivation, hybrid work, remote work, covid-19

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1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, coronavirus was first detected and declared as global pandemic the following year (World Health Organization, 2020). This brought on several challenges in the realm of working, as employers and employees alike had to adjust to a different way of working for within a short period of time. Suddenly, the norm – known as working from the office – changed into working in isolation in the comfort of one's own home with minimal human interaction in real life. This manner of working has since made itself into a new style of working, where a combination of remote working and on-site working is used widely across organizations. Such an arrangement is called hybrid work and it is a new term that has found its way into workplaces. This method of carrying out work and organising a workforce can be characterized by having part of an organization's workforce located at an on-site location and the rest at several different locations (Beno, 2021, pp. 331-339). For most employees, this means increased flexibility when it comes to working and an enhanced work-life balance.

An employee's work location and manner of working are factors that can greatly affect one's motivation at work. Motivation as a term can be described as the requirement that provokes an individual to behave or act in a certain way (Björklund, 2001, p. 4). As the way work is done has changed suddenly for millions of people, it brings up the topic of how motivational needs have changed and differed from what they used to be before coronavirus.

The question at hand that this thesis aims to answer is if and how hybrid work has affected overall employee motivation and what can be done at workplaces to improve the motivational levels of employees. As motivating employees is a great concern for many employers – and is highlighted even more now that work practices have changed drastically due to the coronavirus pandemic – this thesis aims to provide recommendations and guidelines as to how to improve the motivation of individual employees in an era where hybrid work is dominating the globe.

2 THESIS PLAN

2.1 Thesis topic

The topic of this Bachelor's thesis is going to focus on the recently more widely adopted way of working – hybrid work. Due to the global situation that the corona virus pandemic has brought upon businesses, the topic of hybrid work is of great interest and significance to companies of all fields. Hybrid work is big factor in today's world no matter from which point of view it is being looked at – and it is here to stay.

The author of this thesis believes that because of the huge role hybrid work is having in the business world, it should be the basis of how one of the most important components of any company – employees – should be tended to. In essence, for example, how should employees be treated in an environment that brings different kinds of changes and challenges, as opposed to that of just working regularly in an office space with the rest of the company? There is no question that the way of working and the factors that come with it; communication, social relationship, motivation, and other aspects are facing many adjustments due to hybrid work.

Motivation is a major part of work for any employee. The impact that it has on one's work performance, job satisfaction and engagement, as well as overall happiness of employees is significant. For this very reason, the author of this thesis wants to shed more light on how hybrid work has affected and will affect the motivation of employees at work. Knowing how to best support their employees in times of change and in a way that caters to this new way of working, is of nothing but value for businesses across the world.

2.2 Thesis objective, purpose and research questions

The objective of this thesis leans more toward an explorative angle. As the main question that this thesis aims to answer is *How hybrid work has affected overall employee motivation?*, followed by a sub-question *How can companies improve the level of employee motivation in the hybrid work era?*, the end purpose is to

create a general guide for employers on how to navigate employee motivation when utilizing the hybrid way of working in a company. The objective, as follows, is to gain knowledge on the effects of hybrid work on employee motivation and similarly employee productivity, which is closely related to employee motivation, and to use this to benefit companies regardless of the field they operate in.

The questions derive from the assumption that the motivational needs of employees have changed during this transition of merely working in an office with no remote work, to suddenly having to work in an isolated manner for long periods of time. A global pandemic like the corona virus can also make people re-evaluate their lives, which can lead to shifts in their motivational needs at work.

3 THEORY

3.1 Motivation in general and in work life

Given that the topic of this revolves around motivation, it is only natural to begin the defining of the main concepts by explaining the meaning of motivation in the concept of this thesis. Motivation itself has different definitions and it really depends on the context of the situation that determines which one is the most fitting. One very easily understandable definition is that motivation is a force that drives people to complete an action (Cheng & Cheng, 2012, pp. 8-14). In the context of this particular thesis, e.g. if an employee does not have an option to work remotely but they would highly prefer this at times, the force that would drive them to work with a high performance could lessen drastically. This is due to the fact that when their motivational needs are not being met, they won't go out of their way to do anything more than what is absolutely necessary as they can't expect their working situation to change to a remote or hybrid setting by purely working. An occurrence like this can be explained with a motivation theory called the Expectancy Theory of Motivation by Vroom, which will be introduced later in this chapter.

As the topic of this thesis is also heavily focused on working life, the concept of work motivation is of great importance. It can be described as a collection of energy factors that arise both within and outside of an employee's self, and that shape the form, direction, intensity, and length of work-related behaviour (Pinder, 2014, p. 11). For example, the shift from office work to a hybrid style of working has increased the amount of comfort that employees seek in their work. This could be anything from not wanting to spend a lot of time commuting to wanting to have more freedom in scheduling and organizing one's own work while working from home. Aspects like these are going to determine an employee's level of work motivation, and whether they can influence these according to their needs and wants.

