Milana Virtanen

The Impact of Remote Working on Employees' Work Motivation & Ability to Work

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Business Administration

International Business and Logistics

Bachelor's Thesis

05 October 2020

Author Title	Milana Virtanen The Impact of Remote Working on Employees' Work Motivation & Ability to Work
Number of Pages Date	44 pages + appendix 05 October 2020
Degree	Bachelor of Business Administration
Degree Programme	International Business and Logistics
Instructor/Tutor	Daryl Chapman, Senior Lecturer

The purpose of this thesis is to find out what kind of impacts does remote working have on employees' work motivation and ability to work. A survey was selected as the data collection method and to support the purposes of this thesis, it is important to find out employees' experiences and opinions about remote work. The respondent group consisted of employees of a financial services company based in Finland. The survey was sent to 250 employees and 180 of them responded. The survey included questions about employees' remote working experiences, such as; how their idea of remote working had changed, and what could be improved either in their own remote working habits or in the organizational remote work culture. According to the results, employees were generally very satisfied with remote working and majority of them were willing to continue it in the future as well. Respondents mentioned benefits such as more efficient working and better possibilities to concentrate, increased work-life balance and higher work motivation. However, they raised also some issues such as worsened ergonomics and decreased social interaction. All in all, remote working can be considered as an efficient way of working which has it benefits but also some challenges. Since it is a relatively new way of working, organizations could establish own instructions and recommendations for it. In that way, organizations could support their employees' motivation and ability to work and show that they care about their employees, which can increase the employee engagement.

Keywords	Remote Work, Work Motivation, Ability to Work, Wellbeing, Work-life balance

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

Contents

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

Appendices

Appendix 1. Remote Work Survey

Table of Figures

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

Glossary

Affect-based trust

"Trust that is based on emotional bonds, showing genuine care of another person's wellbeing." (Staples, 2001)

Autonomous motivation

"Motivation that is caused by internal factors such as genuine interest or appreciation towards one's job tasks." (Ryan & Deci cited in Orsini & Rodrigues 2020: 739.)

Cognition-based trust

"Trust that is based on evidence that a person is trustworthy and professional." (Staples, 2001)

Controlled Motivation

"Motivation that is caused by external factors such as rewards and pressure." (Ryan & Deci cited in Orsini & Rodrigues 2020: 739.)

SDT

Self-determination Theory. "A theory that can be used in researching peoples' motivation and personality. It differentiates motivation into controlled and autonomous motivation, instead of combining them as one single concept." (Ryan & Deci cited in Orsini & Rodrigues 2020: 739.)

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

1   Introduction

This thesis focuses on remote work and the impact it has on employees' motivation and ability to work. Remote Work is becoming a more and more popular way of working globally and the COVID-19 pandemic has had its own impact on this development as well. Remote work is a contemporary issue and since the phenomenon has widespread quite rapidly all over the world, it is important to examine how the change and the new way of working work out in practice, how remote working affects on employees' motivation and what are the advantages and disadvantages of remote work.

Remote work is not a new concept although it is a new situation that remote work is suddenly a preferred way of working all over the world and it has become more usual than ever before in all fields and organizations where it is possible to execute. Therefore, there is plenty of literature available about the topic. However, there are some situations and consequences that could be further researched due to rapid changes in work culture and the current situation in the world.

The subject of this thesis is the impacts of remote work on employees' work motivation and ability to work. This thesis focuses first on remote work and work motivation in general, and then, it addresses the benefits and challenges of remote working. Then, the mental and physical impacts of remote work on employees are presented and the different ways how organizations could support their employees within these areas when they are practicing remote work. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on work culture will also be discussed later in the thesis as well as leaders' role in remote working and the future of remote work. In the end of the thesis, the data collection methods and results from the survey will be presented.

2 Term Definitions

2.1 Remote Work

Remote working can be defined as working from elsewhere than in the employer's premises. Due to that, employers and managers must utilize modern technology to communicate and work with each other. Remote working requires the employer to provide to his/her employees at least computers, mobile phones, an access to a work email account as well as other necessary platforms such as videoconferencing technology. (Viktorovich;Rozentsvaig;Bakhteeva;Soshnikova;& Sherpaev, 2020)

Remote working is not a totally new phenomenon since, already in 2009 over 20 % of organizations in Germany offered their employees a chance to work from home at least a few days every month. However, due to information and communication technology development it has become more popular and easier to organize. (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018)

In Spring 2020, remote working became rapidly 'the new normal' due to COVID-19 outbreak. Luckily, companies all around the world were already used to working remotely, however, some public services such as hospitality and food supply must be executed face-to-face. It also depends on the development level of economies, how rapidly societies can adapt in remote working especially when it considers majority of people at the same time. All in all, the pandemic situation has companies around the world more familiar with remote working than ever and it has possibly proven that it is not as challenging or inefficient as people believed before. Without knowing when the restrictions disappear totally, it may be that employees around the world will work remotely to some extent for quite a while and become more and more used to it. This forces organizations to design and implement continuously better practices and policies for remote working to make it as efficient and convenient as possible, which can be considered as a positive consequence during the challenging times. (Wiik, 2020)

2.2   Work Motivation

Work motivation is a psychological process which springs from an individual's being but also from his or her environment and affects in their work-related behavior. There are numerous of things that have an impact on work motivation such as national culture, job design and person-environment fit. (Latham & Pinder, 2005)

Work motivation can be divided into two different types, intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation. Intrinsic motivation is caused when an individual is doing something due to his or her genuine interest whereas extrinsic motivation is caused by an external factor such as a possibility of getting a reward. Research has shown that in cases when work performance causes both types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, employees' job satisfaction can reach its highest peak. (Gagne & Deci, 2005)

By ensuring its employees high work motivation, organizations can benefit in the long run. Work motivation usually increases among employees when the work environment is need-supportive which offers employees need satisfaction. Due to increased motivation, employees' performance will remain on an optimal level and it will also improve their wellbeing. Work motivation and employees' wellbeing are two significant values for any organization and strongly linked to each other. Therefore, it is important for organizations to take care of their employees' work motivation which can support their wellbeing as well. (Olafsen;Deci;& Halvari, 2018)

3   Benefits & Challenges of Remote Work

3.1   Job Satisfaction

There are several benefits when it comes to remote working such as it can increase the job satisfaction since remote working possibility is an appreciated quality among employees and make them more effective workers. Employees may appreciate the flexibilities that remote working offers. For example, employees who have small children or work as part-time employees, can benefit from having more autonomy in organizing their schedules. The increased job satisfaction may help organizations to retain their employees for a longer time, which is beneficial for both parties. (Michael & Smith, 2015)

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

Additionally, when employees work from different locations, they tend to have less conflicts with their colleagues. When employees get better along with their colleagues, it can also make them more effective workers and is likely to boost their positive attitude towards their work in general. (Johnson, 2019)

When it comes to remote working, there are also some disadvantages considering job satisfaction. Working from different locations and communicating with colleagues only online, may decrease employees' feeling of belongingness and instead make them feel isolated from each other. Remote working can increase the threshold for employees to share their negative feelings such as worry. Remote working may also raise concerns among employees regarding security, such as data leakage and other safety risks. Employees might also consider their possibilities to grow inside the organization and proceed on their careers as smaller. (Mullen, 2017)

In remote work, some issues may leave concealed such as conflicts among team members or alcohol abuse problems, which can lead the situation to getting worse. When colleagues do not meet each other face-to-face every day, they may find it more difficult to open their problems or it can be also easier for them to hide their problems. It would be important that employers would encourage their employees to be open about their life situations and personal issues as well if needed. With an open communication environment, employees can have a lower threshold to open about their issues and ask for help when they need it. In this way, employees' difficulties could be detected earlier, and it could increase their wellbeing, which would be beneficial for both individuals and the organization.

Remote work can also bring new challenges when employees must work from their homes. They can find it hard to find the balance between working time and free time. Additionally, some employees can lack of space at their home and if they have kids at home, it may come across as a challenge to find a quiet and suitable workspace for working parents. (Guantario, 2020)

On the other hand, research has shown that work-life balance of women can increase due to remote working. When women can work from their homes, they have more time

to spend with their families due to increased flexibility and without transitions from home to workplace. Increased work-life balance prevents depression among women which supports their wellbeing as well as ability to work in a long period time. (Grant;Wallace;& Spurgeon, 2013)

In addition to the challenges with balancing between working time and free time, not staying online after a remote workday may come across as a problem for employees. According to a survey conducted by Remote.co, 40 % of the respondents considered it as one of their biggest challenges in remote working to not remain online after a workday at home office. (Kuehner-Hebert, 2019) In the long run that might have negative effects on employees' life quality. The other challenges that the respondents had faced in remote work were distractions at home, establishing strong relationships with colleagues, feelings of loneliness, technological issues and managing with different time zones. (Kuehner-Hebert, 2019)

3.2   Interaction

When people work remotely, it directly decreases the social aspect of work since spontaneous conversations at the office are not possible. The cooperation within a group is not as easy remotely as it is in face-to-face and it requires more work to keep up the casual interactions through different video conference tools or phone calls. (Petty, 2017) Due to remote work employees usually communicate less with their colleagues, which decreases the social interactions during the day. This may not suit everyone or at least it requires adjusting to prevent the feeling of isolation. Some people also prefer to spend more time at home with their families and get the support they need in that way. (Grant;Wallace;& Spurgeon, 2013)

All in all, there is not much research on remote working employees who live alone and how remote working culture affects their wellbeing and life quality. Remote working is a relatively new concept especially on a global scale and especially when it is mandatory such as during times of crisis or pandemic. Therefore, it could be further researched since remote working is becoming a more and more popular way of working all over the world.

3.3   External Factors

In remote working there is a smaller risk that external factors such as extreme weather conditions would prevent employees from working since, they are working from their homes, whereas weather conditions could prevent employees from coming to the office. Remote working possibility offers more flexibility in the daily work life if the employees want to reschedule their days or if there are external factors that are prohibit people from going outside and practice social distancing such as global pandemic situation. In extreme situations such as during a pandemic, it is a significant benefit for an organization if it can provide remote work possibility for its workers. In that way organizations can continue their operations through difficult times and avoid dramatic financial losses that a total suspension of the operations could cause. (Quicke, 2009)

For employees who in normal circumstances would walk or ride a bicycle their way to work or at least part of the way, a shift to remote working may decrease their physical activity significantly. For some employees, commuting to their workplace, may be the only exercise during the day and remote working may eliminate all the physical activity of their workdays. In a long run this can cause negative impacts in employees' wellbeing and ability to work. To avoid employees' declining condition, it would be beneficial for organizations to encourage their employees to exercise during breaks and stay active although they are working from home.

