

Communities of Practice (CoP's) and Knowledge Management (KM) practices in relation to remote working

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Tiivistelmä

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Työn nimi Käytäntöyhteisöt ja tietojohdaminen etätöiden näkökulmasta		
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Tiivistelmä <p>Tämä tutkimus keskittyi tutkimaan mitä muutoksia etätöet on tuonut käytäntöyhteisöjen (CoP's) ja tietojohdamisen (KM) käytäntöihin. Etätöet itsessään on ollut suuri muutos suurelle osalle yrityksille. Etätöet on vaikuttaneet miten käytännöt muodostuvat virtuaalisesti ja miten tietoa jaetaan. Tehokkaan käytäntöyhteisöjen sekä tietojohdamisen käytäntöjen muodostaminen etätöissä on strategisesti välttämätöntä, jotta yritykset säilyttävät kilpailukykyänsä ja pystyy hyödyntämään työvoimaa globaalisti. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli löytää suurimmat muutokset käytäntöyhteisöjen ja tietojohdamisen käytännöissä etätöissä.</p> <p>Tutkimus oli laadullinen ja tutkimusmenetelmänä käytettiin avoimia haastattelu kysymyksiä tapaustutkimus lähestymistapaa käyttäen. Tutkimus hyödynsi aiempia teorioita käytäntöyhteisöistä (CoP's), virtuaalisista käytäntöyhteisöistä (VCoP's) sekä tietojohdamisesta ja tutki niitä etätöiden näkökulmasta. Tutkimuskysymyksiin vastauksia tutkija keräsi avoimista haastattelukysymyksistä empiiriseen osioon ja teoreettiseen osioon tutkimuksen kirjallisuuskatsauksen kautta. Teoreettinen viitekehys tutkimukselle koostui kirjallisuuskatsauksesta ja havainnointiin empiiriseen tutkimusosioon kohden. Tutkimustulokset saavutettiin empiirisen ja teoreettisen osioita hyväksi käyttäen.</p> <p>Tutkimus väittää että tietojohdaminen tiedon jaon ja siirtäminen kannalta ovat säilyneet jokseenkin samoina. Näiden eroavaisuus määrite on aika, kuinka paljon online-työkaluja ja alustoja käytetään etätöissä tiedon jaon ja siirtämisen käytetään. Luonnollisesti, online-työkalujen ja alustojen tarjonta ja moninaisuus ovat kasvaneet etätöissä. Haastattelujen perusteella, kasvokkainen vuorovaikutus ja kohtaaminen on jäänyt pois etätöiden myötä. Tutkimus selvitti, että käytäntöyhteisöjen suhteen uusien työntekijöiden perehdyttäminen ja konfliktien käsittely on haasteellisempaa etänä. Haastattelujen perusteella, sosiaalisten kanssakäymisten sekä kasvokkaisen vuorovaikutuksen puute on taipumuksena jättää persoonattoman ja eristäytyneen tunteen, sillä ilmeet, eleet ja kehonkieli puuttuu etätöissä. Kuitenkin, tämä tutkimus väittää, että etätöiden tuomat muutokset käytäntöyhteisöjen ja tietojohdamisen näkökulmasta ovat painoarvoltaan suuremmat kuin kasvokkaisessa kanssakäymisessä.</p>		
Asiasanat Käytäntöyhteisö, virtuaalinen käytäntöyhteisö, tietojohdaminen, etätö, laadullinen tutkimus		

Abstract

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Title of Publication Communities of Practice (CoP's) and Knowledge Management (KM) practices in relation to remote working		
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Abstract <p>This research focused on the changes remote working has initiated in regards of communities of practice (CoP) and knowledge management (KM) practices. Remote working itself has been a major change for many areas of businesses and has affected the way communities are formed and knowledge is shared. Having and developing efficient CoP's and KM practices in the new norm of remote working is strategically crucial for businesses to strive and remain competitive and be able to utilize workforce on a global scale. The aim of the research was to find out the major changes that CoP's and KM practices have undergone within the remote working environment.</p> <p>The research was a qualitative research and the research method consisted of open-ended interview questions in which the case study approach was chosen. This thesis used prior studied theories on CoP's, VCoP's, and KM practices and examined them through remote working conditions. In the aims of answering the research questions, the researcher utilized open-ended interview questions to gather the empirical data and the theoretical part through the literature review of the thesis. The theoretical framework of the research was conducted through the literature review of the research and observed towards the empirical findings of the research. The main research findings and conclusions were conducted through the empirical research findings in addition to the theoretical part of the research.</p> <p>The research asserts that KM practices in terms of knowledge sharing, and transferring have remained rather same. The differentiation attribute is time the online tools and platforms are utilized in knowledge sharing and transferring. Naturally, some variety of online tools and platforms have increase along remote working. According to the conducted interviews inevitably the face-to-face encounters are lacking in the remote working environment. Regarding CoP's, the research found out that orienting new employees and dealing with conflicts are considered more challenging in the remote working environment. The lack of social encounters and face-to-face interactions tend to leave an impersonal and isolated feeling since facial expression and body language are nonexistent according to the interviewees. This research asserts that the changes remote working has brought in regards of CoP's and KM practices are bigger in value in comparison to face-to-face encounters in the physical office environment.</p>		
Keywords Communities of practice (CoP's), virtual communities of practice (VCoP's), knowledge management (KM), remote working, qualitative research		

