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Work wellbeing in hybrid work life in a facility management company

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Abstract

Hybrid work became vastly popular in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept provides flexibility, freedom and versatility and many companies have started to implement it since it has been noted to be a beneficial and successful way of working. The new normal is there to stay and employees do not want to lose the hybrid work due to all the positive aspect it has. This was the case for the commissioner company as well, which is a facility management company that wished to stay anonymous. The aims were to understand and analyze the state of work wellbeing in the commissioner company whilst implementing the hybrid work model. The research was conducted by semi-structured interviews where the participants were asked to explain how the hybrid work model affects their work wellbeing and what is their current state of work wellbeing in the post-pandemic work life.

The results of the interviews were analyzed with typification and thematic analysis. The results provided answers that the hybrid work model strongly supports the work wellbeing of the employees in the anonymous commissioner company. It is seen as a new significant development that provides flexibility, freedom and versatility to the workdays and the lives of the employees.

The employees enjoy implementing the hybrid work model and do not see reasons to stop implementing it. Hybrid work model provides a combination of remote work and working from the office which is widely seen as a happy medium where one obtains possibilities and freedom to choose where they work. They get to see and socialize with colleagues, however also there is a possibility to work from a remote location when it is necessary or desired.

Keywords

Hybrid work, work wellbeing, COVID-19, interview study, qualitative research

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Työhyvinvointi hybridityöarjessa toimitilajohtamisyrityksessä

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Tiivistelmä

Hybridityöstä on tullut suosittua COVID-19 pandemian jälkimainingeissa. Konsepti tuo joustavuutta, vapautta ja vaihtelevuutta ja monet yritykset ovat alkaneet käyttää sitä, sillä sen on huomattu olevan hyödyllinen ja tuottava tapa tehdä työtä. Uusi normaali on tullut jäädäkseen ja työntekijät eivät tahdo luopua hybridityöstä sen useiden positiivisten puolien takia. Tämä on mitä tapahtui myös opinnäytetyön nimettömälle toimeksiantajayritykselle. Yritys on toimitilajohtamista harjoittava yritys, joka halusi pysyä anonyyminä tutkimuksessa. Tutkimuksen päämääränä oli ymmärtää ja analysoida heidän työhyvinvoinnintasoansa hybridityöarjessa. Tutkimus toteutettiin puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla, joissa haastateltavilta pyydettiin selittämään, kuinka hybridityö vaikuttaa heidän työhyvinvointiinsa ja mikä on heidän nykyinen työhyvinvointinsa taso pandemian jälkeisessä arjessa.

Haastattelujen tulokset analysoitiin tyypittelyllä ja teemoittelulla. Tulokset kertoivat hybridityömallin tukevan nimettömän toimeksiantajayrityksen työntekijöiden työhyvinvointia vahvasti. Malli koetaan uutena ja tärkeänä kehityksenä, joka lisää joustavuutta, vapautta ja vaihtelevuutta työpäiviin ja työntekijöiden arkeen.

Yrityksen työntekijät eivät näe syitä lopettaa hybridityömallin käyttöä. Hybridityömalli luo kombinaation etätyöstä ja toimistolla työskentelystä, jonka koetaan olevan kultainen keskitie, jossa jokaisella on mahdollisuuksia ja vapautta valita, missä he työskentelevät. He pääsevät näkemään ja vaihtamaan kuulumisia kollegoidensa kanssa, mutta heillä on myös mahdollisuus tehdä töitä muualtakin kuin toimistolta, silloin kun se on tarpeellista tai kun he niin haluavat.

Avainsanat

Hybridityö, työhyvinvointi, COVID-19, haastattelututkimus, laadullinen tutkimus

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1   Introduction

This thesis observes, explains, and evaluates the work wellbeing in hybrid work life in the anonymous commissioner company. Due to confidential reasons, the name of the company is not mentioned in this thesis. It is a company in the facility management industry that currently employ 15 people. The aims of this research are to understand and analyze the state of work wellbeing in the company whilst implementing the hybrid work model. The goal is to find out how the hybrid work affects the employees' work wellbeing in their hybrid work life. As a result, this research will describe, understand, and analyze the experiences and the state of work wellbeing of the employees in the company while implementing the hybrid work model in the workplace. There is one main research question which is "How is the hybrid work model affecting the work wellbeing in the post-pandemic work life?" and a sub-question "What is the state of work wellbeing in the hybrid work life in the commissioner company?". The research was conducted by interviews, more specifically semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview leaves room for additional thoughts and ideas for the interviewer or for the interviewee due to the flexible and more open nature of this type of an interview which seemed like the most beneficial option for this research.

The topic of work wellbeing is one of the most significant aspects in companies. During the COVID-19 pandemic work wellbeing started to be discussed more and actions to enhance, support and improve it were widely taken in companies. Hybrid work model became popular after the worst of the pandemic had been passed. Hybrid work model is seen as a beneficial way of working since it provides flexibility, freedom, and versatility to the employees. The goal in this thesis was to observe if the hybrid work model has been a success in the anonymous commissioner company and how it affects the employee's work wellbeing. In this company, the employees would not want to give it up anymore and want to continue implementing it in the future too since it has multiple positive aspects, it provides flexibility, and it is a less stressful way of working.

2 Work wellbeing

Work wellbeing as a term is wide and consists of many important parts. To open the concept more, first it is important to look at the ground concept which is wellbeing. According to Warr and Nielsen (2018) overall wellbeing covers one's life satisfaction and happiness, including physical, mental, and social aspects. Physical wellbeing means how healthy one is physically, including their body functions, sleep, eating, fluid intake, and exercising. If one's physical health is not taken care of, it can often lead to illnesses. It is important to treat one's body well, take care and nurture it. Secondly, mental wellbeing is about thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and how capable one is to cope with difficult situations when those occur. Threats to mental health are situations where one does not know how to cope with something that has happened, for example a sudden negative incident, or stress, as well as having a lack of self-confidence, feeling useless and worthless. Social wellbeing means relationships with other people which happen everywhere a person goes – at home, with family, university, work environment, and hobbies. It is important to have good quality relationships in order to keep social wellbeing on the positive side. Both parties of the relationship should obtain support and care, and the communication between the people should easy and comfortable (What is The Health Balance and Why Does it Need to Be Balanced, 2019).

Work wellbeing is equally as important as the general wellbeing. Warr and Nielsen (2018) also point that in most cases, work wellbeing is in a direct correlation with work satisfaction and work performance. If work wellbeing is not satisfactory, the performance is seldom good and therefore the results are not good either. When work wellbeing is good, it means the work environment is pleasant, safe and everyone are together making each other and their work performance better. Like explained in Wellbeing at work (n.d.) work wellbeing includes functional, supportive, and motivating atmosphere, as well as everyone getting treated well and equally by managers and them ensuring everything is fine and that the employee can show all of their best abilities and thrive in everyday work life.

Fortunately, many companies have realized and understood this correlation and started to apply different ways of enhancing and supporting their employees' work wellbeing. As mentioned in Wellbeing at work (n.d.), when work wellbeing is supported and executed properly, people tend to

feel more committed to the job and the company when they are happy to work for them, feel confident, trust in their own skills, and have a positive "I can do this" attitude. Work wellbeing, high motivation and performance at work has been found to decrease sick leaves.

2.1   Stairs of work wellbeing

There are many factors that affect the overall work wellbeing. Starting from the company's core values, as well as mission, vision and strategy should be supporting productivity and wellbeing of the staff, support the work community and the atmosphere of the workplace, take care of the staff and maintaining good results. The company should be able to provide a fair and equal treatment of the staff, and a safe and healthy work environment where everyone can be who they are (Wellbeing at work, n.d.). The core location of the main elements of work wellbeing is the workplace itself. Management and the employees play the most significant role there. Although, they have other helping hands who they can rely on with more complicated and difficult matters. These helping hands are for example occupational safety organizations, occupational health care and human resources (Rauramo, 2009, 1). Päivi Rauramo (2009, 5) introduced a model called "Työhyvinvoinnin portaat" (*Stairs of work wellbeing*) where it is stated that work wellbeing consists of five basic needs of human beings: psychophysical basic needs, need for safety, need for affiliation, appreciation, and self-actualization (Figure 1).

This model is a useful tool to analyze work wellbeing since it provides a large perspective, as well as covers it comprehensively, with detailed points. With the help from the model, company can aim to reach an overall work wellbeing of the employees and develop it constantly. All the sectors of the stairs of work wellbeing should be in control and satisfied in the workplace, however they also need to be in balance otherwise, in personal life, outside of the work environment in order to reach the ultimate work wellbeing (Rauramo, 2009, 1).