3.4   Productivity

Contrary to general preconceptions, employees are usually more effective and motivated when they can work remotely. According to one study, employees are happy with remote working since majority of the respondents could not think of returning to work at the office. Additionally, only a minority of them thought that remote working will have an impact on their career progression. (Kuehner-Hebert, 2019) When remote work is done right, it can increase the productivity of employees and support their work-life balance. Remote work is a modern way of working that gives employees more autonomy and the

freedom to choose the time and place where they want to work at instead of having formal schedules and limitations to work from a certain location. (Murphy, 2017)

Although, remote working saves employees' time since they do not have to travel between their homes and offices to work, the given flexibility might not directly have a positive impact on their productivity. Research has shown that remote workers and workers who have more flexible working hours do not receive as much training and mentoring as their colleagues. Additionally, if there are colleagues in the same company that work at the office, remote workers might easily be left out from their social activities as well as knowledge shared among on-site workers. It might also differentiate employees into different groups, create inequality and decrease the feeling of togetherness. When information does not reach all employees and the atmosphere among employees degenerates, it can have negative impacts on employee productivity as well. (Graziano, 2016) However, it is up to employers themselves that are pursuing remote work in their companies, to make sure that remote work does not harm productivity or create inequality in among employees.

3.5   Organizational Costs

Remote work can also affect organizations financially, both in positive and negative ways. Organizations can also secure their digital workspaces without enormous costs. However, it requires planning clear policies, training employees and making the organization culture as well as the IT infrastructure more effective. Remote work can be executed with reasonable costs, yet it requires new policies that support the new way of working and takes the essential aspects into account. (Murphy, 2017)

Additionally, remote work offers flexibility and more options for organizations as well. When a job is not limited to a certain location, an organization has significantly larger markets to choose their candidates from. This can help an organization to find exactly the talent that they are looking for more easily and in a shorter period of time. In addition to a larger talent pool, remote work option can cut an organization's recruitment costs. (Murphy, 2017)

In some cases, remote working culture can decrease organizational costs significantly due to decreased property expenses. If organizations do not have to provide any office facilities for their employees or only to a small share of their employees, it can have significant financial benefits. For example, these organizations can change their office property to a smaller one or close it completely. Even if some of the employees would still work at the office every now and then or majority would work mainly from home, it could cut the organization's property costs significantly. (Grant;Wallace;& Spurgeon, 2013)

On the other hand, there is a risk of high costs when it comes to ergonomics and office furniture within remote working. Employees may request different office furniture to make their work from home more comfortable and if organizations have not applied clear policies and price limits for these purchases, it may become expensive for them. It is important that employers support their employees' wellbeing by investing in their ergonomic working style and in that way help to prevent injuries. By creating clear policies and ergonomics program, organizations can cut costs and support their employees' wellbeing even when they are working from home. (Michael & Smith, 2015)

4 Supporting Employees' Mental & Physical Wellbeing in Remote Work

4.1 Mental Health

Remote work modifies employees' workdays in many ways – it eliminates the spontaneous discussions and face-to-face communication with colleagues, however simultaneously, it can decrease disruptions and social interaction. Since employees are working from different locations, it is important that they communicate regularly with their team members and managers. By organizing regular video conferencing meetings, employees can have a lower threshold to open about their problems and worries and, it can increase their feeling of belonging in their team. (Raizman, 2020)

In remote work, employees are not able to share their feelings such as frustrations to their colleagues in the same way as in non-remote work. Some employees may have more responsibilities while they are working from home such as taking care of their

family members and household tasks. The need for multitasking may decrease their ability to focus and cause them more stress. It can also cause them feelings of inadequacy, which can in a long term, impact negatively on their mental health. All in all, remote working can bring new challenges and hardships for employees, and therefore, it could be useful for organizations to prioritize their employees' health and wellbeing. In that way organizations could show how much they care and support their employees' mental health and ability to work. (Wynter, 2020)

4.2   Physical Health

Although, mental health is a remarkable issue in remote working, so is physical health. Physical health has a significant impact on mental health. Therefore, it would be beneficial for organizations to establish guidance and provide support for their employees on how to build a functional and ergonomic workspace at their home offices. Since, there are usually less disruptions in remote work, it can cause employees forgetting to have breaks. (Raizman, 2020)

Organizations could guide their employees to stick in their normal habits although they are working from home. Starting the workday by changing work clothes and tidying up oneself, employees can be more alert in the morning at it can boost their mood throughout the day. It is also important to have breaks and especially to be active during those breaks to increase one's alertness. Employers could encourage their employees to exercise during their breaks such as going out for a walk or stretching instead of sitting still. Even small changes in everyday habits can increase employees' motivation and ability to work in a long run. (Raizman, 2020)

5   The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Work Culture

5.1   Global Impacts on Organizational Level

COVID-19 pandemic has had dramatic effects on work culture all around the world in 2020. Nevertheless, remote working has been in use already before but after the COVID-19 outbreak governments instructed people to perform social distancing. As a direct result of social distancing, organizations and their employees in several fields have

shifted to remote work. Therefore, organizations must pay more attention in their employee engagement and invest more in technology. When managers and their workers are working from different locations, it is even more important for the managers to keep track of their employees' work engagement and motivation by creating an open communication environment and offering low-threshold support. (Wiik, 2020) The pandemic situation has forced organizations to test how remote working works if it is carried out daily in a long period of time. It required adapting to the situation fast since organizations still must operate in order to survive financially. (Jackson, 2020)

5.2   Employees' Adaptation into Remote Working

Remote workers do not only have to adapt to the new situation practically but also mentally by taking a receptive attitude and aim to react positively. Especially older managers and employees who have already gained a long work experience might be so used to working at the office that they can find it hard to adapt to the new remote working culture in a fast phase. This can also set different generation groups into unequal positions. (Guantario, 2020)

Since, the pandemic forced everyone to practice social distancing, except the key workers in hospitality, food supply and other public services, it drove whole families to stay at home for a long time. It has brought several challenges, for example, to families of whom parents suddenly started to work from home and since kids are also staying at home, it may cause lack of space and work privacy. Children are spending more time at home and they are possibly having less things to do which can make them restless. As a result, it can disturb their working parents and decrease their ability to focus which can cause them more stress and impair their performance. (Guantario, 2020)

On the other hand, employees who live alone and have an independent work life may benefit from remote work and social distancing due to the privacy that it brings. When they work from home, they are alone, and their work is not interrupted due to co-workers and social interactions during the day. However, spending the whole workday alone and practicing social distancing does not suit everyone and employees might feel themselves

as outsiders and lack the feeling of belongingness which can negatively affect their mental wellbeing. (Keeling;Clements-Croome;& Roesch, 2015)

6 Leaders' Role in Remote Work

6.1 The Balance Between Trusting & Tracking Employees

Since remote work on this scale is a whole new way of working it is important that it is also planned well, and it may require managers to change their way of thinking to some extent. Instead of trying to control and track their employees' every move as well as their working time, managers could trust more in their employees and focus rather on the results that they make. In the end, it does not matter how the employees execute their tasks if the quality is on expected level and tasks are done in time. To be able to trust that the employees will perform well and bring the expected results, the management would have to establish clear goals and policies for remote work. It is also important that employers offer the necessary tools and equipment to support their employees' remote work and help to make working convenient. (Mautz, 2019)

On the other hand, it is important for managers to be aware of what their employees are working on and remote working makes it more challenging. Since, in remote work, managers cannot suddenly appear at their employees' workspaces and check their current situation and possible problems. If leaders rely blindly on the updates received from their employees through digital communication channels such as emails and videoconferencing platforms, they can easily be misled. Therefore, leaders should put more effort in communicating with their team members and taking an initiative to be in touch with them frequently to encourage them to contact each other as well as the leader without a high threshold. (Johnson, 2019)

6.2 Leaders Supporting Employees' Motivation

When it comes to motivation within remote working, leaders are in a key role to make sure their employees stay motivated. Regardless of the location where employees work, and even if they work alone and communicate with their colleagues only through phone calls, emails and video conferencing technology. (Fernet, Guay, Senécal & Austin cited

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

in Orsini and Rodrigues 2020: 739.) Research has also shown that leaders with needs-supportive attitude increase their employees' motivation as well as it leads to better results and higher job satisfaction. The best way for leaders to support their employees in remote working is to give them autonomy and showing trust towards them, however, giving them clear guidance in order to make them feel organized and effective, and maintaining close relationships and open communication. (Orsini & Rodrigues, 2020) Leaders could establish clear guidance and tips for remote working, and to support the relationships between employees, it is beneficial to rather overcommunicate than communicate too little. (Fica, 2020)

6.3   Leading by Example

Leaders could also encourage their employees to create good routines for workdays, for example, waking up early, change clothes, planning the focus and the timetable for the day. Taking care of one's wellbeing is one of the most important things that employees must do to retain their ability to work. The most effective way to train a team is to lead by example and therefore, leaders could lead by their own example when it comes to wellbeing by taking good care of themselves by having breaks, exercising, meditating, and taking care of their work-life balance. In that way employees can consider wellbeing as an important part of their work and start to adapt good routines demonstrated by their managers in their own daily habits as well.

It is also useful to make one's home office as convenient and functional as possible and using the right tools to make working smooth and effortless. Ergonomics is also an important aspect considering the wellbeing and working capacity - these factors can help employees to focus and perform better and increase their ability to work in the long term, which can also increase their work motivation. (Fica, 2020)

6.4   Self-determination Theory

According to Self-determination Theory (SDT), motivation is typically the key reason why employees engage in their job tasks. However, motivation varies between controlled and autonomous motivation. Controlled motivation is caused by external factors such as

rewards and avoidance of negative consequences and pressure, whereas autonomous motivation is rather intrinsic that comes from genuine interest. (Ryan & Deci cited in Orsini & Rodrigues 2020: 739.)