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1 INTRODUCTION

The remote working concept has only increased with the current COVID-19 pandemic. Safe to say, remote working has brought the ability of having more flexible working hours and facilitated the combination of personal and working life. Numerous research have already been conducted in relation to remote working and its impact on employees. Many companies concurrently execute personnel inquiries regarding remote working and evaluate the satisfaction it may bring to employees. As Cook, S. (2019, p. 14) states, remote working conditions are only increasing and becoming more and more popular in regards of new and younger workforce. Therefore, the future will inevitably create agile and virtual teams. Cook, S. (2019, p. 65) continues to explain that whilst teams are expanding within the scope of remote and virtual teams, the need for active management is only highlighted.

In order for a productive collaboration in teams, it needs functional and efficient management. Managing knowledge within a beneficial and efficient way in an organization, needs clear definition and strategy behind it. Like Brelade, S. and Harman, C. (2003, p. 5) point out, there are several different ways to define knowledge management. One organization may implicate that knowledge management is a *“process of transferring knowledge from one place to another”* hereby enabling the organization itself to an effective and quick problem-solving solution. Others may implicate knowledge management as a *systematic approach*, where the relevant information is available to be used by the correct individuals. Individuals who can differentiate and perceive the applicable information and utilize it. On a larger scale knowledge management can be seen as a *“process of linking the right people to the right information at the right time”*. The link and common denominators between all the prior definitions of knowledge management lies within people and information. (Brelade, S. and Harman, C. 2003, p. 5)

This chapter gives insights to the thesis overall topic, which includes theoretical aspects around knowledge management (later KM), knowledge transfer and creation as well as key concepts on communities of practice (later CoP's) and virtual communities of practice (VCoP's). In addition, the chapter provides insights on key areas and points around remote working and implementing CoP's and KM practices to virtual communities that remote working proposes to the new normal working environment. The chapter provides information on what knowledge management is and what are the key concepts around it and its transfer. This research provides insights on how implementing CoP's and knowledge management practices are present in the trends of remote working and virtual communities today and how they have changed in the face of remote working.

1.1 Background of the research

Technology has evolved and with it has brought enhanced accessibility to information and knowledge, it allowed for information and databases to become available within seconds. Knowledge management focuses on people and the information and knowledge that people within themselves acquire and transfer. Knowledge management plays a huge role within companies where teams work remotely, it is vital that they can transfer knowledge with each other quite rapidly and effortlessly. As the trends of remote working only increases within the near future, managing knowledge and transferring is becoming more valuable and valid. In addition, forming virtual communities and new ways of operating in them is equally important in the virtual or remote environment. However, it can also be argued that these factors around CoP's have had the opposite effect, making the management and transfer of knowledge less significant in a CoP, since one can now choose the location of work and build communities virtually from the comfort of one's home. This decrease in physical contact and interaction brings about the question of: how can companies successfully manage and operate a VCoP's and which factors could lead to its success or failure?

Due to technological advantages and developments, companies now face new challenges in the areas of remote working and virtual communities. Increasing efficiency and decreasing overall costs are inevitably in every companies' agendas and objectives, thus sharing and using the valuable knowledge that everyone

has is crucial and companies are interested in identifying the potential challenges for the future.

In the ever-competitive environment with the supported technology all around us at the press of a button, organizations need to adapt, develop, and implement communities of practice and knowledge management practices to tackle global competitiveness. The general trend today is towards nurturing collaborations virtually without boundaries, across time and distance. This attribute of flexibility from the employer is seen more and more ideal and attractive for employees (Cook, S. p. 14, 2019).