3.2 Attribution error in work life motivation

When looking at how the motivation of employees has changed with the hybrid working model, it is essential to see how these changes might display themselves in an employee's behaviour at work. Even though the assumption is that all these changes are motivation related in this thesis due to the chosen topic, it is also good to note that it might not always be the case entirely. This is where another concept comes into play, the fundamental attribution error. What this means is that internal variables (motivation) are linked to cause and effect by people rather than external causes (contextual factors) (Pinder, 2014, p. 17).

In this context, managers might incorrectly attribute poor job performance to low motivation, instead of taking external factors such as working environment into account. When it comes to work motivation in a hybrid work setting it can be a combination of both internal and external causes. For example: an employee might be feeling unmotivated due to deterioration in their job performance. Most managers might see this purely as an issue within the employee as opposed to it having any external causes. However, in this situation the reality is that the worsened job performance started with problems in technical devices and work conditions, as the employee is currently working from home. This example highlights the different ways in how hybrid and remote work can affect work motivation as there are many new aspects that need to be taken into consideration. For instance, work computers and ergonomic conditions are things that are normally provided and maintained by the employer. However, in a hybrid work setting, it is not a given that employees provide adequate equipment to work from home. This can lead employees to a motivational dilemma, where they would rather have a remote working opportunity and possible technical challenges, instead of working fully at the office where equipment and other helpful factors are handled by the employer.

3.3 Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Motivation theories are also extremely relevant in this thesis and its research. The main theory that will be utilized is Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory. The premise of this theory lies in the assumption that there are particular "motivator"

and “hygiene” determinants that can each correspondently influence job dissatisfaction and satisfaction (Byrne, 2006, pp. 4-11).

In terms of “motivators”, improved performance on the job could boost motivation, whereas work overload could become a source of dissatisfaction (Byrne, 2006, pp. 4-11).

In the context of this thesis, hybrid work model can have a big effect on several motivators. Using the aforementioned example of a motivator, an employee that has experienced improved performance while working from home can suffer a tremendous lack of motivation if being forced to switch back to working from an office – whether that means being at the office five or two days a week.

The option to choose for employees in this new style of hybrid work is extremely important. In a scenario, where an employee previously has only worked in an office setting and gets to experience what it is like to be able to work from home, there is most likely to be resistance and lack of motivation if a situation occurs where an employer does not let their employees continue a fully remote working style, let alone a hybrid style which is becoming the norm. This generation of workers is so much more aware of their worth and value that if they do not feel happy and fulfilled in their respective places of employment, they will let go of that place and find somewhere else where their wishes are listened to and catered to.

In terms of “hygiene” factors, elements such as working conditions and relationship with co-workers can be sources of dissatisfaction (Alrawahi, et al., 2020, p. 2). Firstly, in an era where remote working is on the rise, working conditions are a significant factor for many as it is quite essential to how work is done and whether it is ergonomic and enables productivity. For example, an important aspect to consider in working conditions is distraction, as working from home can impose work-related matters on family time and vice-versa which is another challenge in remote work (Wang, et al., 2020, p. 30).

Also, employees who either work completely remotely or utilize hybrid work, need proper equipment for their working conditions in order to do work as efficiently and well as they would in the office environment as they would remotely.

If a company does not offer equipment to employees in such situation, it can bring down work motivation quite significantly, as improper equipment has a negative effect on productivity (Wright, 2020), which in turn can lead to an employee feeling unsatisfied with work and further snowballing the situation into low work motivation. Not offering employees proper work equipment to work from home as a sign of support can also lead to employees feeling uncared for, which can be dangerous in terms of upkeeping work motivation.

Secondly, especially when a workplace utilizes hybrid work, there can be differences in how employees perceive and experience their relationships with co-workers. It is a given that relationships thrive more in a face-to-face environment and helps to improve group dynamics, given the ease of communicating and interacting in person. This brings forth why this particular hygiene factor is right in the centre of hybrid work and how it affects work motivation in employees.

As work motivation is dependent on each individual it does not apply to everyone, but a generalisation can be made where there are two types of employees: those who are motivated by being able to interact in person with their colleagues, and those who experience higher levels of motivation when working alone in their homes while maintaining their office relationships virtually. Therefore, hybrid work is a tremendous opportunity for employees to be able to cater to employees' individual needs, by giving them the option to choose working both from home and at the office, or from a third-party location.