5 Self-actualization

Organization: Meaningful job, creativity and freedom

Employee: Administrating know-how, controlling own work

4 Need for appreciation

Organization: Values, actions and economy, rewarding, feedback, development discussions

Employee: Active role in the actions and development of an organization

3 Need to belong

Organization: Leadership, work community, networks

Employee: Accepting differences, supporting development, flexibility

2 Safety needs

Organization: Work conditions, work contract

Employee: Safe, ergonomic and proficient ways of working

1 Psychophysical basic needs

Organization: Workload, occupational healthcare

Employee: Healthy habits

Figure 1. Työhyvinvoinnin portaat (adapted from Rauramo 2009, 5).

2.2   Motivation to work

It is important to note that work wellbeing is not the same for everyone and it is built differently for different people, depending on their jobs, lives, and personalities. Jari Hakanen (2011, 26) states that in order to enjoy one's work, it depends on what the job and career means to the person and what their expectations are about it. Hakanen (2011, 26–27) also expresses that if put simply, there are three types of attitudes about working; work is just work, career first, and this is my calling. For the first type of people work is merely just work – they do not seek much from it, think of it as being a way to afford living, and do not find the work or its impact too valuable. The second type is people who want to improve in their work, become better and perhaps gain a more important role in the company throughout time. These people put more effort in their work and use a lot of resources to gain their goals related to their career. For the third type of people, they see the job as part of who they are, they do not do it for the money or to climb up in the company's hierarchy – they enjoy it, and do it because the job means a great deal to them. Sometimes one's calling can be a career that is challenging, and the salary might not be the best, however they do it because of the enjoyment it gives in any case.

It should be remembered that even though a person might feel like they are following their calling and enjoy the work greatly, a negative work environment, uncertainty of the work role, and poor managerial actions can wreck it and make them see the job in a negative way instead. This also

works the other way around, in good and positive work environment with righteous management and clear roles, an unpleasant job can turn into a calling (Hakanen, 2011, 27). Like stated previously, work wellbeing is a complex concept where everything affects every action and every aspect of it. Not only one's personality, neither their expectations of the job, nor their work motivation affect it – it is simply everything together as a big bunch of aspects that form the whole concept of work wellbeing.

Another significant point about work wellbeing is motivation. Without work wellbeing there would be no motivation and without motivation there is no work wellbeing. Hakanen (2011, 30) describes that the concept of motivation has two types: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Third and more of an unofficial type is no motivation at all, however that would not last long in any work environment. A person with extrinsic motivation does something merely to reach an external goal. The person might want to be conscientious and a good employee in order to get the managers to like them and therefore possibly get rewards, such as bonuses, and stabilize their workplace because the management likes them. Extrinsically motivated person is often after economic benefits. As Hennessey et al. (2015) observe, with intrinsic motivation, a person is doing something for the sheer enjoyment of the job, and they are really engaged into the tasks they are given. These people feel more creative when they are genuinely interested and engaged into something and when the task makes them feel happiness and enjoyment because of the task itself, not because of any outside pressure. All in all, like Why employee motivation is important and how to improve, measure and maintain it (2021) explains, people who feel motivated in what they do, show better results, are more active, innovative, engaged, and efficient. The employees want to come to workplace because they enjoy being there which decreases sick leaves and other absences. The company will also obtain positive word-of-mouth when the employees share their experiences and work life stories with their families and friends.

2.3   PERMA model

Work wellbeing can also be explored, observed, and analyzed with PERMA model. In 2011, psychologist Martin Seligman identified a model that describes the five components of wellbeing. This model is called PERMA model. Each of the letters stand for a specific word and these are: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. It is used to measure, evaluate, and analyze the five key components of wellbeing. When looking from the work wellbeing

perspective, combining these five components can lead to an employee who is thriving at work and feels happy, productive, and engaged (Goodman et al., 2017). This model was chosen for this research since it provides deeper insight into a person's emotions since it covers topics such as relationships and accomplishment which are not described in such detailed way in the other models chosen for this research.
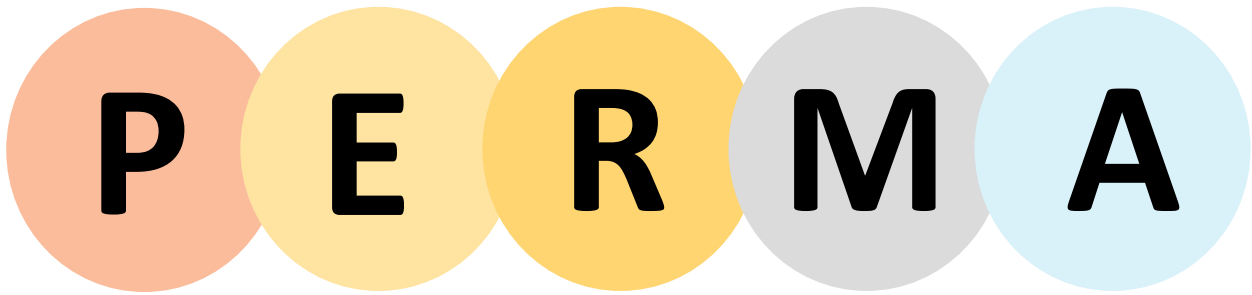

Figure 2. PERMA model (adapted from Ker 2022)

Starting with the first element of the PERMA model, positive emotions are important in everything that people do since positive feelings are one of the main elements of psychological wellbeing. As Ker (2022) states, employees who work in a positive environment, are happy at the workplace and with the work they do. The second key element of PERMA is engagement, which is described as engaged, highly interested and absorbed into the work. This can lead to the "peak of productivity" or in other words, the feeling of flow (Ker, 2022). Flow cannot be reached if one is working with something they do not care about, is boring, or too challenging. The feeling of flow occurs when one is highly engaged into a task which needs a lot of focus but is not out of one's league. It is not unheard of that if the expectations from the company are too high and if the task is too challenging, it can lead to stress and disengagement (Brewerton, 2021). The third key element of PERMA is relationships. Relationships are everywhere and they include family members, colleagues, friends, and even acquaintances (Brewerton, 2021). Relationships are also extremely vital in an organization. When the employees have positive relationships with other employees and management, it makes them feel like they are supported and cared for. These employee relationships are also useful in a crisis or stress situation (Ker, 2022).

The fourth element of the PERMA model is meaning which is described as having a sense of purpose and meaningfulness at the workplace. Work wellbeing gets a boost when the employee is doing something they find significant and purposeful (Ker, 2022). The importance of meaningful work and doing something that makes a difference was also mentioned previously with Päivi Rauramo's (2009, 5) "Työhyvinvoinnin portaat" (*Stairs of work wellbeing)*. As Ker (2022) describes the final element of PERMA, accomplishment, being about employee's need for reassuring words, praise and rewards for a job well done. Brewerton (2021) observes that most employees want to set goals for their careers or for the tasks they are executing, and it gives pride, self-confidence and feeling of self-development to the person when their goals are accomplished.

2.4   Challenges and threats

Work wellbeing has its own challenges and threats, and it is a complex concept because it consists of multiple factors which all are connected and affect each other. Nigam et al. (2020) observes that uncertainty of the job and role at the workplace is one major factor that can threaten the work wellbeing of a person. If they are unsure what is their role and what is expected from their part can be extremely stressful. Sanfilippo (2023) states that management cannot put unrealistic expectations to their employees because in the worst-case scenario they are left with a burnout individual who must either quit or take a long sick leave to recover.

Subsequently, Manka & Manka (2016) explored the concept of positive and negative stress. This can either be a supporting or a threatening factor in one's work wellbeing. Not all challenges and stress are necessarily bad and not all of them cause the negative effects that were mentioned earlier. Some people want to keep themselves busy and have various things going on at the same time. To these kinds of people, having a lot of workload usually gives them a boost effect – positive stress – and they might aim to "compete" with themselves. However, it does not work that way for everyone. For some, it can lead to negative stress if they do not know how to control it. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize when stress is going towards the bad direction. On that occasion, one should take a rest and take it easier for some time. Some people have learned how to recognize it and work with it, nevertheless it is not as easily said than done to others. Negative stress is also noticeable in other ways when it has gone too far. It usually appears as sleeping problems, irritableness, headaches, isolation from coworkers and having negative attitude towards them, the work, and customers (Manka & Manka, 2016).