1.2 Research objectives and questions

The objectives of this thesis are to explain and gather information about the changes KM practices and CoP's have undertaken in relation to remote working. The thesis will include explanations for the importance of the community of practice concept and knowledge management and how companies utilize these areas in the organizational operations in working remotely. The main concentration in this thesis is on companies that provide customer service and assistance. The empirical part of the thesis will examine the experience and undergone changes of remote working from the management point of view in addition to gathering the employee's perspective. Furthermore, the research aims to identify changed behaviors and factors when knowledge is shared remotely in a virtual environment where personal emotions are lacking and unbiased.

Based on the objectives of this thesis the main research question is defined as follows:

- ***How has remote working changed companies' approach to communities of practice (CoP's) and knowledge management (KM) practices?***

To answer the main research questions, the thesis will include answers to sub-questions:

- ***What value do CoP's and KM practices provide an organization?***

- *How are knowledge management practices utilized in remote working?*
- *Why effective knowledge management and communities of practice are beneficial to companies and to remote working?*

1.3 Theoretical framework and literature review

The theoretical framework provides the overall outlook and standpoints to the overall research. In this research the theoretical outlook consists of knowledge management and its practices, communities of practice and value creation aspects as well as the implications these will have on remote working and virtual communities, particularly where knowledge sharing happens. For example, inefficient and disorganized knowledge management practices will presumably not provide value to an organization nor will it help in development of an organization. The lack of communities of practice and missing the feeling of belongingness will not provide a positive outcome. On the contrary, the feeling of belonging to something and having mutual goals and outcomes is seen a highly valuable to an organization.

Figure 1 below shows the overall theoretical framework of the research. It aims to demonstrate, how knowledge management (KM) and communities of practice (CoP's) are interlinked with remote working. It also visualizes the value chains between them and the change aspect.

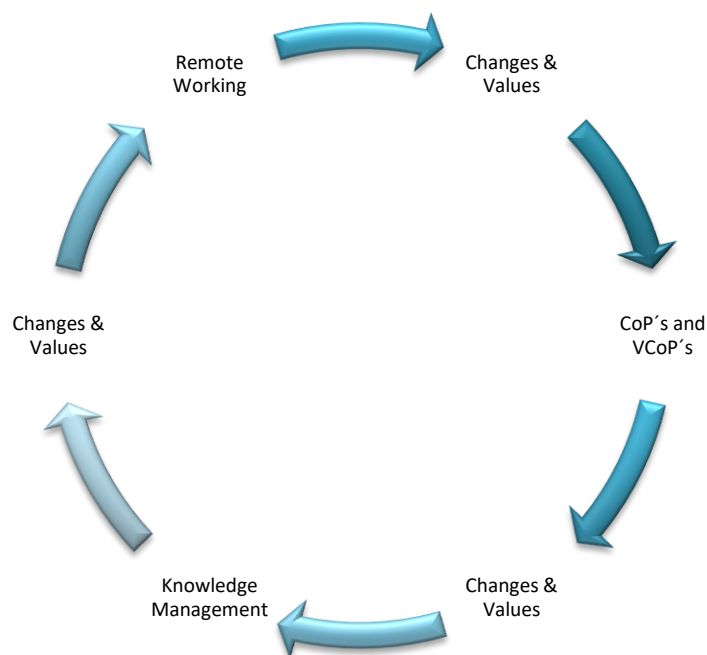


Figure 1. Theoretical framework. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

The literature review part provides an outline of the used literature and topics in the thesis. It mainly focuses on what has already been studied and how it was implemented. It provides the reader an understanding on how this thesis is connected to the prior studies and theories. (Rowe, F. 2014, pp. 241-242) As stated by Shryen (2013) and cited by Rowe, F. (2014 p. 243) the literature review not only provides a summary, but furthermore defines *“What we already know, what we still need to know, and how we can get there”*. Theories on knowledge management practices as well as communities of practice have been vastly studied and researched in the past. However, what the current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in is remote working and virtual communities.

As Moore, K. & Birkinshaw, J. (1998) state, effective practices on creating and sharing knowledge is beneficial in large global service companies. Knowledge management is stated to be an action of creating, sharing, acquiring, and capturing knowledge to improve organizations operations and performance (Easterby-Smith, M. and Lyles, MA 2011, p. 155). As asserted by Bo, B.N. (2005, p.4) in an article, the 21st century is a knowledge-based economy where most embedded value in companies is found through knowledge assets.