Research has shown that employees who are engaged in their work are usually driven by autonomous motivation whereas workaholics are driven both by controlled and autonomous motivation. Research has also shown that giving employees more choices and autonomy, instead of controlling them and their work significantly, leads usually to autonomous motivation and more independent behavior. Within remote working independence is usually emphasized and is a prerequisite for good performance, and therefore, it can be useful for managers to not try to control their employees and instead offer them more freedom to support their autonomous motivation. (Malinowska;Tokarz;& Wardzichowska, 2018)

7   The Future of Remote Work

7.1   Second Wave of COVID-19

Now that organizations from several different fields all around the world have implemented remote working as a part of their work culture due to corona virus pandemic, it is more likely that they will continue it in the future as well to some extent. For many organizations remote working has been already a familiar practice before but for some organizations it may have become as a new habit or at least it has become more common due to the pandemic and social distancing. However, the development level of an economy has a significant impact how well the society can adapt into remote working culture due to differences in internet access and how large portion of their citizens have previous experience of remote work. (Bana;Benzell;& Solares, 2020)

To prepare for the possible second wave of corona virus, governments can support organizations by planning bailout and investment programs, and in that way, governments can offer organizations possibilities to make decisions that will help them to survive from the next crisis. All in all, remote working is like to remain as the new

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

normal for quite a while and it is possible that organizations start seeing more benefits in preferring remote work in a long run as well. (Bana et al, 2020)

7.2 Employee Monitoring

While remote working is becoming more and more usual, organizations are also tracking their employees' behavior and actions. There are differences between organizations, some of them go to extremes and therefore, it is important to question at what point employees' privacy has become invaded. For example, a data-analytics company Humanyze has gone to extremes with their tracking – the company tracks the locations, record the conversations and follow constantly the calendars and emails of their employees. The company believes that since businesses today are data-driven also the employees should be. (Areheart & Roberts, 2019)

There are different monitoring software programs available that track employees and their performance whether they were working on-site or remotely. This tracking is executed to ensure equal quality of employees' work regardless of their location for the benefit of business outcomes. However, some workers consider that monitoring software programs cause invasion of their privacy. Therefore, it is important that organizations consider carefully whether it is necessary to invest in a monitoring software and that the tracking is made legally respecting employees' privacy. (Kohen, 2020)

Increased monitoring can have both positive and negative effects. The positive outcomes can be for example, more efficient processes and less barriers in the workplace. However, the negative outcomes can be quite significant as well since employee monitoring can decrease trust and communication between employees and an employer as well as reduce creativity and empowerment of individuals. These effects are quite alarming since they can have a direct impact on the relationships between a manager and an employee. (Bader, 2019) Solely, the fact that an organization is willing to invest in a monitoring system can give a sign of distrust to employees. (Chang;Liu;& Lin, 2015)

7.3   Trust Between Employers and Employees

Trust is a key factor in a healthy relationship between an organization and an employee, and if that trust cracks, it can be difficult or even impossible to rebuild or replace it. Increased use of monitoring systems can also decrease the communication between a manager and their employees which can decrease empathy and inhumanity between them, employers will spend more time on analyzing employee data instead of listening their employees' opinions. In a long term this can weaken the relationships and the trust within an organization and decrease employees' job satisfaction. (Bader, 2019) Usually sharing private information can bring people closer to each other, however, if a mutually agreed privacy limit is exceeded that can easily create negative feelings and break the trust between an employee and an organization. Additionally, research has shown that continuous employee monitoring in an organization increases psychological concerns among employees. (Chang;Liu;& Lin, 2015)

On the other hand, companies can be caught between its employees and stakeholders. At the same time, organizations must meet the obligations that they receive from their stakeholders such as keep the productivity at a certain level and retain the quality, and therefore, it has to make sure that its employees performance remains on an expected level yet, treating its employees with ethical manners. Although, employee monitoring is primarily for tracking that employee performance and productivity support the organizations benefit and are align with stakeholders' interests, there are many other reasons for it as well. For example, to avoid security risks and make sure working complies with the law. Additionally, in cases when there is bullying or harassment among employees, employers can more easily detect and prove those cases which is beneficial for employees' safety as well. (Kiser;Porter;& Vequist, 2010)

Since, remote working is becoming more usual it would be beneficial for organizations to concentrate on how they can build the trust between their employees especially in remote working. The relationship between a manager and an employee differs quite a lot whether they are working at the same office or from different locations. Trust can be divided in two different types; cognition-based and affect-based trust. The first one applies to demonstrated competence and responsibility and therefore, it is based more

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

on facts and measures, whereas, the second type refers to emotional bonds between individuals such as genuine caring about each other. (Staples, 2001)

Research has shown that cognition-based trust is significantly more effective in remote working, whereas, affect-based trust works better in non-remote working. Therefore, managers whose employees are working remotely should put effort in creating cognition-based trust with their employees by convincing them with their own responsibility and professionalism. Building trust between managers and employees can benefit organizations significantly since it not only improves the performance and reduces job stress among employees, but it can also make them more reliable for their managers. When employees feel that they can genuinely trust in the organization and their managers, it can increase their conscience and make employees take more responsibility of their own performance. (Staples, 2001)

7.4   Part-Time Employment & Remote Working

Remote working can be a functional solution for part-time workers for example, if these employees have small children at home or they are studying along with their work. It can support their time management if they work shorter days in an organization or if their life situation requires more flexibility in their weekdays. However, if an employee starts in a part-time employment in a new organization, it may be challenging to adopt in the work community and leave them feeling isolated from their team. Therefore, it is important for organizations to establish principles how to train part-time workers and how to keep them engaged to support their integration in the new workplace.

There is not much research results available about part-time employees who work remotely and since remote working is becoming more common, it would be useful to research this further. However, in all remote work contracts including part-time and zero-hours contracts, it is beneficial to agree clearly on terms such as workload, working hours and days. (The Centre for Occupational Healthy, 2020) It is important to both communicate the terms of remote working to employees and to write the terms in the contact of employment. In this way, the requirements and expectations are made clear for both parties and there is a smaller risk for misunderstandings.

8 Data Collection Methods

The research question of this thesis is "How remote working impacts on employees' work motivation and ability to work?" To be able to answer the research question, it is important to collect and analyze data. When it comes to remote work and the impacts of it on employees' motivation and ability to work, it is useful to collect data from employees to find out their genuine experiences. This survey was made for the personnel of Company X, a financial services company based in Finland. The personnel consist of 250 employees, majority of them based in Finland and approximately 20 employees working from abroad. In the company, the roles are divided into different levels; directors and managers, specialists and trainees.

The employees were informed about the survey a couple days in beforehand and altogether, they were given 13 days to participate in the survey. They were also told that they can complete the survey during their working hours, they are free to choose whether they want to complete the survey in Finnish or in English and that the responses will be collected anonymously.

The Remote Work Survey used in the data collection, can be found in this thesis as the Appendix 1. In the beginning of the survey there was a set of questions that specify the background of the employees such as how old they are and whether they have had previous experience of remote working or not. Additionally, their role in the company were specified as well as how far from the office they live.

The survey itself was divided in three different areas; the first section focused on employees' idea and experiences of remote work, the second one on communication and team relations, and the third one on the future of remote work. The survey included questions such as how successful the implementation of remote work had been at respondents' workplace and had the employees enjoyed working remotely and how remote working had impacted on their work motivation. The employees were also asked about how remote working had impacted on the relations between them and their colleagues and did they think there is enough communication between them and their

colleagues and manager while they worked remotely. In addition, the survey included questions related to the future of remote work, how the employees viewed remote work culture in the future and what could be improved to make remote work even more efficient.

The results were anticipated to include answers that are somewhat negative towards remote working and show the need for improvements. However, the results were also expected to be quite variable. Some people probably did not have previous experience of remote working, which means that they were not used to it and possibly, they had not yet found the best practices for it. Additionally, people have different life situations, some may have young kids at home or unfavorable conditions for working from home, which can cause challenges and negative feelings towards remote working.

9   Survey Results

9.1   Response Rate & Background Information of the Respondents

The survey was sent to the employees of Company X, a Financial Services company based in Finland. The survey was sent to all 250 employees of the company, and the response rate turned out to be higher than expected. Altogether, 178 of the total 250 employees responded to the survey, which signifies that the response rate was over 70 %.

According to the background information responses, there were respondents from each of the five age groups; 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55 and +56 years. However, majority of respondents (60 %) belonged in age groups of 26-35 and 36-45 years old. Altogether, the survey received 30 responses from director or manager level workers, 143 responses from specialist level workers and five responses from trainee level workers. Most of the employees did have previous experience of remote working. However, 19 % of the respondents reported that they did not have experience of working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic had started.

9.2   Data

9.2.1   Idea & Preferences Related to Remote Work

Majority (60 %) of the respondents replied that the implementation met their expectations very well and the rest responded that it had met their expectations well or somewhat. 88 % of the respondents answered that they have enjoyed remote working quite or very well and rest of the employees had enjoyed remote working occasionally. They were also asked how often they would like to work remotely in the future. Almost 90 % responded that they would like to work remotely half of their working time or more and almost 10 % would like to work remotely all the time.