3.4 Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation

Another theory that will be used alongside Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory is Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation. This theory roots into the idea of common sense in an employee's motivation to take action when they can expect a desired outcome based on their behaviour (Parijat & Bagga, 2014, pp. 1-8). It is a hedonistic assumption, but very true for quite a lot of people as many people like to minimize negative outcomes for themselves. The theory also points to an important fact that not all employees have the same motivational needs and

wants, hence they should not be expected to be motivated in the same way. This is yet another reason why hybrid work and the ability for employees to utilize it is such a critical factor for improving employee motivation.

Another thing to note about the Expectancy Theory of Motivation, is that it puts great value on an employee's individual understanding of what is happening in the process of motivation (Parijat & Bagga, 2014, pp. 1-8). Such matter is extremely important to remember in this hybrid work era, when it is more crucial than ever for employers to consider an employee's personal needs and wants when it comes to motivation as this has effects on productivity, results and the entire organisation as a whole. Motivation – or a lack thereof – can produce a ripple effect: when motivation is high and fulfilled, productivity increases, and results are better due to higher effort on working. This in turn will have a positive effect in general on the entire organization as spirits are on the rise following enhanced results. However, this also works the opposite way when motivation is low among employees. It makes perfect sense for work motivation to be of great interest to employers and worth investing in. Work practices change over time and agile organizations are the ones that will retain best talents in the long run.

The Expectancy Theory of Motivation by Vroom can also be tied to a concept which will be introduced later on in the thesis, "the Great Resignation". Vroom's theory works on the basis of a couple of variables. First of all, most employees – if not all – have personal goals that they want to fulfil by working in different companies. These individual goals are therefore brought to completion by work outcomes and whatever rewards that a company might provide (Parijat & Bagga, 2014, pp. 1-8). As a result, the link between work results or organizational incentives and personal objectives is critical, for example how well company incentives meet an employee's personal goals and how appealing those incentives are to the individual (Parijat & Bagga, 2014, pp. 1-8). Second of all, these work outcomes or incentives are reliant on the work performance of an employee (Parijat & Bagga, 2014, pp. 1-8). This brings forth once again the fact that if an employee believes that their work effort has an effect on their work outcomes and possible rewards, they will be more productive and enjoy a higher level of motivation. Finally, an individual employee's judgement of the likelihood that their own efforts would result in a good performance is critical (Parijat &

Bagga, 2014, pp. 1-8). This repeats the importance of trust in the employer and an employee's own abilities, which again are most likely found within a motivated employee.

The reason why these variables can be linked to the concept of the Great Resignation, is the fact that as so many individuals are keener to quit and change their jobs, the more organizations need to pay attention to retain talent and invest in keeping employees motivated and happy. The variables introduced in Vroom's theory are highlighting the significance of an employee's individual goals and how they correlate with an organization's incentive program, as well as the opportunities that they have to succeed in their job and gain positive outcomes. It seems that with the Great Resignation propelled by Covid-19 and the emergence of remote work, individuals have realized that their personal goals of motivation have not been fulfilled to the extent of staying at their workplace, and instead have chosen to resign and seek a place where their expectations match their desired reality when it comes to motivating factors at work.

An example in the topic of this thesis could mean that a certain employee has a goal of working without being tied to a single location. Hybrid work has been introduced in their respective workplace; however remote working is limited to only two days per week. This guideline set by the organization hinders this employee's personal goals, thus lowering their level of motivation as they cannot fully reach this goal by working at this company. The employee could either negotiate a role where they could have fully remote working possibilities, or they could resign and find a better organizational fit for their personal goals. Organizations these days should be striving to be more flexible when it comes to accommodating employee needs in the motivational realm, as workers of today won't hesitate to jump ships to create the best career scenario for themselves.

Nowadays due to Covid-19 and the mark it has left on the professional world, the biggest factor affecting work motivation could be whether an employee can work remotely or in a hybrid manner based on their wishes, as it is the most drastic change that organizations and employees have had to face in a while.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Framework for Analysis

As this research heavily focuses on motivation at work, there are two main concepts that will be utilized in order to provide thorough analysis. While motivation itself is a very broad concept, due to the nature of this research, the main focus will be on the subcategory of work motivation as previously introduced. Simultaneously, the Motivation-Hygiene theory by Herzberg and Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation will also be used and thus, the main framework of the analysis will be a combination of the these. This combination approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis for this particular research purpose, as the purpose is to seek differences in how work motivation has changed in the last few years after the emergence of hybrid work.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis and reflect on the differences in work motivation, data from before the year 2020 will be used as time before this particular year was still mainly free of Covid-19 (before declaration as a global pandemic) (World Health Organization, 2022) and hybrid work wasn't as widely used, as well as data from 2020 onwards will be utilized. By doing this, the author is able to answer the research question and draw conclusions as to how and/or why motivational needs have changed in working environments.