3   COVID-19 pandemic affecting work wellbeing

Humans, as well as the whole planet Earth, countries around the world and societies face multiple challenges and threats that can be harmful to the environment, animals, humans, and other species. There are natural disasters, wars and diseases that are a constant threat to life. One recent threat and challenge that our humankind has had to face and cope with for more than two years, is the COVID-19 pandemic. Anttila (2022) states that it is a respiratory disease caused by a virus which was named SARS-CoV-2 when the epidemic started in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Within a few months, the disease spread all around the world, and in March 2020 The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the disease as pandemic. COVID-19 has been a tricky disease since it has gotten many variants throughout time which have for example made some symptoms appear differently and made the infection spread easier from person to person, e.g., the alpha variant of the virus. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 disease are similar to other virus infection symptoms, and they include headache, sore throat, shortness of breath, fever, cough, muscle pain, fatigue, flu symptoms, nausea and diarrhea. In addition, loss of smell or taste have occurred in many cases. After two and half years of troubling and bothering the world, during summer 2022 the worldwide pandemic has changed into endemic in many countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected our lives in various ways. Some people lost their jobs, some people were hardly working since their working hours had to be reduced massively, and some were laid off with no idea when they would be coming back to work. Especially young people suffered from the pandemic greatly (Cotofan et al., 2021). Due to the pandemic, it became increasingly difficult to find jobs, trainings, and placements for a young and inexperienced person. The social isolation, being forced to be alone, not able to hang out with friends and do normal things also had a negative impact on the young people's wellbeing.

Effects on mental health and work wellbeing

The pandemic had severe outcomes and effects on people. The constant fear, stress, and uncertainty of everything caused various problems in societies, workplaces, and individuals. Humans are not made for being alone and isolated, social interactions and connections to other humans and to

society are vital. If people are forced suddenly to be alone and isolated, it can have serious outcomes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic mental health problems increased all around the world. The pandemic has been described as "one of the biggest global crises in generations" (The impact of COVID-19 on mental health cannot be made light of, 2022). It caused multiple social, economic and health related challenges: people forced to be isolated and alone, away from their loved ones, as well as companies having to lay off people, or even go bankrupt, and because of this people losing income which caused some to fall below the poverty line. Some people's loved ones died or had other serious health problems due to the infection. The strict laws on traveling and meeting with other people, restricted people from helping and being there for their dear ones. These globally tough times affected minds and mental health of people. Anxiety increased widely, however also more serious mental health problems occurred, including depression symptoms and post-traumatic stress, as well as even suicidal thoughts (The impact of COVID-19 on mental health cannot be made light of, 2022).

Like Cotofan et al. (2021) mentioned, young people unfortunately got hit badly by the pandemic. Schools and universities being closed and young people having to isolate in their apartments, some completely alone, increased anxiety, fear, and unpredictable atmosphere. Many young people could not go to their hometowns to be with their family members due to the lockdowns and travel restrictions. Not only young people, but most people struggled with the uncertainty and fear about the pandemic. Media played a significant part in the increasing fear, too. Especially in the beginning of the pandemic, people did not know much about the COVID-19 disease and media was filled with fear and misinformation about it which caused people to be even more hysterical and afraid (The impact of COVID-19 on mental health cannot be made light of, 2022).

One could say that mental health and work wellbeing go hand in hand. Without a healthy mental state, work wellbeing cannot be on the good side either. Therefore, it is clear that all the stress, anxiety and uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic brought, was a big hit on the work wellbeing, too. The ongoing stress and anxiety that the pandemic brought also directly decreases work wellbeing because it has decreased the general wellbeing of a person, as well as their mental health.

Additionally, as McCord (2022) observes, being isolated from colleagues, the office or the workplace made people feel lonely and miss their daily encounters with colleagues because they started working from home. In addition, the work life and free time got mixed with some people, they found it hard to divide them because they would work and do free time activities from the same place: their own house. It was difficult to find motivation for working when one is every day in the same place and cannot go almost anywhere else (McCord, 2022). Also, the fear of losing one's job was another additional stress factor (Nigam et al., 2020). A happy, motivated employee who knows what they are doing and what their expectations are is generally more successful and their performance and outcomes from their work is better. During the COVID-19 pandemic it was challenging to keep one's work wellbeing high and keep oneself motivated and stress free. The wellbeing struggles appeared as lower work performance, less motivation, stress, and anxiety.

4   Remote work and hybrid work

As described in What is remote work? (n.d.) remote work means working from somewhere else than the traditional office facility. This can be for example the person's own home, a co-working space, or any other location other than the traditional office. The positive factors that remote work provides to employees are an improved work life balance, increase in productivity, freedom, as well as less costs for the company. In remote work, one can choose where they work from, it does not have to be the office, it can be anywhere. The company also can save in costs since they might not need as many desks and such a large office space anymore (Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know, 2023). However, as What is remote work? (n.d.) describes, also the employee can save costs by remote working. They save money and time since they do not need to commute to work. On the other hand, the negative sides of remote work are the lack of interaction with colleagues, communication problems and being lonely and isolated since all the work is done remotely, without colleagues, and outside of the physical office facilities (Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know, 2023).

Changes and crises sometimes require quick solutions. When people were trying to avoid contacts with other people during the COVID-19 pandemic, many new things were developed, and concepts that already existed but were not necessarily in general use, including remote work model and hybrid work model. The latter model became vastly popular. Monteiro (2023, para. 6) states that: "The hybrid workplace model is the combination of the traditional office model with remote

work". The remote work concept was explained previously in the remote work paragraph. In most cases, the hybrid work model is implemented by having a few office days each week as well as a few remote days. Monteiro (2023) explains that in the post-pandemic work life, employees require the hybrid work model and flexibility which the model provides. Bladen (n.d.) states that although the hybrid work model became well-known during the pandemic, it was not created then. The origins go all the way to the beginning of 2000s when Internet started to be good enough in order to run multiple programs and applications with a computer.

4.1   Positive aspects of hybrid work

Companies and employees shifting towards the hybrid work model has and will bring changes to the work lives and organizational structures. As Jacobs Sesta (n.d.) observes, when people are not at the offices as much as before, the companies have started to reduce their office spaces and therefore save expenses, such as rental payments. In addition, less goods are needed at the office when there are not that many people there do consume them – including office supplies and snacks. The hybrid work model ensures the employees can save expenses as well, because of the reduced costs of commuting expenses for the ones who do not live close to the workplace. Jacobs Sesta (n.d.) also states that the pandemic has changed the meaning of collaboration and working together. With the online meeting applications, meetings can be held whenever and with whoever, no matter if they are on the other sides of the world, all they need is a computer, a working Internet connection, video camera, and microphone. Even if the people are not in the same physical space together, they can work together, be efficient together and feel the sense of belonging.

As mentioned earlier, hybrid work provides a great deal of flexibility and freedom to the work lives of the employees. It makes it possible for the employees to schedule their days according to their own lives and personal schedules. It is also useful in the case of sickness, if the person feels a bit under the weather in the morning, they can just inform their superiors that they are working from home today and therefore the other employees can avoid the possibility to get sick as well, yet the person is still able to be useful and productive because they are working remotely. Hybrid work model provides an opportunity to mix and match the workdays, sometimes they go work to the physical office facility, and the other days they work remotely. As Franzen-Waschke (2021) describes, this model provides the best of both worlds to the employees with different needs and

personalities. People are often divided into two different personality types: extroverts and introverts. For example, as Panorios & Postantziz (2020) states, extroverted people most often prefer to work from the physical office due to their need for human interaction. On the other hand, introverted people mostly prefer working remotely, and do not thrive from social interactions and they are fine being on their own. Hence, to these types of people it is easier to work remotely. All in all, hybrid model serves both of these personalities – there is the possibility to interact with colleagues and also the possibility to be alone, and not surrounded by colleagues.