The survey results showed differences in remote work satisfaction between different age groups (Figure 1). Employees in age of 36-45 years were significantly most satisfied with remote working, since, 60 % of them had enjoyed working remotely very well. Older employees in age groups of 46-55 and 56+ were also more satisfied with remote working than younger employees in age groups of 18-25 and 26-35.
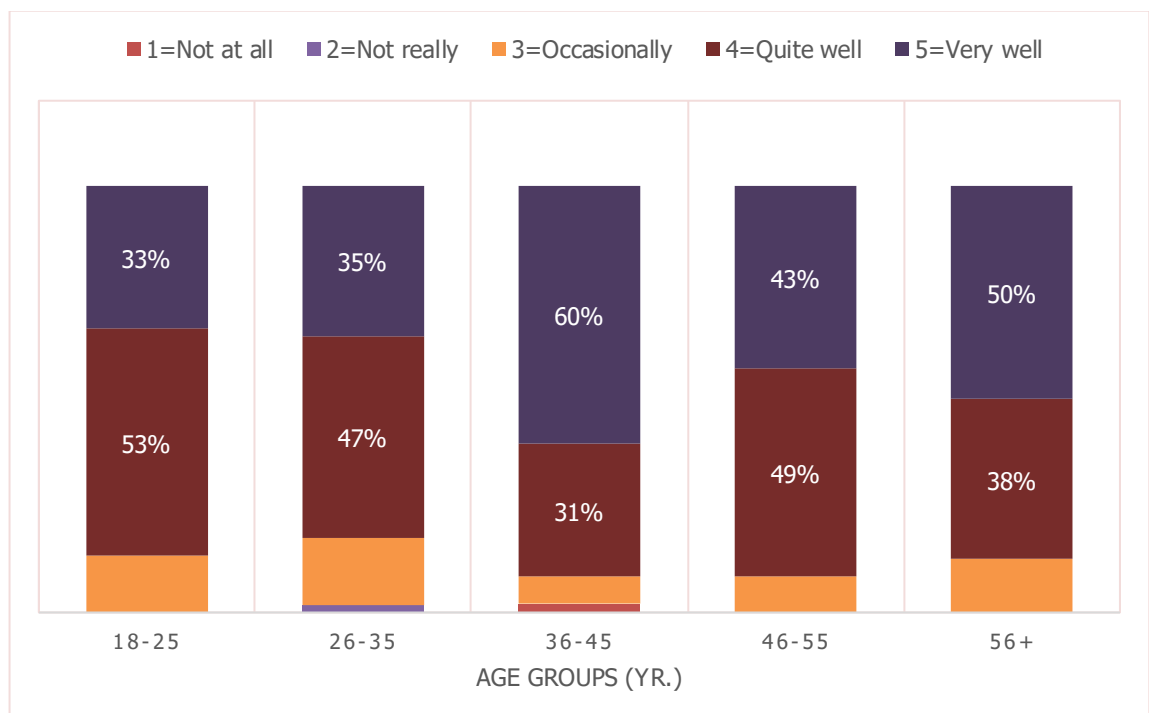
Figure 1. The Impact of Employees' Ages on Their Remote Work Satisfaction.

According to the survey results, also employees' roles in the organization have an impact on how often they are willing to work remotely (Figure 2). Half of the employees in director and manager roles would prefer to work remotely 50 % of their work time. However, one third of directors and managers would prefer to work remotely most of the time and the rest would like to work from home occasionally and some even all of their work time.

Instead, employees in specialist roles were significantly more keen on remote working since, over half of them would like to work remotely most of their work time and almost 10 % of them would like to work remotely all the time. There were more spreading among specialists' responses since there were also a few specialists who would not prefer to work remotely at all. There were only five trainees who responded to the survey and their responses were quite unanimous. One of the trainees would like to work remotely all the time and the rest would prefer to work remotely most of their work time. Altogether, 9 % of the repondents would have wanted to continue remote working 100 % of their working time.
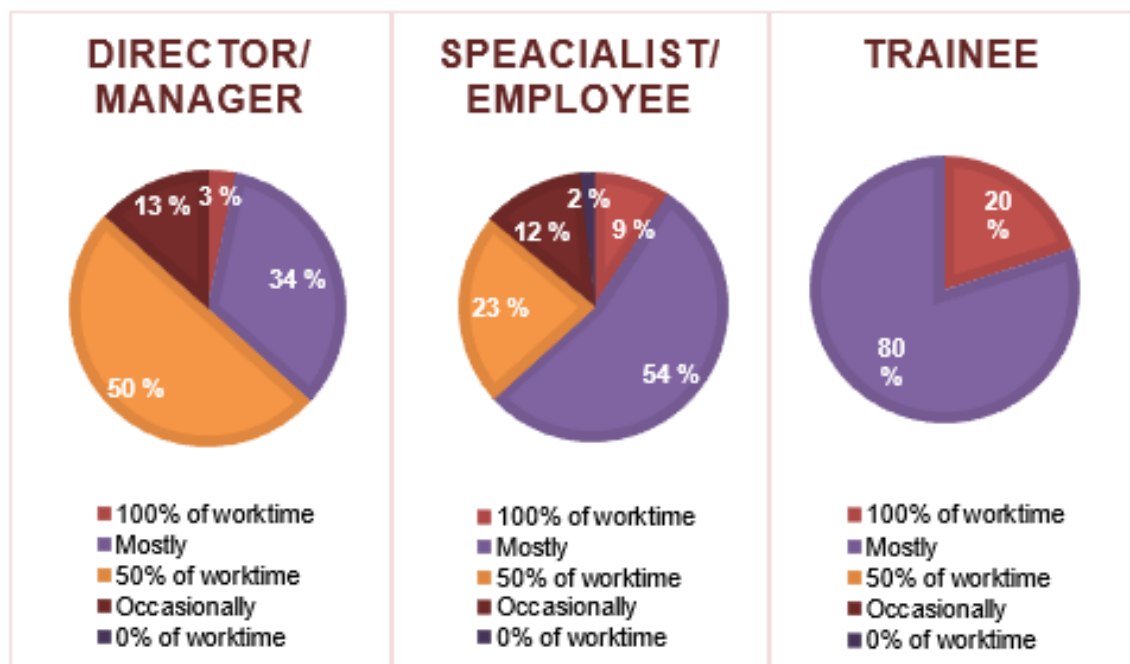

Figure 2. The Impact of Employees' roles in the Organization on How Often They are Willing to Work Remotely.

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

Many of the respondents commented that they had some prejudices about remote working before it became 'the new normal'. The prejudices included doubts about will there be enough communication with colleagues, will the employees be left alone with their problems and that working would become inefficient. However, some respondents also commented that their idea of remote working has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, they have realized how efficient way of working it can be and how easy it is to communicate with digital tools. Many of them have also experienced that it is easier to focus in remote work, since there are less distractions, and to retain their work-life balance due to time savings while working from home.

Employees were asked whether their idea of remote working has changed now that it has become more usual and they were also asked to justify how. A significant majority answered that their idea of remote working has not changed, and one third responded that it has changed. Most of them thought that remote working has turned out to be more efficient and successful way of working than they thought before. For example, some employees felt that the relations within their teams had improved, there were less distractions and communication had flown well through digital channels. Some of them also had realized that they could have more free time and better work-life balance due to remote work. On the other hand, some respondents mentioned that they had started to appreciate more on-site-working since some tasks are much simpler to accomplish when people can interact face-to-face. Employees had also realized that they had started to miss social interaction when they are working at home alone.

A significant majority of the respondents who did not have previous experience of remote work, responded that they have enjoyed remote working quite well or very well. According to these results, employees have adopted well in remote work when the whole organization has shifted into the new way of working.

9.2.2   Wellbeing & Motivation in Remote Work

The employees were asked how they consider that remote work impacts on their work motivation, time management, stress levels, physical wellbeing and work-life balance.

The most positively remote work impacts on their work-life balance and work motivation (Figure 3). Additionally, 75 % of employees responded that remote working impact positively or somewhat positively on their time management. However, 10 % of respondents answered that remote working impacts negatively or somewhat negatively on their stress levels. 24 % of the employees responded that remote working impacts negatively or somewhat negatively on their physical wellbeing.
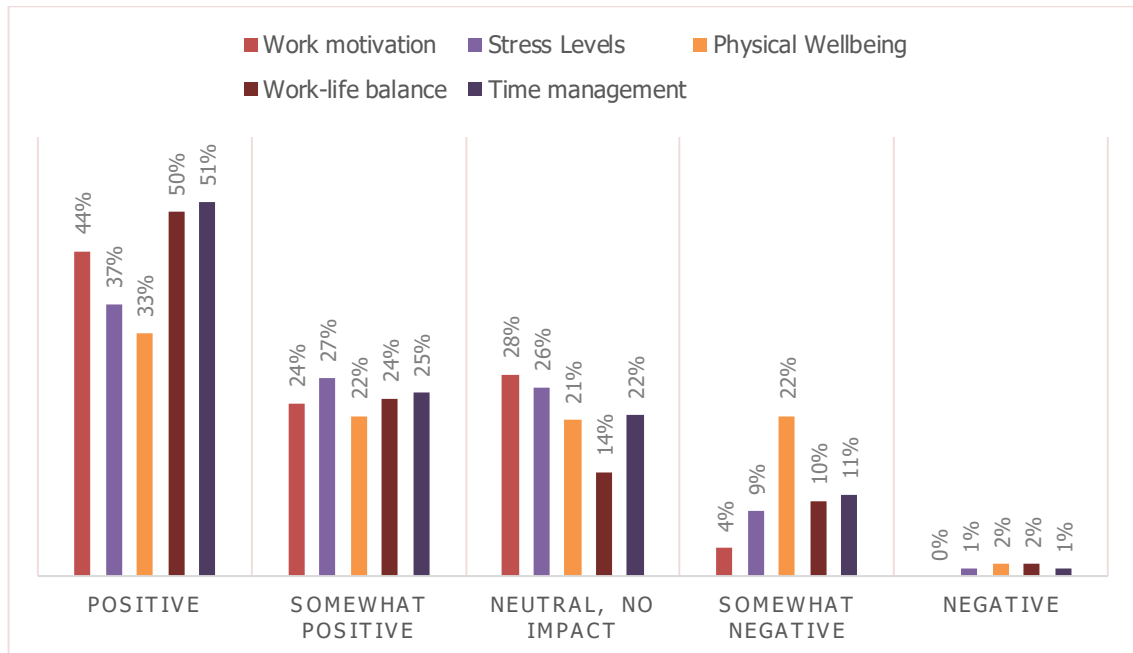

Figure 3. Impacts of Remote Working on Employees' Work Motivation, Stress Levels, Physical Wellbeing, Work-life Balance & Time Management.

The employees were asked what could increase their wellbeing in remote work and they were asked to give their responses as text instead of multiple-choice answers. As majority of respondents mentioned ergonomics as a challenge for remote working, it was naturally one aspect that could increase their wellbeing if ergonomics could be somehow improved on organizational level. Respondents suggested for example, better work tools such chairs and adjustable desks that would allow standing while working. They also brought up that better home office conditions, exercising breaks and better lunches would increase their wellbeing.

Employees were also hoping for more social events and meetings with colleagues and team members. Scheduling and work-life balance raised also as one issue among employees, since, many of them responded that they have difficulties to draw a line between working hours and free time, and that they keep forgetting to have breaks during their workdays. Some of the employees also commented that seeing their work equipment at home disturbs them during their free time and that they feel like they would be always working since their office is inside their apartment.