In addition, it is of essence to note that the nature of this research is mainly descriptive and analytical, without as much concrete and practical results. This thesis aims to shed light on the past and future, with recommendations on how to navigate the depths of employee motivation in the age of hybrid work.

4.2 Data gathering

The majority of the data will be gathered through online sources such as blogs and articles. First of all, this thesis is utilizing the latest articles on hybrid work in order to gain perspective of what the current situation is for many employees working in such setting. This brings forth the need for analysis on what the motivational needs were for employees a couple of years back before hybrid work

became a widely used concept. To do this, the reflection point of the analysis will be based on articles and online sources from before 2020 – meaning the time before Covid-19 and hybrid work. Thus, the opposing source of newer and more current data will be from articles and online sources released after 2020.

More data will be sourced from blogs, as these forms of online writings are able to capture trends faster and thus, provide new information in a systematic and timely manner – meaning that the information used is accurate for the time that it is representing. This is an important factor as hybrid work is still widely evolving as companies are seeking the best ways to utilize it in their respective areas of work and company cultures.

4.3 Qualitative analysis

The data acquisition and analysis in this thesis will be conducted by utilizing qualitative research methods. In qualitative research, data collected and analysed is mainly of non-quantitative quality, which means that the data is mostly consisted of textual elements such as notes, documents, online writings, and interviews (Saldana, et al., 2011, pp. 3-4). This fits the nature of this thesis, as the research question *How hybrid work has affected overall employee motivation?* produces more in-depth analysis and observations rather than numeral results.

As for the type of data being utilized, from the two options of primary and secondary data, the author of this thesis has chosen to use secondary data as the main source of data. While primary data is data that is acquired by the same research that will later on utilize the data themselves (Vartanian, 2010, p. 3), secondary data means that someone else utilizes existing data for a new purpose (Smith, 2008, pp. 3-4). The main reason for utilizing secondary data is that acquiring sufficient primary data with academic significance would not be feasible at this point for the author. There is a great volume of online articles and posts related to hybrid work already and analysing these against the author's own observations and past writings on work motivation will provide new insights into the topic.

This means that the data analysis method of this thesis will be comprised of analysing the content that is found on the internet related to this topic of between motivation and hybrid work. Findings from this will also be mirrored and analysed against a few concepts and theories, e.g. Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory as previously mentioned in the previous chapter. By doing this, the author is able to answer the research question and draw conclusions as to how and/or why motivational needs have changed in working environments.

An additional source of secondary data to be mentioned will be a recent emergence of the "Great Resignation". This refers to the current trend of employees switching jobs at a very low threshold in order to create better a better balance between work and life (Cook, 2022). As such, it showcases a direct link to how the pandemic has changed working life and people's perception of their jobs and careers. Meaning, that employees are more aware of what drives their work motivation due to the tough working conditions that the pandemic forced people into, such as sudden and fully remote work with little support from companies as many employers were also struggling to accommodate the sudden change. Now in the recovery phase (read: hybrid work), employees are quick to jump from job to job if they find a place that fits their values and needs more appropriately, especially if the job allows for better work arrangements and other benefits in the long term (Cook, 2022).

To sum up, this concept as a source of secondary data would provide great insights as to how employers should aim to retain talented workforce by analysing the core reasons on why employees change jobs and how they would be able to tap into most common work motivational aspects in the hybrid working era.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Relationship with co-workers

One big source of work motivation for some employees is the relationships they share with their co-workers. Individuals that share a strong bond are able to transfer information faster – due to presumably sharing a similar point of view – and trust each other more easily and overall work better together (Yang, et al., 2021, pp. 43-54). On the other hand, individuals with weaker bonds spend less energy and time upholding these relationships, thus only collaborating in a concise “straight-to-the-point” manner without much effort on the actual co-working relationship. This is very much a personal preference to each employee. However, with the rise of hybrid work - where some people work from the office, some work from home and others switch between these two options – studies have shown that not being able to maintain strong relationships within an office community affects employee performance and the overall dynamics of the office teams (Yang, et al., 2021, pp. 43-54). Before Covid-19 and more prominent remote working options, this might not have been fully considered by many employees since working face-to-face was the only option a lot of the time. Hence, some individuals have realized the benefit of working purely remotely and taken that to a higher place on their list of motivators at work compared to being able to interact with colleagues at an office environment.