4.2 Challenges of hybrid work

Hybrid work model has its perks, and it is suitable for many, however, is not perfect, and it is not a fit for everyone. Balancing the remote work and office work can be troublesome. One of the most common and problematic aspect of hybrid work is the feeling of isolation that the employees have been feeling because they are not working from the office facility and therefore cannot spend time with their colleagues. They might miss the casual conversations, jokes, and those little moments during breaks that they usually spend with their colleagues (Jacobs Sesta, N.d.). Many also face a lack of motivation and engagement when working remotely (Franzen-Waschke, 2021). This is in correlation with the fact that people are not able to with their colleagues as much and must adjust to working remotely. For some it is difficult to be productive and work from home or some other remote location. It is also worth it to note that not all work processes can be done online, or at least there is not yet a good platform for it (Franzen-Waschke, 2021). This can bring feelings of frustration and does not affect the work motivation in a positive manner. In accordance with Franzen-Waschke (2021), when working remotely, everything is dependent on the Internet, all the online meetings, presentations, platforms, and applications. Nonetheless, Internet is not perfect, and sometimes there are technical problems, the Wi-Fi gets interrupted, and it can easily ruin one's remote workday completely. This is also frustrating, and it affects the person's motivation and work performance during the day.

5 Research implementation

5.1 Research aims and research questions

The aims of this research are to understand and analyze the state of work wellbeing in the anonymous commissioner company whilst implementing the hybrid work model. The goal is to find out

how the hybrid work model affects the employees' work life and how the work wellbeing is enhanced in the post-pandemic hybrid work life. As a result, this research will describe, understand, and analyze the experiences and the state of work wellbeing of the employees in the company while implementing the hybrid work model in the workplace. According to Bryman (2005) the research question or questions are a crucial part of the research process. The research question offers a direction for the whole research and the process related to it. In addition, the planning of the research and methodology are all created in order to answer the research questions. As Bouchrika (2023) states, the research questions give guidelines to the researcher as it provides limits and more defined picture of the process. Without defined research questions setting boundaries and limits to the research would be more difficult and make it more challenging to the researcher. Thus, the following question was chosen to be the main research question:

- How is the hybrid work model affecting the work wellbeing in the post-pandemic work life?

In addition to the main research question, there was also another sub-question to help broaden the main question and to help dig deeper into it. The other one was:

- What is the state of work wellbeing in the hybrid work life in the commissioner company?

5.2 Research method

There are two common research methods that are widely used in different types of research – quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research focuses on numbers, and the collected data is analyzed through comparing numbers and statistics that occurred in the research. On the other hand, qualitative research is more descriptive, and it aims to understand and evaluate the phenomenon and research outcomes and data through interviews and themes (McLeod, 2023).

Qualitative research was the chosen method that was used to execute this thesis. Qualitative research methods such as a semi-structured interview will be used to analyze, understand, and evaluate the results of this thesis. As Fossey et al. (2002) explain, qualitative research is as an umbrella

term that describe, evaluate, and understand human behavior, experiences and interactions without using statistical analysis methods or quantification. The most common ways to utilize qualitative research is using methods such as interviews and focus groups. The main idea of using interviews in research is to explore the chosen topic or research problem on a deeper level, obtain more perspectives, observe the motivations, as well as other more personal feelings and thoughts of the interviewee (Gill et al., 2008). In addition, qualitative research is used to form a theory, or a hypothesis based on the answers the researcher has obtained. Qualitative research takes the participants' own experiences and feelings into account by explaining the problem from their perspective. Additionally, qualitative research is text-based and does not involve numbers, or statistical analysis, like on comparison, quantitative research does (Qualitative vs Quantitative Research, n.d.).

Qualitative research was chosen as the main research method of this thesis because it provides the most advantages and possibilities, as well as it is more beneficial when analyzing and evaluating the outcomes and results of the research. The research was be conducted with a relatively small group of interviewees, and there is a great significance on the personal perspective, feelings, and experiences of the interviewee, which are the major characteristics of qualitative research, such as Fossey et al. (2002) described previously. Therefore, choosing qualitative research seemed like the most beneficial and sensible choice for the research of this thesis.

5.3   Data collection and analysis methods

Data collection methods

The research data was collected by interviews, more specifically semi-structured interviews. The participants who agreed to participate in the interviews, received an email prior to the interview date containing general information about the research, for example what the research is about, what are the aims and reasons for this research. The email also stated that the results will be analyzed anonymously.

Interviews, for example semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative research. Gill et al. (2008) describes semi-structured interviews usually containing multiple key questions that work as a guideline to the interviewer. In addition, the key questions work as a definition of the topics

that are covered and explored in the interview. Semi-structured interview also leaves room for additional thoughts and ideas for the interviewer or for the interviewee due to the flexible and more open nature of this type of an interview. George (2022) states that semi-structured interviews are a good and balanced mixture of structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Some interview questions are planned, however the order might change depending on how the interview goes, as well as the whole interview is flexible and gives possibilities for the interviewee to answer questions properly, as well as add in their own thoughts and feelings.

Semi-structured interview seemed like the most beneficial, sensible, and useful technique to conduct the interviews for this thesis. The purpose of the research is to understand the personal feelings, experiences, and views of the interviewee and as Gill et al. (2008) mentioned earlier, semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to understand the chosen topic on a deeper level. Since the research objective is to analyze and evaluate the work wellbeing of the employees of the company who implement the hybrid work model in their work lives, as well as their personal thoughts and experiences related to these topics. Thus, semi-structured interview is the method that could provide the most use when considering the type of the research and research questions. As Gill et al. (2008) explained, the key questions that often play a significant role in semi-structured interviews, will help giving guidelines, and because the questions are not too tight or strict, there is room for additional comments and thoughts.

The interviews for this thesis were conducted for 10 participants of the anonymous commissioner company, and all the 10 people were interviewed individually and privately. The language used in the interviews was Finnish, however the results and analysis will be done in English. The interviews were conducted from the end of May till the beginning of June 2023. The interviews were divided into three main themes: work wellbeing, COVID-19 pandemic, and hybrid work model. There were eight semi-structured questions for the interviewees, which gave possibility for them to answer more widely and share their personal experiences and views better. The length of the interviews varied from 20 minutes to 50 minutes. The interviewees were told beforehand what the interview would be like, and what is the topic and aims of it, however the questions were not told beforehand. They were also told that the results would be analyzed anonymously and their permission to record the interviews was asked, as well as told that the recordings would be destroyed by the end

of the year 2023. In addition to the email, each participant was also asked their permission to record the interviews right before starting the interview. All the participants gave their permission to record the interviews. Seven of the interviews were held face-to-face and three were done online, by Teams. All the interviews were recorded on a smartphone, additionally the Teams meetings were also recorded on Teams. Since the analysis of the answers and results of this thesis happen anonymously, no names nor other indications of gender or position of the person in the company will not be mentioned. The data collected from the interviews is stored appropriately, safely, and privately. It is stored on mobile phone, on which the interviews were recorded, as well as on computer, OneDrive, and an external memory stick. All the stored files are behind passwords; therefore, they are not accessible for others which keeps the interview data safe and hidden from others.

Analysis of data

The data from the interviews was analyzed by thematic analysis, as well as typification analysis. Essentially, Kiger & Varpio (2020) describes thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis method and its main purposes are to identify, analyze and report patterns that are discovered to be repetitive in the research data. Thematic analysis can be used widely because it is a flexible and applicable for many kinds of research. This analysis method is commonly used when the research aim is to understand and evaluate the interviewee's experiences, thoughts, and behavior. Thematic analysis provides multiple advantages to the researcher and their research. It is described as quite easy and simple method to utilize, at the same time being a strong tool to analyze data which provides the researcher possibilities to summarize, analyze and understand a great amount of data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis is a useful tool if the researcher desires to discover patterns in the research data. The data should be read through multiple times and therefore the researcher can discover patterns and repetition in order to draw themes out of the data. Thematic analysis is used in many different fields, for example psychology and social sciences (How to Do Thematic Analysis, n.d.).

The other analysis method, typification, categorizes the data based on recurring characteristics, repetition, and meanings. Typification simplifies and generalizes the collected data, and with this analysis method, the researcher can form different descriptions of the data (Typification, 2010).

This analysis method aims to discover the relevant, typical, and essential characteristics of the data. The interest can focus on exceptional or peculiar points, as well as contradictory and different points. Typification is used to summarize the content, in this case, the interviews to different types. The interviewees give different answers and the whole interview experience is always different with different people and personalities, however there are similarities and generalities that can be divided into types. With thematic analysis, typification and all the other analysis methods, the most important points of every scientific research are interpretation, conclusions, and discussion (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

6   Results

6.1   Work wellbeing

The first theme of the interviews was the general term and concept of work wellbeing. To see the actual interview questions that were asked in each interview, view Appendix 1. Each participant was asked to describe in their own words what work wellbeing means to them. The interviewees were not given any hints or help about the concept, the aim was to have them explain what work wellbeing means to them personally. Good work conditions, that the company supports employees' exercising and physical activeness, ergonomics, flexibility, and that one feels good about going to work were the topics that were mentioned by most. The following quotes are taken from the interviews where the participants were explaining what work wellbeing is in their opinion:

"Work wellbeing means that work conditions are alright, it is nice to go to work, there are lovely colleagues and a good environment to work".