Many respondents shared things that harm their wellbeing in remote work and therefore, it is not a wonder that many of them responded that remote working impacts somewhat negatively on their wellbeing. All in all, it can be concluded that remote working caused contradictory impacts and experiences among employees. It simultaneously either increased or decreased employees' wellbeing. According to the results remote work impacted either negatively or positively on different areas. For example, it affected positively on most of the respondents' time management and work-life balance, whereas, it affected somewhat negatively on most of the respondents' physical wellbeing.

The respondents were also asked what would increase their motivation in remote work and these answers were linked to same things that would increase their wellbeing. For example, ergonomics and better working conditions, better work-life balance and shorter workdays or smaller workload were mentioned as possible sources of motivation.

Employees commented that increased informal communication with colleagues and team members to retain the good relationships with them would increase their motivation. Respondents also commented that they would prefer to have more video meetings with colleagues and customers. On the other hand, some respondents commented that the chance to do remote work is already their source of motivation.

9.2.3   Communication & Team Relations

According to the survey responses, many employees felt that they communicate too little with their colleagues and managers while working remotely. Many employees responded that they did not like to spend their workdays alone and that they preferred to have

more social interaction. Although, they communicated online with their colleagues, some of the employees felt that it is not enough or that communication practices could be at least developed.

Employees were asked in the survey, whether they think that there is enough communication between them and their colleagues as well as between them and their manager. There were significant differences between how satisfied employees were with the amount of communication with their colleagues and managers (Figure 4). As it can be seen in Figure 4, employees were generally more satisfied with the level of communication with their managers. Over 70 % of respondents replied that there is enough communication between them and their manager. However, since the survey was conducted anonymously, it cannot be found out whether the differences exist due to differences among the managers or the employees' needs. Half of the respondents replied that there is enough communication between them and their colleagues, however the other half responded that there could be more or that there is not enough communication. All in all, majority of the respondents were satisfied with the communication level in their workplace, however, there were more room from improvement detected in communication between employees and their colleagues.
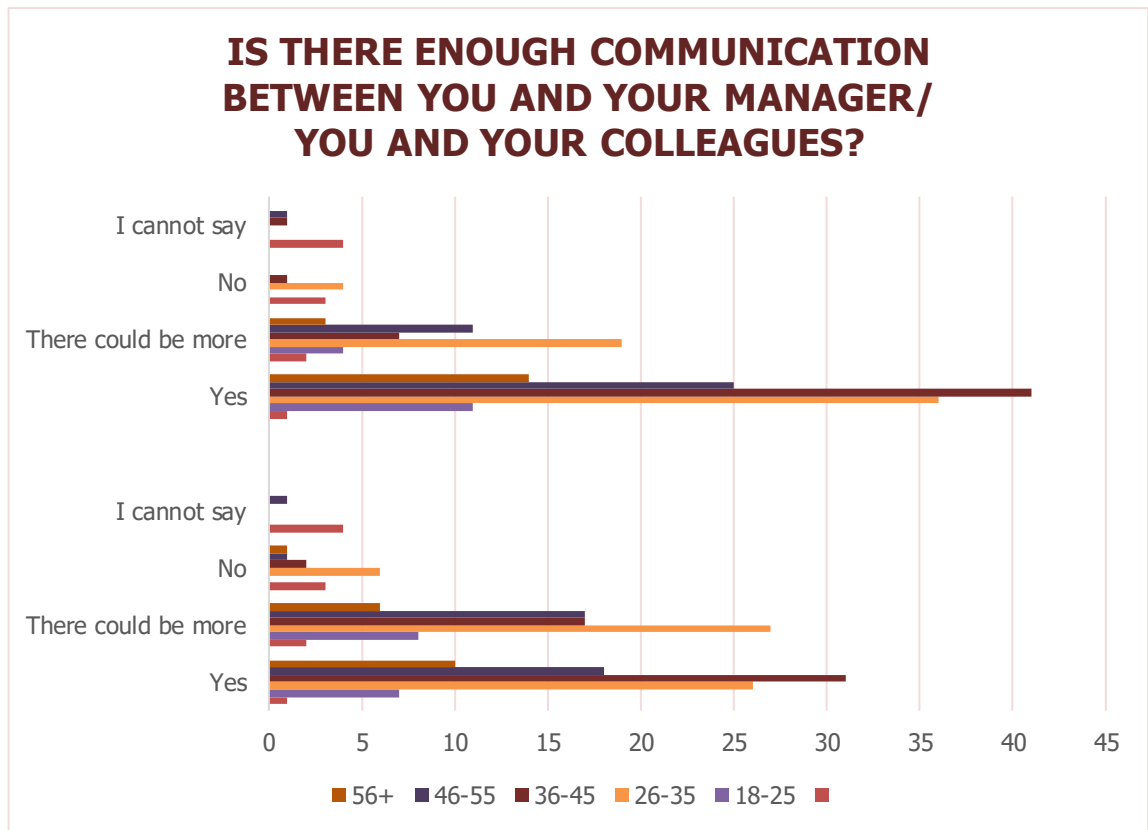
Figure 4. Employees' perception on whether there is enough communication between them and their manager (upper part of the chart) and them their colleagues (lower part of the chart).

In the survey employees were asked if they felt that they received enough feedback while working remotely. Almost half of the respondents answered that they get enough feedback, however 36 % of them felt there could be more feedback and 10 % felt that they do not get enough feedback. According to the results, employees' perceptions on the amount of feedback they received varied between different age groups. (Figure 5) Among employees in age of 18-35 years, a relatively large share of them responded that there could be more feedback.

Figure 5. Employees' Perception on the Amount of Feedback They Received.
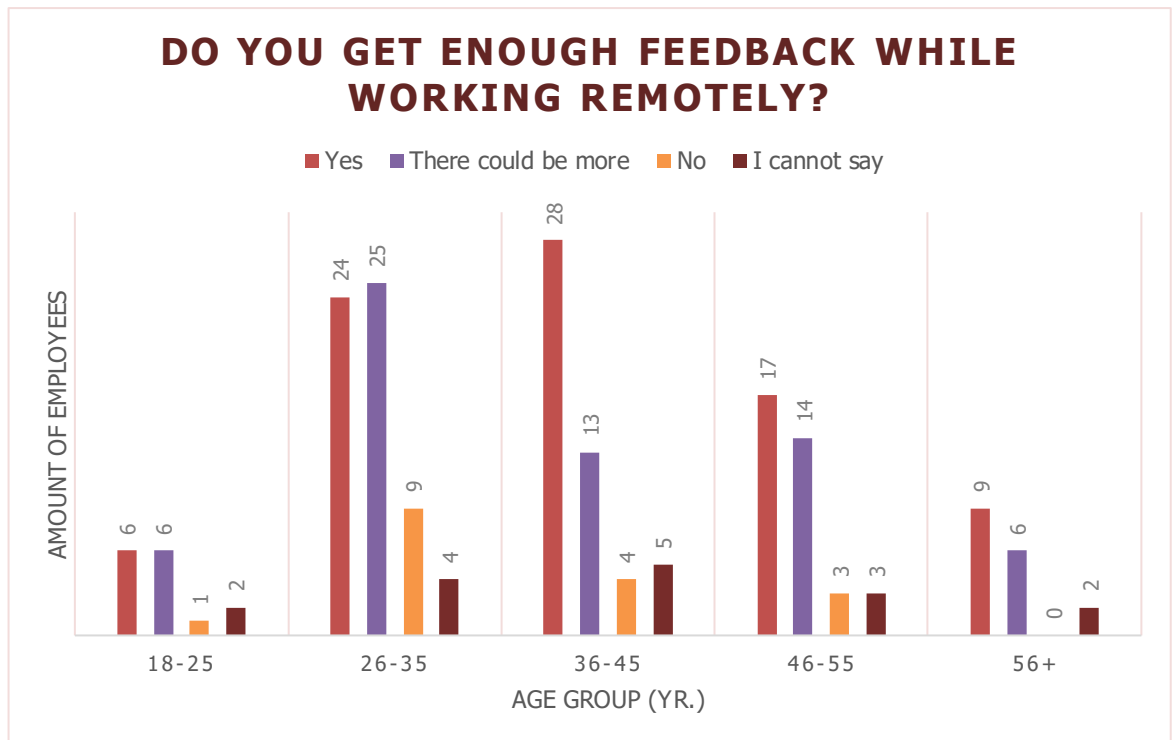
The employees were also asked how often they felt themselves alone or isolated from their team due to remote work. Majority of them responded that they felt themselves isolated or alone in their team never or seldom. However, one fifth of respondents responded that felt themselves isolated or alone in their team occasionally and one of ten respondents responded, quite often or often. According to the employees' responses, the work environment and the relations among team members have not suffered significantly due to remote work mode. Half of the respondents thought that remote working does not have an impact almost one third responded that it has positive or somewhat positive impact on relations among the team. Still, one fifth of respondents reported that remote work has somewhat negative impact on work environment.

9.2.4   Future of Remote Work

Majority of respondents mentioned increased free time as a benefit for remote working. Most people responded that remote working has a positive or somewhat positive impact on their time management and only 1% responded that remote working would have a negative or somewhat negative impact on their time management.