To put it simply, work motivation for some has transferred from enjoying co-working relationships to working independently from home. There can be many reasons for this, but the most apparent one is convenience. Working remotely is not only easier when it comes to different arrangements in life, but it also cuts out commuting and allows for more autonomy when working. In a situation where an employee works partly from home and partly from the office, co-working relationships can be affected just as much in comparison to fully remote work. This is in view of an employee being socially interactive with colleagues for a few days and then disappearing for other days. It can disrupt the maintenance of social relationships at work because information is harder to exchange when it does not happen in person and by missing events that happen at the office while absent.

5.2 Flexibility of remote work

Another big factor for both employees and employers pre- and post-pandemic has been flexibility. In a study made by Reisinger and Fetterer (2021), workers in the information field consider flexibility more valuable than the level of salary or other perks. In other words, the ability to work from anywhere has become a top priority and motivator for many employees. This is possibly the biggest change the work motivation factors have seen since Covid-19 pandemic began, as employees are willing to trade all other perks of a job only to be able to choose where they work from. A phenomenon that has already been seen in the form of the Great Resignation as mentioned before. However, it is important to note that flexibility in terms of working location does not exclude office work, as for some employees switching between the office and home is the right amount of flexibility.

The flexibility that comes with a hybrid work model is a great compromise if other available options were to work fully remotely or entirely at the office. This allows employees to have choice, instead of being forced to work in a certain way which limits happiness in the workplace and puts them at risk of low work motivation. In a study made by Gallup (2022), 140 000 employees from The United States were surveyed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic (Wigert, 2022). The study investigates the portion of the U.S. workforce that is described as “remote-capable employees”, meaning people that have jobs that can be done in a remote manner from an employee’s own home, even if it was only for a few days of the week. This particular study showcases the drastic change that has happened in employees’ preferences when it comes to working arrangements – whether it be fully remote or in-office, or something in between – and means to remind organizations of the dangers of not offering flexible working arrangements. In the study by Gallup (2022), only a portion (8%) of remote-capable employees worked solely remotely before the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of hybrid work, only about 1/3 of these employees had this arrangement.

After Covid-19 hit, an ample number of remote-capable employees started working exclusively from home, even as many as 70% of them (Wigert, 2022). When compared to the numbers in February 2022, the change is noticeable. Mainly all of remote-capable employees continued remote working, but the split between all-remote and hybrid workers became more even, with 39% working purely from home and 42% had a hybrid work arrangement (Wigert, 2022). These results highlight the fact that being able to have flexibility in working arrangements has surged when it comes to what motivates employees and what really matters to them in a workplace, hence making it necessary for employers to keep up with the majority of the workforce who want these opportunities at work.

In the Gallup study (2022), employees were also questioned about their long-term plans when it comes to work arrangements, 53% of them are anticipating a hybrid schedule versus the 24% of remote-capable employees who foresee a purely remote work arrangement. This goes to show that hybrid and remote work is here to stay, and the impact it has made on motivation at work is extremely dominant and can be seen as an expectation for the future.

There are many factors that support the idea of an employee being able to choose the location where they work from, especially since this has significant effects on many aspects that are related to work motivation. If an employee is forced to work at the office full-time, while their preference would be a hybrid or remote working model, it has great negative effects on their overall wellbeing at work, lowers engagement levels and even promotes a higher risk of burning out (Wigert, 2022). The most prominent negative outcome of such a scenario is the employee quitting, as being forced to work in a manner that does not suit one's personal preferences and fit their motivational needs, creates a higher risk of that employee leaving the company entirely. While working arrangements – hybrid and remote work – are not the only decisive components of a good employee experience, they are certainly some of the top ones of what a modern-day employee expect. On top of these, organizations do need to invest in other critical aspects such as a thriving company culture and good management (Wigert, 2022), which also play a part in how motivated and content an employee stays at a company.

In the study by Reisinger and Fetterer (2021), the main motivator behind the need for flexibility was autonomy; being free to choose when, how and where to do work as long as all work-related objectives were being met (Sokolic, 2022, p. 204). However, even though remote work and consequently hybrid working opportunities are becoming a norm for many organizations, it is important to note that there are and will be many employees who will not have these opportunities. Remote job opportunities are widely reduced to a few industries only, including banking and insurance, management as well as information and technology (Lund, et al., 2020).

In a survey conducted by McKinsey & Company, where 800 executives globally were questioned, 15% of the respondents would allow one-tenth of their employees to work in a hybrid manner which includes two or more remote working days post-pandemic – double of the respondents showcasing willingness for this compared to before the pandemic happened (Lund, et al., 2020). This number of willing executives varied by country and the lowest number of only 4% of executives saying they would allow some employees to work in a hybrid manner was found in China (Lund, et al., 2020). Overall, remote working days extending beyond two days a week was less favoured among the surveyed executives with only 7% open to the idea of three or more remote working days among some of the employees (Lund, et al., 2020). This showcases the number of employees who do not have the possibility to access remote or even hybrid work. As an example, percentage wise the amount of people who are not able to work remotely is higher than 60% in the United States (Lund, et al., 2020).