"Work wellbeing means that work conditions are alright, it supports ergonomics with electric tables and chairs, and that there is a possibility for exercising and physical activities".

"To me it means this entirety of things, and that it is nice to go to work".

Another key words and themes that were mentioned, however did not occur with every participant, were a good healthcare plan, feelings of safety and belonging, freedom, meaningfulness of

the job, respect to one another at the workplace and that work wellbeing is a combination of various matters, from physical to mental wellbeing.

"How do I like it at work and how I have the feeling of safety and meaningfulness at my job".

"Feeling like being a part of a community and the sense of belonging".

"That one gets to do work that brings pleasure".

"That the workplace is a nice place to be".

6.2 COVID-19 pandemic

The second theme of the thesis interviews was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this topic was contained three categories and questions related to it. These were times before the pandemic, during the pandemic, and remote work. The aim of this theme was to understand, analyze and evaluate the work wellbeing of the employees of the company first before the whole COVID-19 pandemic even happened, then looking at it during the pandemic, as well as the concept of remote work when the pandemic restricted employees from going to the physical office, and how all these factors affected the employees' work wellbeing.

The first question was asking the participant to describe their work wellbeing and how it was before the pandemic started. Many answered work wellbeing to be quite similar now and before the pandemic. Some stated that before the pandemic work wellbeing was not such a hot topic or a priority in a workplace, it existed, however it was not discussed much or not many actions were taken in order to improve or support it. Some explained that the workplace had electronic tables and support for physical activity even before the pandemic and therefore the work wellbeing had not been much different from the current days. Although, another interviewee did point out that their work wellbeing was worse before the pandemic compared to what it is now.

"Before Covid it was a thing which I did not pay much attention to, it was just this thing on the side".

The second question related to the COVID-19 pandemic was about the employees' work wellbeing during the pandemic, when it was at its worst, and there were a lot of restrictions and when remote work was introduced to the company. For the most part of the interviewees, the answer was quite clear – work wellbeing during the pandemic was quite poor. The reasons for this answer were loneliness, poor ergonomics, the joy of work disappeared and almost feeling depressed, like one participant stated:

"I felt nearly depressed, work was joyless, and I thought about changing jobs".

Nevertheless, a few said that the pandemic did not affect their work wellbeing at all, or if it did, very little. In addition to this, one person told they were thriving because they worked from their home office. Also, another one said because they are an easily adaptable person, the change that COVID-19 brought, was not challenging to them personally.

The third question that was asked from the participants was what they thought about remote working. This question divided opinions widely – to some working from home was unpleasant and then again to others it was alright, if not even pleasant. To the ones whom working from home was not a great match the reasons were mostly because they found it boring, lonely, dreadful, and burdensome, and that it is easy to just spend all day indoors without going outside. Three people described it in these words:

"It was dreadful, as a character, I am not a lonely wolf".

"I am very extroverted person and I long for human interactions, so it was quite excruciating".

"It is easy to get stuck inside your house".

Furthermore, the other participants to whom working from home was not such a challenge, said the concept's good sides to be the fact that one can save a significant amount of money and time since do not need to drive or take any transportation to the workplace which also makes mornings

more peaceful and slower. In addition to this, some people stated that their work efficiency increased noticeably when working from home. On top of that, one person explained themselves having a large intrinsic motivation which helped them to succeed in working from home:

"I have this large intrinsic motivation and self-leadership, succeeding in working from home requires self-leadership".

The final question of this COVID-19 pandemic theme was about the participants' work wellbeing after the worst times of the pandemic had cleared out and the pandemic had become endemic, and the world slowly started to go back to the new normal. Most answered their work wellbeing to be better than before, and that the "new normal", as in hybrid work, has been better and more effective than what it was before. Many found their work wellbeing to be improved because the new normal gives more freedom and opportunities to choose for themselves. Some also stated that they have learned to appreciate general wellbeing, as well as work wellbeing much more than before. One interviewee mentioned that despite all the good factors, when working from home, they got used to complete silence and peace which sometimes is hard to achieve at the office, and that it can occasionally affect their focus and work efficiency.

6.3   Hybrid work model

The third theme of the interviews concerned the main topic of the thesis, hybrid work model and the implementation of it in the company. The first question of the third theme was about the positive sides of hybrid work, as well as about the challenges and negative sides it might have. The positive and negative aspects were divided quite equally when the participants thought about them in their everyday hybrid work lives.

The positive aspects of hybrid work model mostly revolved around two terms – flexibility and freedom. Most interviewees answered that the flexibility, freedom, and possibility for change are definite positive aspects of hybrid work. Many explained it meaning that it is easier to plan their own schedules, days, and personal life. Also, for people who have families and children at home, it is easier to have the flexibility to stay at home with a child who for example has fallen ill.

"Easier to plan everyday activities and versatile days".

"Makes combining family life and work life easier".

The words "change" and "versatility" came up many times in the interviews. The participants like the possibility for change and having different kinds of workdays from different locations and places. In hybrid work one does not have to be stuck at the office all day every day, there is a possibility to do work from anywhere – be it one's home or any another location. Some also answered that the versatility of their workdays motivate them more.

"Versatility, nice that do not need to be in the same place all the time".

"Variety is the spice of life".

"I like versatility, that is a good side".

This question also included the possible challenges and negative aspects of hybrid work model. Loneliness when working from home and communication problems were factors that were mentioned multiple times when this question was asked. Many explained themselves being a social personality who thrives from teamwork and social interactions. In addition, communication problems were described to be usually that people who are at the office know a lot more than the ones working remotely, as well as many feel it more difficult and frustrating to ask little things through Teams or other online services when at the office it is easier to talk and ask about everything, and chit chat.

"Communication is the challenge in my opinion".

"It is more difficult to ask questions when working remotely".

Additionally, some participants answered that when working remotely, especially from home, there are much more distractions, for example children and pets who want attention. Also, bad ergonomics at home were mentioned a few times. However, also one participant answered that they feel the only challenge for hybrid work to be if the company would stop implementing it and change back to the old office work, how it was before the pandemic. In addition to this, someone

pointed out that a possible challenge for hybrid work is if it starts to go too much towards remote work, and that it is important to keep the balance between working from the actual office and when working remotely and keep it as hybrid work.

"The challenge of hybrid work is probably that it does not go too much to remote working".

The second question related to the third theme, hybrid work, was about how the work wellbeing of the employees is enhanced or supported while implementing the hybrid work model. This question meant if the company has taken any actions to support their employee's work wellbeing in some ways, for example by actions related to physical, mental, or social work wellbeing.

The support for physical work wellbeing that the office provides was mentioned multiple times. The offices have electric tables, chairs, gym possibilities for the employees, great occupational health and dental care, and the employees have one hour of their working hours of each week dedicated to doing a physical activity of their choice. Therefore, the ergonomics and work conditions in that sense are thought of in the office space.

"Ergonomics are great, as well as occupational health care, dental care benefits".

When looking at the mental work wellbeing aspects, many participants answered that the company provides an atmosphere and environment where the employees have a feeling that they can ask for help, open up and talk if needed. They feel that the company supports them and that everyone can be how and who they are.

However, many participants felt that the social work wellbeing is not supported as much as they would prefer. Some mentioned this to be because the office facilities do not support the sense of community and belonging at the moment. The company provides little trips for all the employees occasionally, where they could get to know one another better and spend time together even on free time. They also sometimes have breakfast meetings, have lunch together, and reward and acknowledge work well done. For some, these factors provide the sense of community and belonging, however some feel like they need more, or that these factors do not count as building communality.

"We have quite a little of communality right now and I think that is what we are longing for".

"But in a way, I do not think there is support for communality".

"Our office does not support communality, like at all, in the open space one needs to keep quiet and only in the conference room one can speak freely, so we are quite divided right now".

The next question in the hybrid work model theme was about the flexible work scheduling that the company provides for the employees. This means that the employees can choose freely when they are at the office and when they work remotely. There are no guidelines nor appointed days when everyone should be at the office all day. The only exception is that Monday has been a day when everyone is wished to be seen at the office when they hold their weekly meeting.