According to the survey results (Figure 6), most respondents have enjoyed working remotely quite well (42 %) or very well (46 %) and the rest have also enjoyed working remotely occasionally. Especially, employees who live more far away from the office have enjoyed remote working the most. As it can be seen in Figure 6, most of the employees who live close to the office, 0-2 km or 2-5 km away, reported that they enjoy working remotely quite well. Whereas, most of the employees who live further away from the office, 5 km away or more, reported that they enjoy working remotely very well. Majority of the respondents also named saving of time, as a benefit of remote working which is can also be considered as a link to the fact that the distance between home and workplace has an impact on how often employees are willing to work remotely.
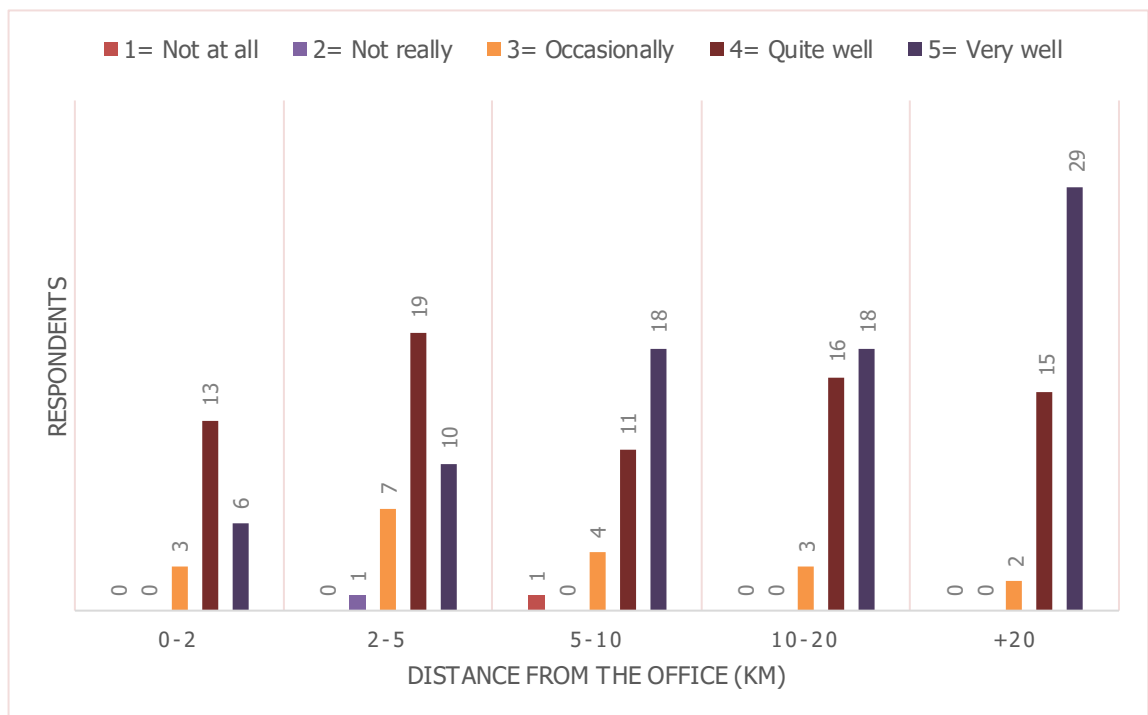
Figure 6. The Relation Between How Well Employees' Have Enjoyed Remote Working & How Far Away Do They Live from the Office.

The respondents mentioned also several challenges that they have come across in remote work. Wellbeing was one significant theme, since, many employees responded that they face challenges related to ergonomics, remembering of having breaks or having too short breaks in between remote work. Some challenges were also related to the

situation at home and family. Some employees found it hard to focus at home due to distractions or to combine family life and work life. Some employees mentioned that they find it hard to draw a line between working time and free time when they are working from home and the work tools are always reachable. According to the results, employees felt that remote working decreases the amount social interaction during workdays since there are no face-to-face meetings, spontaneous discussions or coffee and lunch breaks with colleagues.

In the survey, employees were asked separately what kind of areas of development do they see in their own remote working as well as in their workplace's remote work culture. With these specified questions, employees were expected to pay more attention on what they could improve in their own actions and what kind of issues they have found in the company's policies. Regarding their own remote working, employees commented that they would need to develop their workspaces at home and make it more ergonomic and functional. Responses indicated that employees would need to practice having more breaks and to be more active during breaks instead of sitting still the whole day. They also mentioned that they would like to have more social interaction and communicate more with colleagues.

Some of the respondents experienced that it was more difficult to focus at home due to distractions. Work-life balance turned out to be a challenge for many respondents and they found it difficult to separate work time and free time when they are working from home. Only seeing the computer and other work tools caused anxiety to employees since it makes them think work issues also during free time.

When it comes to the organization's remote work culture, respondents stated that there could be more arranged online meetings since spontaneous conversations and encounters with colleagues are not possible. Some of the employees felt themselves less creative while working remotely. Some respondents commented that they are hoping that employees would always have the freedom to choose whether they want to work remotely or from the office.

The respondents mentioned that there would be room for improvement in communication by having more social interaction. Meetings that were unrelated with work were viewed important considering the relationships among team members. Additionally, respondents mentioned that when there was less social interaction, team members could not learn as much from each other's. Respondents added also that there would have been room for improvement in some employees' communication style. According to the responses, for some employees, it took a long time to response to emails or messages which made the communication inefficient.

10 Data Analysis

10.1.1 Idea & Preferences Related to Remote Work

According to the survey results, employees seemed to be quite pleased with the implementation of remote working at their workplace. Since most of them had previous experience of remote work and it was not a new practice in the company, and therefore, they have possibly adapted to it more rapidly. A significant majority (88 %) had enjoyed remote working, which also tells that the implementation has succeeded quite well. Since the whole personnel has worked remotely during COVID-19, the shift may also have felt more natural for employees. Nine out of ten respondents wanted to continue it in the future as well half of their working time or more and the rest of them would have wanted to continue working completely remotely.

Since, there are significant differences between the age groups' preferences, it is useful to ponder the reasons behind it. According to the survey results, employees in age of 36-45 years were significantly most satisfied with remote working. Employees in this age group are usually in the most age to have small children at home and therefore, remote working might support their work-life balance in that life situation. As majority of the respondents answered in the survey that remote working saves a lot of their time since, they do not have to travel between their home and workplace. Therefore, remote working opportunity can be especially appreciated among employees who have small children due to increased flexibility and time savings.

Older employees in age groups of 46-55 and 56+ were more satisfied with remote working than younger employees in age groups of 18-25 and 26-35. Considering the root cause, older employees usually have more work experience and they have probably already created their own work routines and they cope better independently. Whereas, younger employees usually have less experience and can be more insecure and need more guidance, which can explain the differences between working preferences.

An interesting fact that was found out in the survey results was that employees' roles in the organization have an impact on how often they are willing to work remotely (Figure 2). Half of the directors and managers roles would prefer to work remotely half of their work time and one third of them would prefer to work remotely most of the time. Since, employees in the company have adapted surprisingly well in remote working, it can probable relieve their managers' job as well. Since, majority of the specialists and trainees responded that they had enjoyed working remotely and have a positive attitude towards it, they can be more easily managed. If managers do not have to spend too much time motivating their employees in remote work and helping them adapt to it, it saves their time and can make their work more pleasant.

Especially, employees in specialist roles were significantly most keen on remote working since, since almost 10 % of them would like to work remotely all of their work time and over half of them would like to work remotely most of their work time. There were more spreading among specialists' responses, since, there were also a few specialists who responded that they did not prefer to work remotely at all. However, there were altogether 143 of the total 178 responses to the survey from employees in specialist roles, which makes it easier to make liable conclusions of them. Whereas, only five trainees responded to the survey which makes it more difficult to conduct liable conclusions of them as a group. Trainees' responses were quite unanimous; one of them wanted to continue remote working all of their work time and the rest would prefer to work remotely most of their work time.

Many respondents commented that they had some prejudices about remote working before it became 'the new normal'. They commented that during the COVID-19 pandemic, their idea of remote working had changed. They found out new benefits of it

such as, better possibilities to focus due to decreased distractions and increased work-life balance due to time savings while working from home. They also realized how efficient it was to communicate with the help of digital tools. Since COVID-19 forced the employees to shift to remote work, it also forced them to adapt to the situation. Therefore, the attitudes among employees were probably more approving than if the shift to remote work had been voluntary. Concerns about one's own health as well as other peoples' health impacted probably also in many employees' attitude. All in all, it is positive to notice that the employees' attitudes towards remote work had become more positive over time.

Some respondents had started to appreciate more on-site-working due to the simplicity that it offered and its adequacy in certain tasks. However, this can be a matter of familiarization. Some employees may need more time to adapt in remote work or some practices may require new guidelines and approaches. Employees also realized that they had started to miss social interaction in remote work. All in all, there are always as many different experiences as there are different people. It may be that attitudes and personalities had an impact on these experiences. However, it would beneficial for organizations to collect feedback from their employees to find out what works. In that way organizations could know how to response to their employees' needs and support them in making their workdays as convenient as possible.

According to the results, employees had adopted well in remote work as well as enjoyed it, when the whole organization had shifted into the new way of working. When both the organization and its employees start to realize all the benefits that remote working has to offer, it is possible that they will get used to the flexibility and are willing to continue it more often in the future as well.

10.1.2 Wellbeing & Motivation in Remote Work

The employees were asked how they consider that remote work impacts on them in different areas; work motivation, time management, stress levels, physical wellbeing and work-life balance. The most positively remote work impacted on their work-life balance and work motivation (Figure 3). It impacted also positively on most respondents' time

management. However, some respondents felt that remote work has negative or somewhat negative impacts on their stress levels. An alarmingly large share of respondents (24 %) considered that remote work affects negatively or somewhat negatively on their physical wellbeing.

The employees were asked what could increase their wellbeing in remote work. They mentioned for example, improvement of ergonomics, more social interaction with colleagues and regular breaks during workdays. All employees do not necessarily have similar work tools at home that would support their ergonomics, such as desks, adjustable chairs and a large screen, which they might have at the office. To take their employees' concerns as well as their wellbeing in remote work better into account, the organization could provide them the necessary work tools as fringe benefits. The organization could also encourage their employees to exercise during their breaks. In that way employees' physical activity could be increased and they would remember to have their breaks. When employees remember to have their breaks, it can also increase their productivity, work motivation as well as wellbeing in a long term.

Since employees hoped for more social interaction and especially more informal chatting with their colleagues. Employees commented that increased informal communication with team members could retain their good relationships with them as well as increase their work motivation. Respondents also commented that they would prefer to have more video meetings with colleagues and customers. This can be considered as a sign that employees are missing face-to-face interaction, and some of them did hope to have more face-to-face meetings with colleagues at least every now and then. Obviously, the employees feel like there is less communication when they are working remotely and some of them responded that it decreases the feeling of belongingness and makes them feel themselves alone with their problems.

Scheduling and work-life balance indicated to be issues in remote work among employees. Many of them responded that they have difficulties to draw a line between working hours and free time and remembering to have breaks during their workdays. Employees also commented that seeing their work equipment at home disturbs them during their free time and that they feel like they would be always working since their

office is inside their apartment. In remote work, home and workplace is combined as one same place which can appear as a difficulty for some people. It may require practicing on how to empty one's mind out of work issues after workdays although the environment does not change.