The Great Resignation is the result of changed work practices and the evolving thinking of how work can be done. On top of this, employees are re-evaluating the role of work in their lives and strive for better work-life balance (Smith, 2022). As there are more and more opportunities in where, how, and when certain jobs can be done, employees are more inclined to really listen to their own needs and wishes when it comes to their place of employment. Before Covid-19, many people did not realize there were options to do work differently other than just commuting to the office every day.

Now, many companies offer more flexibility and employees are also learning to demand it. Such a phenomena is a clear indicator of changed motivators, as the ability to work remotely – which includes motivating factors such as flexibility, autonomy, and convenience – to a certain extent goes beyond staying at a job where it is not possible to quitting and finding a better match to fit these newly founded main work motivators. The extreme need of proper work-life balance and the willingness to do what it takes to achieve it, is certainly a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, during when people learned to appreciate the time that they were able to have at home and with their loved ones. It is also why attracting and retaining the best talents requires companies to devote effort into solving the matter of remote-work opportunities in their respectful organizations (Wigert, 2022) in order to improve their retention strategies with a modern-day workforce.

Big changes have happened since employees were made more aware of their possibilities when it comes to working opportunities. For example, a study by Future Forum based on over 10 000 employees globally showcased results that point towards the changes that the emergence of remote and hybrid work put in motion. The soon to be discussed results only further emphasize the facts that have emerged in the earlier paragraphs, but also bring up a few variations in what employees' value in today's working life.

So far, the key takeaways of what factors play the main role in an employee's work motivation and what they truly value, have been flexibility and autonomy in terms of where they are able to work: fully at the office, completely remote or a hybrid between these two options. However, there is another component that has just as big of a role in determining work motivation for employees and that is flexibility in working hours. A study conducted by Qualtrics (Future Forum Pulse, 2021) gives insights on how the expectations of employees have changed over the course of the past few years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Presented by The Future Forum Pulse, the results of the study involving over 10 000 knowledge workers across the world reveal that the second most valued factor for employees is flexibility in working hours (93%) while 73% want flexibility in working arrangements in terms of location (Future Forum Pulse, 2021). These factors come second only to compensation, which still prevailed as the number

one factor when measuring job satisfaction (Future Forum Pulse, 2021). The study also presented results underlining the fact that when a workplace does not meet an employee's motivational needs and values, they will start looking elsewhere for a better match as 21% of workers in the knowledge industry are apt to change to another company within the next year and 56% are open to the possibility of a new job in general (Future Forum Pulse, 2021).

The reason why flexibility in work schedules and working hours are so important, is the evidence of positive effects that it has on employees, such as reduced stress and higher job satisfaction (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021, p. 15). Some individuals experience higher levels of productivity in the morning while other experience it in the evening hours. This is why companies should strive to accommodate different needs of individual employees. As this might not always be possible for each and every one of the employees in question, compromises are possible. For example, each day could involve a set period of time when everyone needs to be reachable for work related matters team-wise, e.g. through meetings online or offline, and the rest of the time can be allocated by the employee themselves in a way they deem the best for their own productivity.

6 DISCUSSION

Big changes are apparent in the way work is done in today's society. The research question of this thesis *How hybrid work has affected overall employee motivation?* was meant to bring up and discover how employees have reacted to the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic forced on companies and their employees in terms of motivational circumstances. Based on the data unravelled in this thesis, it is clear that there are certain trends that are soaring amongst employees following the Covid-19 pandemic. These include flexibility and the ability to choose, be it from where work is done or how many hours is spent on certain tasks.

6.1 Motivator and hygiene factor under the lens of Vroom's theory

As described in result section 5.1.1, the employee's preferred working relationship is dependent on what suits their personal needs and motivational goals the best. For example, looking from the perspective of Vroom's Expectation Theory of Motivation, if an employee's personal goal at work is to build strong networks, working fully remotely or even partly has serious negative outcome effects on this goal. As a result, working at a company that adopts a firm-broad remote working concept would not be optimal and not being able to fulfil a personal work goal would lower this particular employee's motivation naturally. This is why it is highly important for companies to listen to their employees during a transformational time like this, so that employees are able to harness their motivational goals and employers can reap the benefits of happy employees and great productivity.