Most participants answered the flexible work scheduling to be a suitable and beneficial solution and system since it brings flexibility, freedom, and possibility to choose where one works each day. Some also stated that predetermined office days would be completely horrifying and could potentially increase stress levels too.

"I would rather have freedom".

"I find it absolutely horrifying if company forces employees to come to the office certain days of the week, maybe some want it but how does it increase one's wellbeing?".

"Strict schedules bring anxiety and if one cannot make it on time, it brings unnecessary stress which definitely does not help doing the work tasks".

Despite many answering the freedom and flexibility to be the positive aspects of the flexible work scheduling system, also many mentioned the system having both sides, positive and negative. Participants respect the flexibility; however, some would also want to see their colleagues more at the office and work physically together. In addition, a few stated they would be willing to have a predetermined office workday in every week.

"Maybe in a way it (predetermined office day) would tie people together to the workplace".

"In a way I do root for the flexibility, however from the point of view of the togetherness it would be nice to have some sort of an incentive for people to want to come to the office".

"On one hand, good, however I think I would make Monday a predetermined office day for everyone".

The next aspect of the hybrid work model theme regarded combining work life and personal life. This phenomenon has been seen as a challenge for many when balancing work and personal lives in the hybrid work life. Finding it hard to start or stop working, no breaks and too many distractions at home, and multitasking have been some of the challenges for the participants. Nevertheless, for some participants of the interviews, there were hardly any problems at all, finding the balance was effortless, they had no distractions at home, and strong self-discipline. These are following comments by people to whom finding the balance and combining work and personal lives in hybrid work life have been less complicated:

"I suppose I am in this mindset that now it is time to work".

"I have no challenges at all".

"I cannot even understand what challenge there could be, I have no problems at all".

"I usually do it so that I close my laptop, put in its bag and out of sight so it does not remind me of work all the time".

The participants were somewhat divided in this question – to the ones who has had no challenges at all to the ones who have found it much more difficult. Here are comments by participants who have found the balance between work life and personal lives have been somewhat more difficult:

"We have a dog who would want attention and in those kinds of situations one must plan more, for example that the dog is tired when an important Teams meeting is starting".

"Sometimes do not even get up from my chair, once you sit down there it is easy to just be there for hours without moving anywhere".

"There are very little breaks and steps on remote days, and it is easy to go back to checking up on work even in the evenings".

"Now I have succeeded at it (balancing work and personal life) well, however at first it was not self-evident, at first, I could not specify when my workdays started and ended".

"Dreadfully, there are two options, either I am doing everything else than work, or I am stuck with my laptop so that every place hurts and do not even drink water".

"I think I have too many distractions at home, I cannot focus on work".

"Sometimes there are moments where you notice you are eating with one hand and trying to type on your laptop with the other one and no one should aim or fall for that".

The next question of the hybrid work model theme was if the participants feel like they would want to continue implementing the hybrid work model in the company and why yes or no. The participants had the opportunity to share their feelings, experiences, and personal reasons why they would either want to or not want to continue implementing the hybrid work model. With this question, the answers that were given were harmonious and similar – all the interviewees answered that they want to continue hybrid work model also in the future.

"I definitely want to continue it because it fits my current situation in life very well".

"Well, absolutely yes, I feel like this is a more flexible way of working. I surely want to continue it and somehow it is hard to picture working only at the office anymore".

"I cannot see us going back to only working from the physical office and I cannot see any reason why we would do that, so this development has been good".

"It would be only dreadful if we would stop implementing it (hybrid work model)".

Finally, the last question made the participants think and ponder how the hybrid work model in the company could be still developed more, enhanced, or changed somehow. Office facilities and the practicality of the office space where they work were key themes and mentioned frequently. Some employees feel that the office space where they are working now does not support their needs for the time being. There were also comments regarding finding a "happy medium" where everyone's wishes, personalities and respect would play a significant role.

Consequently, some proposed an idea to change the office space so that it would match the needs of all these different kinds of persons. A participant also pointed out that the impracticality of the office facilities is most likely a reason why many prefer to work remotely since it does not match their personal needs which consequently can lead to a lack of sense of belonging and the feeling of community in the workplace.

"I feel like the office facilities do not serve this (hybrid work model)".

"Exactly with the office facilities and that everyone could have an impact to their own work-space and where they feel like they like it and to give the possibility to others and listen to them, too".

Another theme that was mentioned multiple times was that many feel like the sense of community and togetherness should be enhanced and supported at the company better. In addition to this, many feel like the company is lacking common rules and guidelines regarding hybrid work life. Some feel that the hybrid work model has divided the employees quite heavily since some prefer to work remotely more than others, and some prefer to be more at the office. Related to this, a participant mentioned that there should be more communication and discussion about weekly plans and schedules of the employees which might feed the sense of community. As mentioned before, a few wished for common rules and guidelines that could support the communality, these being for example one predetermined day in a week where everyone gathers and works from the office together.

"I do wish for more communality in the workplace".

"Maybe to have some sort of rules about it (hybrid work), cannot force anyone but to have some kinds of incentives which would make us gather together more often at the office".

"I would hope there could be some limits to it, for example to have Mondays as general office days".

"We are awfully scattered around in this hybrid work life".

Even though some wished for more communality and even for one predetermined workday in a week, for some that is not the case. One person disagreed with the others by saying that sense of community does not come from being together at the office and that it is born from completely different factors. Additionally, some could not think of anything to develop, change, or enhance in the hybrid work model.

"At least I would not take anything away from it".

"It is good just how it is now".

7   Recommendations

The main aims of this research were to evaluate and analyze the work wellbeing of the anonymous commissioner company's employees while they are implementing the hybrid work model, as well as to observe how the work wellbeing affected their hybrid work lives.

When looking at work wellbeing and what it means to the employees of the company, the answers of the interviewees clearly revolved around physical and social work wellbeing. The physical factors can be seen as many answered supporting physical wellbeing by providing exercise possibilities, as well as good work conditions and ergonomics at the workplace to be vital factors for work wellbeing. The interviewees value physical work wellbeing, safety at the workplace and social work wellbeing aspects. As mentioned in the theory base, What is The Health Triangle and Why

Does it Need to Be Balanced (2019) explains exercise to be one of the most significant factors of physical wellbeing. Päivi Rauramo's (2009, 5) model "Työhyvinvoinnin portaat" *(Stairs of work wellbeing)* described two basic needs of human beings that are in direct correlation with the answers given in the interviews. Good work conditions and ergonomics are part of the need for safety which are basic needs of human beings and therefore a vital aspect of work wellbeing.

On the other hand, social work wellbeing factors are inevitably seen as important factors for one's work wellbeing as well since many answered the sense of belonging to be a great deal, as well as that one simply feels good about going to work and enjoys time with colleagues. Also described in Päivi Rauramo's (2009, 5) model "Työhyvinvoinnin portaat" (Stairs of work wellbeing) the sense of belonging is another basic need for humans. The need for affiliation regards that humans as social beings long for belonging, be it in a workplace or in their personal lives. In addition, as Wellbeing at work (n.d.) stated in the theory base, work wellbeing also is built by a supportive and motivating atmosphere at the workplace where they are treated well. On top of that, Ker (2022) explained often positive work environment and happy employees go hand in hand.

Other themes that were discussed in the interviews regarding work wellbeing, were that the company should have a good occupational healthcare which is also mentioned Rauramo's (2009, 5) model as the basic need for psychophysical needs. Many also answered work wellbeing for them meaning freedom, flexibility, and meaningfulness at the job and all of those can also be referenced to Rauramo's (2009, 5) model of work wellbeing. Freedom and meaningfulness are part of the self-actualization aspect of work wellbeing and flexibility is part of need for safety.

Afterwards, the participants were asked to describe, explain, and evaluate their own work wellbeing before the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as during it. They were also asked to explain how they coped with remote work. When looking at the time before the pandemic even started, many stated that their work wellbeing was alright, however the concept of work wellbeing was not discussed as much as now and perhaps it was not considered as such an important factor.

Many interviewees explained that their work wellbeing during the pandemic was poor and unsatisfactory. One factor that had a great negative effect on the employees' work wellbeing was loneli-

ness, not having interactions with colleagues and daily chitchats. McCord (2022) observed previously that loneliness, isolation, and lack of interaction with colleagues were factors that made employees' work wellbeing negative. Someone also expressed themselves feeling depressed during the worst times of the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on mental health cannot be made light of (2022) explained this earlier by stating that the pandemic increased anxiety, and out of more serious mental health problems, also depression symptoms.