Many respondents shared things that harm their wellbeing in remote work and therefore, it is not a wonder that many of them responded that remote working impacts somewhat negatively on their wellbeing. Employees' wellbeing is not only on their own responsibility but also on employers' responsibility and especially when remote working is somewhat new way of working for many people, it would be beneficial for organizations to establish wellbeing guidance and support their employees in taking care of their ergonomics at home office as well.

All in all, it can be concluded that remote working causes contradictory impacts and experiences among employees. It can simultaneously either increase or decrease employees' wellbeing depending on personality, life situation and preferences. Therefore, it is important for organizations to collect information from their employees and hear their experiences. In that way, organizations can find out which practices are most suitable, what kind of needs their employees have, and how the existing practices could be developed for common good.

According to the responses, many things that would support employees' wellbeing would also impact positively in their work motivation. For example, ergonomics, better working conditions and work-life balance were mentioned as possible sources of motivation. Some respondents commented that the chance to do remote work is already their source of motivation. This indicates that employees appreciate the possibility to do remote work, and especially now that it has become more common, they have realized how effective it can be. However, it cannot be known certainly whether it is a novelty or will this attitude remain among employees in the future as well.

10.1.3 Communication & Team Relations

Communication is an important aspect when it comes to work and team collaboration. In remote working, employees are required to communicate mostly or completely online, since, they do not meet face-to-face often or at all. Therefore, in remote working the importance of communication is emphasized even more. According to the survey responses, many employees felt that they communicate too little with their colleagues and managers while working remotely. Since, the spontaneous discussions at the office are not possible in remote work, communication could be planned and organized more systematically. It could add more social interaction in employees' workdays, decrease feelings of isolation and offer them a lower threshold for asking help from their colleagues when needed.

Employees were asked in the survey, whether they think that there is enough communication between them and their colleagues as well as between them and their manager. Half of the respondents replied that there is enough communication between them and their colleagues, however the other half responded that there could be more or that there is not enough communication. It can be concluded that employees interact less with their colleagues in remote work compared to on-site working, which bothers some of them and can make them feel alone in their work.

The positive side is that, according to the survey results, most employees were satisfied with the amount of communication between them and their manager. Since, the survey was conducted anonymously, it cannot be found out, whether the differences existed due to different managers or employees' varying needs. Some managers can be more experienced in leading remote teams or they may have put more effort in adjusting their management methods in the changing work culture than others. All employees did not have previous experience of remote working which can also have an impact on how quickly they are able to adapt to it. More experienced workers can be more independent and do not need as much consulting or feedback from their managers, whereas younger employees may adapt more easily into virtual work environment. Different employees have different preferences on how much communication they need from their manager and how they experience remote working in general. All these factors can have an impact

on how satisfied employees are with their managers' communication methods. Therefore, the experiences cannot be predicted, and it is important to listen to the employees' experiences and make improvements according to that feedback.

Feedback is also significant in work and especially in remote work since, the communication can differ quite a lot from the on-site communication. When people are not communicating face-to-face, many things fall out, for example, gestures and feelings. It can be more difficult to find out what the opposite side is thinking or what the atmosphere is like, when people cannot read each other's gestures. Almost half of the respondents answered that they had gotten enough feedback, which is positive. However, over one third of the respondents felt that there could have been more feedback and even every tenth respondent felt that they did not get enough feedback. All in all, there is quite a lot of spreading between the respondents' experiences considering feedback. Again, it cannot be concluded from the survey results, whether the spreading is due to different management styles or differences between employees' personalities or work experience. However, it could be beneficial for the company to establish organizational guidelines for remote managing and especially for giving feedback.

The employees were also asked how often they felt themselves alone or isolated from their team due to remote work. Luckily, majority of them responded never or seldom, however, even one fifth of respondents responded occasionally and one of ten respondents responded, quite often or often. It would be important that employees would feel themselves included to retain a high work motivation and therefore, this is something that could be concentrated more and improved on organizational level.

According to the employees' responses, the work environment and the relations among team members had not suffered significantly due to the remote work mode. Majority, half of the respondents, thought that remote working did not have an impact on team relations. This can be considered as positive result, since the aim is that remote work would work a fluently as non-remote working. Almost one third responded that it has positive or somewhat positive impact however, one fifth of respondents reported that remote work has somewhat negative impact on work environment. These results can be

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

considered quite good; however, it would be beneficial to consider the concerns related to negative impacts on team relations. There is always a reason behind the concerns that is good to be able to develop already existing practices.

10.1.4 Future of Remote Work

According to the survey results, most respondents have enjoyed working remotely quite well, very well or at least occasionally. These positive results create a good starting point for the future to continue remote working in the future as well. Majority of respondents mentioned increased free time and better time management as benefits for remote working. When employees can work from their homes, it offers them more flexibility. Since, remote working employees do not have to spend time in commuting from their homes to their workplaces, it can bring significant time savings for some of them. Especially, employees who live more far away from the office, 5 km away or more, have enjoyed remote working the most. Therefore, it can be inferred that the distance how far away employees live from their workplace, has an impact on how often they are willing to work remotely rather than from the office.

Although, the respondents were generally happy with remote working, they also mentioned several challenges that they had come across. The concerns regarding wellbeing were included in several responses, such as challenges related to ergonomics, forgetting to have breaks or having too short breaks in between remote work. According to the responses, daily remote working is something new for most of the employees and therefore, it still requires some practice to. The company could also provide more tips and guidelines for its employees to support them in adjusting into remote work. Even with little changes, significant improvements could be made to support employees' convenient and effective remote working.

Some employees found it hard to focus at home due to distractions or to combine their family life and work life. Some employees also mentioned that they find it hard to separate the working time and free time when they are working from home and the work tools are always in sight. This can be considered as a somewhat contradictory issue, since, some employees experience that remote working improves their work-life

balance whereas, some of them experience it totally oppositely. It is important that employees recognize these problems and can share these experiences, in order to overcome their challenges. These challenges can be winnable, however, it may also be that remote working suits better for some people than others, for example, to certain type of people.

In the survey, employees were asked what could be developed in their own remote working as well as in their workplace's remote work culture. Regarding their own remote working, employees commented that they could have developed their workspaces at home and made them more ergonomic and functional. Responses indicated also that employees had to practice having more breaks and being more active during breaks instead of sitting still the whole day. Respondents also mentioned that they would have liked to have more social interaction and communicate more with colleagues. Since, in remote working spontaneous conversations are not possible, it can cause information disconnects and weaken relationships within a team. Therefore, it would be important that the company would establish organizational guidelines regarding team communication Team managers can also play in a significant role here, and by encouraging their team members they can help in strengthening relations within the team.

Some of the respondents experienced that it was more difficult to focus at home due to distractions as well as retain a good work-life balance in remote work. If employees are still getting used to working from home, it can be challenging challenge to separate work time and free time. When the environment is the same the whole day, it can be difficult to wind down after a workday. Therefore, it would be useful that employees would spend their free time also elsewhere than at home to be able to relax and to direct their thoughts on something else. Since, seeing the computer and other work tools at home caused anxiety to employees, it could be a good idea to clean the work tools out of sight after workday if there is not a possibility to have a separated office room at home for work.

When it comes to the organization's remote work culture, the respondents mentioned that there would be room for improvement in communication by having more social

interaction, especially more informal meetings. Respondents added that there could be more arranged online meetings since spontaneous conversations and encounters with colleagues are not possible. Informal meetings can help new employees to get to know their colleagues better and support their integration into the team. When employees know each other's better, they usually share more empathy, which can increase their job satisfaction and work motivation. Additionally, respondents mentioned that when there was less social interaction, team members could not learn as much from each other's. It would be important that employees have the possibility to share knowledge. Not only it can increase the atmosphere and trust among employees, but also it gives them an opportunity to develop professionally, both individually and as a work community. These challenges could be solved by establishing different online meetings with colleagues that would allow employees to use their creativity and share their thoughts freely. Some of the employees felt themselves less creative while working remotely which can be a consequence of decreased social interaction and brainstorming.

The results indicated that there could have been room for improvement in some employees' communication style. According to the responses, for some employees, it took a long time to reply to emails or messages which made the communication inefficient. Ignoring colleagues can be easier in remote work and therefore, organizations could establish their guidance for remote work communication. Since online communication is the only way to communicate, it must be efficient. Even if employees are busy, they should inform their colleagues how long it will take that they are available again whether, it is by an automatic email or a direct response. Many times, only receiving the information about what will happen and when, can calm a person. If the suggested timing is too late, the sender is still able to send the message forward and ask help from someone else.

A couple responses indicated that remote work could be always an option for employees to choose. These employees wished that they could have the possibility every day to choose, whether they want to work from home or from the office. These comments indicate that employees see remote work as an effective way of working and they have possibly got used to it already quite well. Some of them might feel that remote working

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

increases their life quality or supports their work-life balance, and therefore, consider that it should be an available option for them every day in the future as well.

11 Conclusion

Remote working is becoming increasingly more common way of working and it is an appreciated possibility among employees nowadays. It offers several benefits such as flexibility for employees in organizing their workdays, as well as, employers can benefit from having a larger talent pool available since jobs are not tied to a certain location. However, remote work has also some challenges such as decreased communication between employees and decreased work-life balance due to difficulties in separating work time and free time. There is not much research available considering how remote work impacts on employees' life quality, especially among employees who live alone. It is important to take the mental effects of remote work into consideration, and therefore it would be beneficial to further research the long-term effects on remote workers' life quality and mental health.

COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations all around the world to adapt rapidly in remote working culture, however, the development stage of each economy affects significantly on how well societies can adapt to the new way of working. All in all, remote work entails both positive and negative aspects, and it is important that organizations are aware of them. In that way organizations can recognize the benefits and the challenges, and finally overcome the challenges and succeed in remote work. It would be beneficial also for governments to implement plans to support organizations in transition to remote work and for organizations to develop their remote work practices and policies.

The research data of this thesis were collected in a form of a survey. The results could be utilized especially for similar companies, financial services companies based in Finland. However, to be able to utilize research information in companies abroad or from different industries, remote working experiences, it would require further researching with matching target groups. The survey included questions such as about employees' remote work experiences, what could have been improved and whether they were willing to continue it in the future as well. The results of the Remote Work Survey can be

considered to be reliable and valid, since, the respondent rate was relatively high. Over 70 % of the employees who were invited to participate in the survey, did leave their responses. The study was conducted anonymously among employees of the same employer, Company X. In that way, employees were given a freedom to share their experiences honestly without revealing their identity. Since, all the respondents shared the employer, the results were also more comparable.