6.2 Analysis on previous study results using Vroom's theory

The aforementioned results once again display the reality of many employees and employers alike. Flexibility in the ability to choose work location has proven to be a highly sought-after benefit for many reasons, including a better work-life balance, higher satisfaction at work and a better ability to cope with stress (Future Forum Pulse, 2021). While this may be the main determinant for many employees when it comes to motivation at work in a post-pandemic world, flexible schedule

is just as important – if not even more important – to many people. Allowing employees to have flexibility in choosing their working hours themselves or at least partly with some predictability, increases productivity and decreases stress-levels (Future Forum Pulse, 2021).

These results can further be analysed by utilizing Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation. A productive employee thrives in a combination of autonomy and flexibility with some level of predictability. As previously explained in the theory chapter, when an employee can expect a positive outcome based on their behaviour, they are more likely to take action. This points to motivational needs and the agendas that are required to reach the desired outcome at work. If an employee is forced to work eight full hours per day even though they might only need five to finish the needed tasks, it can project a big risk on productivity levels. Mirroring this to Vroom's theory, knowing that 8 hours of work is required no matter the amount of time it actually takes to finish all the work for the day, an employee would not feel the need to work in a productive manner as they know it would not bring any added positive outcomes. These positive outcomes could be getting off work earlier for finishing work in a reduced time due to productivity and being able to use the remaining time of the day focusing on a better work-life balance. However, stagnant working hours after everything has been done reduces satisfaction and promotes lower levels of productivity for many.

6.3 The Great Resignation: consequences of unmet hygiene factors

As previously discussed in the results section, the role of work is being looked through a critical lens by many employees these days and what it should be in the grand picture of their lives. There is no question, that since the coronavirus pandemic happened and changed the way many people do work, the perception in which work is viewed has shifted as well. If companies are incapable of offering their employees what they need and want – or at the very least solutions to reach compromises – it is without doubt that these employees will start to plan their exit strategies and hunt for a new place of employment where their motivational needs are being met to a sufficient degree. This can also be viewed as a consequence of not meeting the required hygiene factors that individual employees seek. Having enough hygiene factors (job dissatisfier) that are either lacking or left

completely without consideration, causes too much dissatisfaction at a workplace for an employee to continue working there, as having job dissatisfaction means that certain aspects of work are below the level of acceptance that an employee is willing to put up with (Atan, et al., 2021, pp. 2-3). This is because hygiene factors are too imperative for an individual to have in an undesirable condition, especially if it is the case for numerous ones such a salary, relationship with co-workers and overall working conditions. Naturally, some individuals might only be after a high salary without a care for enjoyable social interactions and proper working conditions, however as a general guideline these are important aspects for most people.

6.4 Improving motivation in hybrid work

As it has become clear that employees are more and more aware of their needs and learn to demand these accordingly, employers need to take certain measures that are in accordance with the way hybrid work has changed the requirements of employees. After all, most things at work come down to how well an employee's motivational needs are being met and how these needs fit a certain organization's culture and environment, as well as available resources to accommodate them.

One of the factors that has been investigated in this thesis in relation to work motivation was relationship with co-workers. It is a factor that can elevate one's experience at work and greatly improve work motivation, or it can be a big source of job dissatisfaction depending on the situation as it is an extrinsic factor that often can be out of an employee's control (Atan, et al., 2021, p. 3). As it was discussed, hybrid work – a mixture of on-site and remote work – can allow individuals with different views on work relationships to decide for themselves how much they wish to engage in social interactions and the level of effort on how much they want to invest in knowing and spending time with their co-workers within the realm in which they can have an impact on.

However, this is only possible in organizations that offer flexible remote working options for all of their employees. Also, the difference in many employees' co-working relationships and their nature can be a source of conflict and increase

unequal behaviour amongst employees. This is why organizations should aim to create set times for employees and teams to interact with each other, with some of these times meant for in-person meetings. These events should not be forced, as autonomy is key for a workforce in today's world – which was discussed in the results section of this thesis.

These set times work co-working interactions should not be regular team meetings where everyone goes through their tasks of the week, as it does not allow room for a natural discussion to be had. Emphasis should be on the word casual. The best course of action would be to let employees decide themselves how to utilize these times of co-working interaction, in order to create the level of autonomy that is often wanted. Forced coffee chats can work for some people, but for others it can be an uncomfortable situation that does not improve their willingness to improve co-working relationships.

Investing some resources and time into creating – or outsourcing – a platform or a system where a team of co-workers can choose a set activity, topic of discussion or even an option to take a nap/have free time on individual turns each week can help build up excitement for the set times of co-working interactions. The previous example could be done in the form of a wheel of fortune, as a fun way to add an element of playfulness to the midst of regular routines which is proven to have a positive effect on relationships at work (Fluegge-Woolf, 2014, pp. 682-705). All that matters, is that it can be done in a hybrid way so that on-site and remote employees can participate. This can further be built into a system where employees can win team prizes or an after-work team activity to be organized after a certain amount of co-working allocated session have been had, for example. In the end, it would be up to the employees how much they wish to invest in such a system and in their relationships at work. All of this will have an effect on employee motivation at work in a positive manner, as long as individuals with less motivational needs to harbour close co-working relationships are not forced to participate on a level that is uncomfortable for them.