However, people are different and the observations from the theoretical background do not apply to every employee. Some stated that the pandemic affected their work wellbeing only slightly, if not at all. Someone stated that they, as a character, are a very adaptable person, therefore, the changes and threats the pandemic brought, did not seem challenging to them.

The employees gave quite divided and different answers when asked about remote work. The negative comments mostly stated remote work being boring, lonely, and dreadful. This is backed up by Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know (2023) where it was explained that loneliness, isolation, and lack of interactions are the largest challenges of remote work. Many said that the constant loneliness and lack of social interactions was not a good match on their extroverted personalities – as Panorios & Postantziz (2020) described in theoretical background – extroverts are mostly the ones who find remote working challenging due to their need for socialness and human interaction.

Nevertheless, the ones who did not find remote working challenging stated that it is a more efficient way of working since they save time and money since they do not need to transport to the workplace which results in slower and more peaceful mornings. What is remote work? (n.d.) also pointed out that remote work can help employees save money in their everyday living costs. As well as this, some interviewees pointed out that their work efficiency in fact increased when working remotely. Increase in productivity was also mentioned in Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know (2023) as a positive aspect of remote working. A participant also told themselves having a strong intrinsic motivation towards work which helps them to concentrate and stay motivated even when working remotely. When looking back to the the theory part, Hakanen (2011, 30) described that there are two types of motivations that people have: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. With help from Hennessey et al. (2015) intrinsic motivation was explained to be something

that a person is does for the pure enjoyment of the job which makes them highly engaged into the tasks they are given.

The last, hybrid work theme of the interviews, was the largest one with most questions and discussions. Hybrid work model is seen as a beneficial, useful, and important new way of working in the company. Flexibility, freedom, change, versatility, and that it is easier to balance between work and personal lives were mentioned as its positive aspects. To support these statements, Monteiro (2023) stated earlier that nowadays employees demand the hybrid work model and find the flexibility it provides essential. In addition to that, Franzen-Waschke (2021) explained the hybrid work model providing the best of both worlds – to the ones who prefer to work from the office, as well as to the ones who prefer working remotely.

The more negative aspects that were mentioned the most were loneliness and communication problems. Jacobs Sesta (n.d.) stated that employees often miss chitchatting and having conversations with their colleagues which has been a negative aspect of hybrid work. Communication problems in this case means when people working from different locations, news and important points do not travel to everyone. Like Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know (2023) explained, communication problems often occur when people are working remotely from different locations. People who are at the office know, however the ones who are not present at the office are not told things that easily, hence communication problems occur.

Furthermore, many mentioned distractions at home to be a challenge in hybrid work when they are working from home, children and pets being the main causes for distractions in most cases. Bad ergonomics was said to be a challenge too when working from home in hybrid work life. The office provides support for ergonomics with electric tables, chairs, and computer mice. However, at home many do not have these benefits and that can often be felt later, for example as backpain. In addition to all the challenges mentioned, a participant pointed out that balance is a key feature in hybrid work model, too. If it starts to go too much towards merely just remote work, it is not beneficial, nor either is it if it goes too much to working from the office. To keep the hybrid work model useful and pleasant for the employees, it is important to keep the balance in order to keep it as hybrid work.

Work wellbeing consists of many pillars, all equally important. As Warren-Nielsen (2018) explained, wellbeing is a combination of physical, mental, and social aspects. The employees feel that the physical work wellbeing has been covered satisfactorily, they provide ergonomic equipment for the offices, including electric chairs and tables, as well as they support exercising and activeness by providing possibilities for gym. In addition, occupational healthcare and dental care is taken care of excellently. Also, to support and enhance mental work wellbeing, the company has an atmosphere where employees feel like they can ask for help and have discussions if necessary. However, the social work wellbeing seems to be the aspect that is not considered enough, according to some of the employees. Some feel like the hybrid work life has divided the group and they long for more interactions with their colleagues. Like Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know (2023) mentions, lack of interaction and loneliness has been one of the major challenges in the hybrid work model. On the other hand, to some, the amount of social interaction and the social work wellbeing is already satisfactory which could be explained by the fact that people are different and have different needs. More extroverted people often require more interactions and long for time with their colleagues, when introverts can be fine with how it is now, like Panorios & Postantziz (2020) explained previously. Finally, to support the social work wellbeing, the company rewards and gives acknowledgement to people who have succeeded in their work excellently. Ker (2022) explained in PERMA model that accomplishment, the employee's need for praise and rewards are a crucial part of work wellbeing.

The company provides flexibility and freedom for their employees by letting them decide when they come to work from the office and when they work remotely. There are no predetermined days, except Mondays or Monday mornings have previously been times when everyone should gather together for a weekly meeting. This system has been welcomed warmly and it is thought to be beneficial, flexible, and useful. Like Rauramo (2009, 5) explained, flexibility is a crucial aspect of work wellbeing. In addition to this, Monteiro (2023) mentions that employees require the flexibility in their work lives. The old normal merely is not good enough anymore. Regardless, some of the employees who would want more social interactions with their colleagues, wish that there could one day of the week, possibly Monday, that could be a predetermined day of the week when everyone would work from the office.

The ability to balance work life and personal life in hybrid work model divided the answers of the employees quite widely. Some had not had any problems in balancing work and personal lives while implementing the hybrid work model, especially when working remotely, or from home, some had found it challenging at first, however later had learned how to work with it, and lastly, some to whom it is completely dreadful, and they do not enjoy it. A portion of the employees found the balancing effortless. Their work environment at home does not have distractions and they find themselves to be more productive when working from home, like Remote Work Pros and Cons That You Should Know (2023) stated increased productivity to be a positive aspect of remote work. However, as Franzen-Waschke (2021) explained, many have experienced a lack of motivation and engagement when they are working remotely. Some employees told their home to have too many distractions, be it pets, children or housework that should be tackled. Many found themselves multitasking, not taking breaks at all, as well as hardly eating anything and just sitting down for hours. Many also found it difficult to see the line between the start of work and the end of work each day. As McCord (2022) explained, the balance and line between work life and personal life became blurry since living and working happen at the same location.

The employees unanimously stated they want to continue implementing the hybrid work model also in the future. It is seen as a positive development and they cannot imagine going back to the old normal, working from the office all day every day. The flexibility, freedom and making own schedules and plans are the reasons why hybrid work model is seen as a functioning tool in the post-pandemic work life. People do not want the way it was before and instead they require freedom and flexibility, as Monteiro (2023) also pointed out.

When looking to the future, and how to develop and enhance the hybrid work model and how it is implemented in the company, the employees were clear that they wish the office facilities to be changed and made more practical, and a better fit for different kinds of employees with different needs. As mentioned, when social work wellbeing at the company was discussed, a major amount of the employees long for more communality, sense of belonging, communication, and discussions. They wish for guidelines or rules how the hybrid work life could be made more functional and enhanced.

The state of work wellbeing in the hybrid work life in the anonymous commissioner company can be said to be satisfactory with the help from theoretical background and the research interviews. The results of the research were surprisingly positive. In general, the company takes care of their employees and also has in the past before the pandemic and during it. Social work wellbeing seems to be the only factor where the employees think the company could do better in the future. The pandemic, restrictions and working from home was challenging to some, however the hybrid work model has turned the tables and their work wellbeing is better than ever, or the same as before the pandemic, because of it. The hybrid work model has clearly made an impact at the company, and the employee's lives more functional, effortless, and flexible. The hybrid work model supports the employee's work wellbeing by providing flexibility, freedom, change, and in general, more opportunities. They would not let it go anymore and there is no going back to the old normal.

However, some actions could be taken still to make the hybrid work model even more functional and beneficial to the employees. As mentioned multiple times in the interviews, many wish for more practical and better office facilities that would meet the needs of different characters. Some prefer to work in silence, and hence, silent working areas should be provided. However, others also thrive from social encounters and look forward to also discussing with their colleagues during the day and breaks. Therefore, there should also be social areas where talking in fact would be encouraged. Many wished for a "happy medium" where everyone would be heard, and their wishes respected. If the office facilities could offer something that would meet the needs of different personalities, it could result in people wanting to work from the office more which consequently could bring more communality and sense of belonging which many also longed for.