To conclude, the employees of Company X had been generally satisfied with remote working. Altogether, 9 % of the repondents would have wanted to continue remote working all of their working time. However, if the COVID-19 virus would decrease in the near future, employees would not have to work remotely all the time. Instead, they could have more freedom to choose how much they would like to work remotely. People have different attitudes towards remote working, and for some personalities it might suit better than the others. Therefore, organizations could offer their employees different options on how to work remotely to support their performance and job satisfaction. In this way, organizations can ensure that their employees can adapt more easily in remote work as well as enjoy it, which can improve their motivation and ability to work in a long term.

Majority of the survey respondents experienced that remote working affects positively on their work motivation and work-life balance. However, many respondents also felt that remote work affects negatively on their physical wellbeing and some of them had also encountered its negative effects on their stress levels. The collected data includes valuable information of employees' experiences and preferences on remote work. However, there could be more research made related to remote work in different fields to be able to utilize the results in different companies. It is important to collect this kind of information that can help organizations to find out their employees' needs and to develop a remote work culture that supports employees work motivation and ability to work.

References

Areheart, B. A., & Roberts, J. L. (2019, January 1). GINA, Big Data, and the Future of Employee Privacy. The Yale law journal, 28(3), 710.

Bader, J. (2019). The Dangers of Employee Monitoring. Door Security + Safety (Vol. 83, Issue 4), 83(4), 50.

Bana, S. H., Benzell, S. G., & Solares, R. R. (2020). Ranking How National Economies Adapt to Remote Work. MIT Sloan management review, 61(4), 1-5.

Chang, S. E., Liu, A. Y., & Lin, S. (2015). Exploring privacy and trust for employee monitoring. Industrial Management & Data Systems, 115(1), 88-106.

Fica, T. (2020). 5 Essential Tips For Working Remotely. Talent Management Excellence Essentials.

Gagne, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work. Journal of organizational behavior, 2005, Vol., 26(4), 331-362.

Grant, C. A., Wallace, L. M., & Spurgeon, P. C. (2013). An exploration of the psychological factors affecting remote e-worker's job effectiveness, well-being and work-life balance. Employee Relations 35, Iss. 5, (2013): 527-546., 35(5), 527-546. doi:10.1108/ER-08-2012-0059

Graziano, M. (2016). 6 Myths of Employee Engagement. Print + Promo, 54(3), 16,18. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.metropolia.fi/docview/1779242916?pq-origsite=primo>

Guantario, G. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on the future of work. Reseller Middle East.

Jackson, D. (2020). A pandemic, remote work and 'the new normal'. Urgent Communications.

Johnson, W. (2019). Leading Remotely. MIT Sloan Management Review, 61(1), 1-4. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.op.idm.oclc.org/docview/2335159873?accountid=39660>

Keeling, T., Clements-Croome, D., & Roesch, E. (2015). The Effect of Agile Workspace and Remote Working on. Buildings, 5(3), 880-898.

Kiser, A. I., Porter, T., & Vequist, D. (2010). Employee Monitoring and Ethics: Can They Co-Exist? International Journal of Digital Literacy and Digital Competence. Retrieved from
<http://bi.gale.com.op.idm.oclc.org/global/article/GALE%7CA429336305?u=per_dcop >
Kohen, I. (2020, 8 18). Monitoring Best Practices: How to Oversee a Hybrid Workforce Without Compromise. Retrieved from HR Daily Advisor: <https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2020/08/18/monitoring-best-practices-how-to-oversee-a-hybrid-workforce-without-compromise/>

Kuehner-Hebert, K. (2019). Remote work comes with its share of challenges. BenefitsPRO.

Latham, G. P., & Pinder, C. C. (2005). Work Motivation Theory and Research at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century. Annual review of psychology, 56(1), 485-516.
Malinowska, D., Tokarz, A., & Wardzichowska, A. (2018). Job autonomy in relation to work engagement and workaholism: mediation of autonomous and controlled work motivation. International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, 31(4), 445-458.

Market Business News. (2020, 7 23). What is telecommuting? Definition and meaning. Retrieved from Market Business News: <https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/telecommuting-definition-meaning/>

Mautz, S. (2019). The Future Of Remote Work Is Happening Now. Here's How To Make It Work For You. Workforce Management.

Michael, R., & Smith, S. (2015). Building Ergonomics into Remote Work Policies. Risk Management, 62(9), 12,14.

Mullen, R. (2017). IBM Shutters Remote Work: Should You Too?: Flexibility of location. Workforce Management (Time and Attendance) Excellence Essentials. Retrieved 7 23, 2020

Murphy, M. (2017). Keeping remote work secure. Canadian HR Reporter, 30(15), 11.

Olafsen, A. H., Deci, E. L., & Halvari, H. (2018). Basic psychological needs and work motivation: A longitudinal test of directionality. Motivation and Emotion, 42(2), 178-189. doi:DOI:10.1007/s11031-017-9646-2

Orsini, C., & Rodrigues, V. (2020). Supporting motivation in teams working remotely: The role of basic psychological needs. Medical Teacher, 42(7), 828-829. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1758305>

Petty, A. (2017). Rethinking Remote Work. Atlantic Media.

Quicke, S. (2009). Clear benefits of remote working. TechTarget, 7-8. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.metropolia.fi/docview/227986241?accountid=11363>

Raizman, C. (2020, June). How HR Teams Can Support Employee Wellness While Working Remote. Employee Benefits and Wellness Excellence Essentials. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.metropolia.fi/docview/2425010969?accountid=11363>

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

Rupietta, K., & Beckmann, M. (2018, February). Working from Home What is the Effect on Employees' Effort? Schmalenbach Business Review, 70(1), 25-55. Retrieved from Schmalenbach Business Review: ZFBF; Düsseldorf Vol. 70, Iss. 1, (Feb 2018): 25-55. DOI:10.1007/s41464-017-0043-x.

Staples, D. S. (2001). A study of remote workers and their differences from non-remote workers. Journal of End User Computing, 13(2), 3-14. doi:10.4018/joeuc.2001040101

The Centre for Occupational Healthy. (2020, 9 26). Remote work and agreeing on related routines. Retrieved from The Centre for Occupational Healthy: <https://ttk.fi/files/7262/Remote-work-agreement-template.pdf>

Wiik, N. (2020). The Remote Revolution: Preparing for the boom in distributed work with data-based insights. A V Technology, 13(3), 42.

Viktorovich, K. E., Rozentsvaig, A. I., Bakhteeva, E. I., Soshnikova, I. V., & Sherpaev, V. I. (2020). The Development of Remote Workers With Disability for Entrepreneurship System. Journal of Entrepreneurship Education, 23(1), 1-10.

Wynter, A. (2020, June). Managing The New Remote Work Reality. HR Strategy and Planning Excellence Essentials. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.metropolia.fi/docview/2425010330?accountid=11363>

Appendix 1

Remote Work Survey

Background Questions

1. In which age group do you belong? *
   - ○ 18-25
   - ○ 26-35
   - ○ 36-45
   - ○ 46-55
   - ○ 56+

2. What is your role in the organization *
   - ○ Director / Manager
   - ○ Speacialist / Employee
   - ○ Trainee

3. Did you have experience of working remotely before the Covid-19 pandemic started? *
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

4. How far away do you live from the office? *
   - ○ 0-2 km
   - ○ 2-5 km
   - ○ 5-10 km
   - ○ 10-20 km
   - ○ + 20km

Questions 1/3

The first set of Survey Questions focuses on your idea and preferences about remote working.

5. How well the implementation of remote working at your workplace has met your expectations?

	5=very well	4=well	3=somewhat	2=not really	1=not at all
	○	○	○	○	○

6. What kind of prejudices did you have towards remote working before it became 'the new normal'?

Enter your answer

7. Has your idea of remote working changed? If you replied yes, explain how?

○ No

○ Other

8. Have you enjoyed remote working?

○ Very well

○ Quite well

○ Occasionally

○ Not really

○ Not at all

9. Would you like to continue remote working, how often?

○ 100 % of the working time

○ Most of the working time

○ 50 % of the working time

○ Occasionally

○ No, 0 % of working the time

10. What kind of impact does remote work have on your...

	Positive	Somewhat positive	Neutral, no impact	Somewhat negative	Negative
...work motivation?	○	○	○	○	○
...stress levels?	○	○	○	○	○
...physical wellbeing?	○	○	○	○	○
...work-life balance?	○	○	○	○	○

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

11. What could increase your motivation in remote work?

> Enter your answer

12. What could increase your wellbeing in remote work?

> Enter your answer

Section 3   · ·

Questions 2/3

The second set of Survey Questions focuses on communication and relations with your colleagues and manager.

13. What kind of impact does remote working have on the work environment / relations within the team?

- ⭕ Positive
- ⭕ Somewhat positive
- ⭕ Neutral, no impact
- ⭕ Somewhat negative
- ⭕ Negative

14. Is there enough communication between you and your colleagues while you are working remotely?

- ⭕ Yes
- ⭕ There could be more
- ⭕ No
- ⭕ I cannot say

15. Is there enough communication between you and your manager while you are working remotely?

- ⭕ Yes
- ⭕ There could be more
- ⭕ No
- ⭕ I cannot say

16. Do you get enough feedback while working remotely?

- ⭕ Yes
- ⭕ There could be more
- ⭕ No
- ⭕ I cannot say

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences

17. How often do you feel left alone / isolated from the rest of the team due to remote work?

○ Never

○ Seldom

○ Occasionally

○ Quite often

○ Often

18. Does manager's effort have a significant impact on the fluency of remote work?

○ Yes

○ Somewhat yes

○ No

○ I cannot say

19. What kind of impact does remote working have on your time management?

○ Positive

○ Somewhat positive

○ Neutral, no impact

○ Somewhat negative

○ Negative

Section 4   ...

Questions 3/3

The third set of Survey Questions focuses on your view about the future of remote work.

20. What benefits do you see in remote working?

Enter your answer

21. What challenges/areas of development do you see in your remote working?

Enter your answer

22. What challenges/areas of development do you see in the remote work culture of your workplace?

Enter your answer

Metropolia
University of Applied Sciences