Another factor that was greatly emphasized in this thesis in regard to employee motivation was working conditions – more precisely the flexibility when it comes to conditions in which people work in. The aspect of flexibility is one of the main

drivers of motivation these days in a hybrid working world, so what more is there to improve an employee's level of motivation?

A key word in a hybrid work setting is trust. While maintaining a hybrid workforce, it is impossible to keep an eye on every single employee and what they do. Enforced work hours are becoming a thing of the past as employers are learning to trust their employees fully to complete their work in a way that suits them the best individually. A circle of trust is something that fosters more confidence in employees, which can further lead to more self-leading individuals with an improved sense of motivation and participation at work (Guinot & Barghouti, 2019, pp. 121-122). This means that concepts like micromanagement and tracking employees while they are working remotely should be a thing of the past, if an organization really wants to uphold a trusting work environment in order to sustain motivated employees.

Trust combined with empowerment of one's employees to do things in their own way while still upholding company culture and values is what will truly resonate with many employees, hence leading to higher levels of motivation. However, the foundation of some of that motivation is a result of the empowerment aspect, in which the focal point is sharing responsibility and thus creating a feeling of shared power amongst the organization (Hieu, 2020, pp. 20-21). This in turn creates improved motivation as employees are more committed to showcase great results based on their level of responsibility.

All in all, employees should be allowed to plan their professional work around their personal lives, and that is what most people will be looking after in the years to come following the changes that the coronavirus pandemic brought with itself – work and motivation wise.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The main research question that was used to formulate this thesis was *How hybrid work has affected overall employee motivation?* in order to better understand if and what kind of changes have happened since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. The sub-question *How can companies improve the level of employee motivation in the hybrid work era?* was chosen to provide clarity for employers on how to manage a workforce with possible changes in needs and wants at a workplace motivation-wise. Throughout the results of this thesis, it was apparent that changes have happened when it comes to employee motivation. The emergence of hybrid work has resulted in employees demanding more flexibility and the need for autonomy has risen from what it was pre-pandemic. Employee retention is more vital than ever due to the great resignation phenomena, which sees employees leaving their jobs when motivational needs are not being met to the current standard of wanting flexibility and freedom.

In order for companies to improve the motivational levels of their employees, they must create a circle of trust and empowerment between themselves and their employees. Concrete advice can be difficult to provide in this case, as situations vary company by company and employee by employee, however the main factor is a trusting environment where employees can feel empowered to do their jobs in ways that suit them the best. Work is not the centre of life anymore, but rather something that is planned around one's personal life and goals.

All the sources used as a basis for the result of this thesis have one thing in common, which is confirming the main research question and its answer. The online sources used differed in nature, yet all proved that changes have happened in working life since the coronavirus pandemic began. This thesis and the study it provides as a result, brings attention to the extreme importance of the main factors that are now being sought after by employees – mainly when it comes to working conditions (hybrid work) and what is important to maintain motivation.

However, there are certain limitations to what this study entails and its significance. Due to time limitations, this thesis only covers a limited number of

sources to justify the results portrayed. The results discussed cannot be justified as absolute, due to the nature of the research questions which involve a very personal aspect of human nature: motivation. Such a topic is difficult to analyse to fit and answer individual circumstances as it is very dependent on each employee and their situation. Despite this fact, this thesis brings up the main factors and guidelines that can be utilized to fit more personal circumstance when needed.

7.1 Recommendations for future studies

Due to time constraints, this thesis was not able to explore individual fields in a more in-depth manner. Different fields would benefit from more knowledge on how the transition to hybrid work has affected their respectful employees and whether this style of working is available to them, as well as how this style of working is perceived by management level executives. This would provide insights into leaderships styles and how this can affect the motivational level of employees.

To conclude, motivational changes have happened to employees facing the new style of working in a hybrid setting. This is all a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, although remote working possibilities were used already to some degree. It has been a tremendous adjustment for both employers and employees, as employees have shifted in terms of motivational needs and wants which employers ideally should cater to. Going forward, employees expect a lot more from their place of employment and seek a better work-life balance. Motivation is dependent on individuals, however the main drivers for many are flexibility and autonomy as motivators. A strong sense of trust should be established among employers and employees to ensure improved motivation and a long-lasting commitment in the midst of the great resignation era.

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