Additionally, some guidelines for hybrid work model could be beneficial to determine. It could mean the predetermined day of the week where everyone should work from the office, or simply have better communication, coordination and planning inside the office about each of the employee's plans for the week, hence it could be easier to plan lunch dates with colleagues and also easier to bring people together at the office. Based on the research and results, it all starts from communication and if communication works, also the hybrid work model will work. All in all, the

hybrid work model seems to be necessary, required, and mostly functional at the company. Possibly with these recommendations they could enhance it or make it even better for the future. However, one thing will stay, and it is the hybrid work model itself.

8 Conclusion

The main research question of this thesis was "How is the hybrid work model affecting the work wellbeing in the post-pandemic work life?". The aim was to analyze, observe and evaluate the current work wellbeing in the company while they are implementing the hybrid work model in their work lives. To help, broaden and understand the main one better, there was also a sub-question "What is the state of work wellbeing in the hybrid work life in the commissioner company?" where the aim was to go straight to the topic of work wellbeing and explore how the employees evaluate and describe their own work wellbeing in the post-pandemic work life. The research was conducted by interviews that were done individually and privately with the 10 participants.

The research questions were answered in this thesis and the semi-structured interviews were undoubtedly the most beneficial tool to answer them. This thesis explained and observed the current work wellbeing in the hybrid work life by asking the right kind of questions, in addition to letting the participants answer freely and talk about their experiences as much as they desired. Thematic analysis and typification as data analysis methods were beneficial and a successful choice of methods for this thesis. With the help from these methods, the results from the interviews were easier to categorize, typify and divide to different themes based on the participants' answers.

This thesis proved that the concept of work wellbeing is utmost significant for the employees and for the success of the company. If the workplace does not meet the expectations, or if it cannot provide the kind of environment and work implementations, people are ready to switch jobs and look for something else. The old normal office day job is not enough anymore after people got introduced to another, improved option – hybrid work. This kind of research could be beneficial for all companies that implement hybrid work model or are thinking of trying it out. The company could see the positive and negative aspects of the hybrid work model, as well as learn what the employees wish for the future, and how to make the model even better. One possible aspect for the future researchers could be to do trend research in hybrid work, observe, analyze, and explore how the model keeps on changing, developing, and improving in the future. It could be interesting

to observe if the positive and negative aspects stay the same or how they change as time goes by and if hybrid work possibly becomes even more popular.

Ethicality and reliability of the research

This thesis is following the good ethical principles and the research was conducted reliably, truthfully, and precisely. The ethics of a research is a large combination of factors which starts from the data collection and reaches all the way till publishing and storing the data as well (von Bonsdorff et al., 2019). The data collection and data analysis of this thesis were carefully organized and planned, and both of those have been described earlier in this thesis. The data collected for the research was only to be used in this thesis, it will not be archived, and it will be destroyed by the end of the year 2023.

The possible ethical questions concern the participants of the interviews, the employees of the anonymous commissioner, with whom this thesis was done in cooperation. The research objectives were explained to the interview participants, as well as how the data is going to be analyzed and that it will be destroyed afterwards. The role of the participants was explained and described to each one of them carefully, as well as at the beginning of each interview, their permission to record the interviews was asked. As von Bonsdorff et al. (2019) explains, it is utmost necessary to describe to the participant how the data is going to be used, where and by whom. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, however since this thesis is written in English, the quotations had to be translated into English. Nevertheless, the translations were done carefully and precisely in order to keep the thoughts and meanings of the interviewee as original as possible.

The commissioner company wished to remain anonymous. Significant information about the company was wished to be kept confidential. Therefore, no name, location, nor any other crucial information about the company will be mentioned. In addition to this, no names, gender, age, or the employee's position in the company will not be mentioned in order to keep the company, as well as its employees anonymous. The quotations from the interviews do not include these matters either. According to Protecting Confidentiality (n.d.) confidentiality is the most significant factor in all research.

Noble & Smith (2015) explains that qualitative data has been claimed to be often lacking transparency and that the researchers can at times be biased to the collected data which is harmful to the research and leads to unreliableness. According to Shah (2019) here are two main types of biases that can occur in qualitative research. These are participant bias and researcher bias. Participant bias mostly occur when the participant does not answer according to their actual feelings and experiences, and instead they answer according to what is more acceptable socially or the more popular answer in general. For example, this could occur when the participant would not want their superiors to know what they have said about them. Nonetheless, in this research this did not happen since the interviews and the results from them were analyzed anonymously. The researcher bias refers to the researcher interpreting and analyzing the data according to their own forethoughts and possible hypotheses. In this research, a neutral, open-minded, and broad approach to the results and perspectives helped the researcher stay as unbiased as possible.

However, there are ways to support the reliability of qualitative research. Noble & Smith (2015) states that recording the interviews and relistening to the audios creates more value and reliability to the research. One does not need to remember all that was mentioned in the interviews and only rely on their memory when the interviews are recorded. It is easy to go back to the recorded audios and therefore go through the data carefully. In addition to this, describing the research process carefully and clearly increases reliability of the research. It is important to be transparent and report all the findings clearly.

In this thesis, these possible problems related to the use of qualitative research were carefully considered, and actions were taken in order to avoid them and conduct the research as transparently and reliably as possible. For example, by recording the interviews it was possible to return to them and listen to them multiple times. This created a clear understanding of the participant's thoughts and views, and they were able to be analyzed reliably. Additionally, the research process was clearly stated in this thesis, and everything was mentioned truthfully. The research questions were carefully planned by the author and also reviewed by a teacher prior to the interviews, and with the feedback it was easier to make the questions as clear and understandable as possible. In addition to this, all the data was collected and analyzed in an unbiased manner.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

Teema 1:

- Miten kuvailisit omin sanoin, mitä työhyvinvointi tarkoittaa sinulle? *How would you describe in your own words what work wellbeing means to you?*

Teema 2:

- Kuinka kuvailisit työhyvinvointiasi ennen COVID-19 pandemiaa? Ja entä millainen se oli pandemian aikana? *How would you describe your work wellbeing before the COVID-19 pandemic? And how was it during the pandemic?*

- Pandemian aikana useat tekivät kokonaan etätyötä, sillä työpaikoille ei ollut sallittua mennä rajoituksien vuoksi. Mikä oli kokemuksesi pelkästä etätyöskentelystä? *During the pandemic, many people were working remotely due to all the restrictions the pandemic brought. What was your experience of remote work?*

Teema 3:

- Miten koet hybridityön sopivan sinulle? Mitkä ovat sen hyvät puolet & haasteet? *How do you find hybrid work fitting you? What are its positive aspects and challenges?*

- Entäs sitten miten teidän hybridityöarjessanne vahvistetaan työhyvinvointia, kun osa työntekijöistä tekee kotoa käsin töitä ja osa on toimistolla? *How work wellbeing is being enhanced in your hybrid work life when some people work remotely and some work from the office?*

- Teillä on käytössä tällä hetkellä joustava aikataulutus hybridityössä, eli saatte itse vapaasti valita, minä päivinä tulette toimistolle. Ainoa on maanantai, joka on ainut ennalta sovittu päivä, jolloin kaikkien olisi tarkoitus tulla toimistolle, jotka siis siihen kykenevät. Mitä mieltä olet joustavasta työaikataulutuksesta hybridityömallissa? *The company is using a flexible work scheduling in hybrid work, which means you all can freely choose when you work from the office. The only one is Monday which is a predetermined day when everyone should come to the office, if possible. What is your opinion about the flexible work scheduling in the hybrid work model?*

- Monilla on ollut vaikeuksia työn ja arjen erottelussa hybridityömallissa, kun tehdään myös osittain kotona tai toimiston ulkopuolella töitä. Kuinka olet onnistunut omasta mielestäsi työelämän ja arjen erottelussa hybridimallissa? *Many people have had struggled with the balance between work life and personal life in the hybrid work model when work is also done both remotely or from home. How do you think you have succeeded in the balancing between work and personal lives?*

- Onko työpäivän tehtäviä ja kulkua ollut vaikeampi määritellä, kun teet kotoa käsin töitä? Jos on, millä tavoin? *Has it been more difficult to determine the work tasks and workflow when working remotely, or from home? If yes, in what ways?*

- Haluatko jatkaa hybridityömallia myös tulevaisuudessa? Miksi? *Would you want to continue implementing the hybrid work model also in the future? Why?*

- Miten mielestäsi teillä voitaisiin jatkossa kehittää työskentelymalleja tai tätä hybridityömallia? *How could the work models or the hybrid work model be developed in the future?*