As Tsui, E. & Kinghorn, J. (2011) state, the need for not only knowledge and information sharing but also the need for belongingness in a group, the feel for a mutual community and a common ground to meet people and friends are factors that are expected as well as received in a virtual community. Tsui, E. and Kinghorn, J. (2011) also highlight the importance of trust within a community; where trust is the fostering, knowledge will be more likely to emerge. And where there is a lack of trust the sharing of knowledge will also be diminished.

1.4 Delimitations

Communities of practice (CoP's) and knowledge management (KM) practices are a widely studied and researched topics and this research aims to find out how these practices have now changed in the new era of remote working and virtual environments. The population of the research is narrowed down to a total of eight people: three from management and five from employee side.

The delimitations of the thesis will be around a customer service companies with little or no experience on remote working apart from the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. Excluding two interviewees, where the companies are around education and human resource. Examining these through the perspective of the management of remote working conditions and virtual communities. Since the area of knowledge management and community of practice is a part of everyday working environment; the information transfer and sharing are more adaptable when it happens face-to-face. Where the traditional way of sharing knowledge happens face-to-face, organizations face new challenges through remote working and virtual communities. As a delimitation, this research focuses on these remote working conditions and virtual communities.

1.5 Definitions of the key concepts and theories

This paragraph demonstrates key concepts which are repeatedly used throughout the thesis. This paragraph aims to provide a better understanding and mentality for the reader while going through the thesis.

Knowledge management (KM): There are several definitions for knowledge management, but as Nemati, H.R. (2002) states knowledge management explains causations of understanding the benefits to building companies' effective performance, operations and ensuring predictions on different business model outcomes.

Tacit knowledge: *"We know more than we can tell"* by Michael Polanyi which just may be his most well-known quotes as referred to by John, S.B. and Duguid, P. (2001) in their scholarly journal *"Knowledge and organization: A social-practice perspective"*. They claim tacit knowledge as challenging to transfer and difficult to articulate.

Explicit knowledge: Where tacit knowledge is the imbedded knowledge within people, explicit knowledge is the *"know-what"* as Machado, C. & Davim, JP. (2014) continue to explain. Explicit knowledge consists of rules and facts and as Machado, C. & Davim, JP. (2014, p. 23) state is a form of people-to-document approach.

Embedded knowledge: As Nemati, H.R. (2002) indicates embedded knowledge is something within us, something that is not easily nor successfully redeveloped or moved. Madhavan, R. and Grover, R. (1998) explain embedded knowledge as stores of tacit knowledge in individual team members'.

Community of practice (CoP): A community within an organizational environment is defined as a group of people with common goals, tasks, interests, and shared values (Hardina, D. pp.26-29, 2012). Drath, WH. & Palus, CJ (1994) begin by explaining meaning-making consisting of frameworks, a cognitive and emotional framework which then leads to a community of practice.

According to a paper by International COKM 2011 *"Knowledge sharing and virtual communities from the International Conference on Knowledge Management 2009"*, CoP's are the common arena where knowledge sharing happens, and it acts as a cherished tool of knowledge management.

Virtual communities of practice (VCoP's): As Behal, A. (2019, pp. 15-37) asserts that communities are everywhere, and everyone is a part of a community of

sort. Whether it being a form of a community at work or through another type of social belongingness, shared tasks and goals and mutual engagements are aspects around a community. Virtual communities are communities which are impersonal and happen online and as published by International COKM 2011 “*Knowledge sharing and virtual communities from the International Conference on Knowledge Management 2009*” journal, usually is through technological enhancements and tools.

Remote working: As stated by Cook, S. (p.12, 2019) the technology today enables remote working conditions to happen and be more common. Not to have a fixed location and working hours, but to have more flexibility in the environment and timeline of work. Cook, S. continues to explain remote working as a competitive advantage, an attraction aspect of an employer.

1.6 Research structure

The first parts of the thesis concentrate on the theoretical frameworks to provide the reader equivalent knowledge on the theoretical aspects the thesis will focus on. The following parts provide proper overall knowledge on the key theories as well as concepts that are being discussed throughout the thesis. The thesis includes crucial terminology and explanations on scenarios around knowledge management (KM), communities of practice (CoP’s), virtual communities of practice (VCoP’s), and remote working.

The last chapters and parts of the thesis will focus on the chosen research methodology and the empirical elements of the research. The actual findings, future research recommendations and thorough analysis of the empirical findings will appear in the last chapter of the thesis.

The overall research structure is presented in Figure 2 below. The structure in the Figure 2 includes five different parts of the thesis. The first part of the thesis is the introduction, second includes the theories, third asserts the research methodology, fourth presents the empirical research and findings and the final introduces the conclusion and discussions.

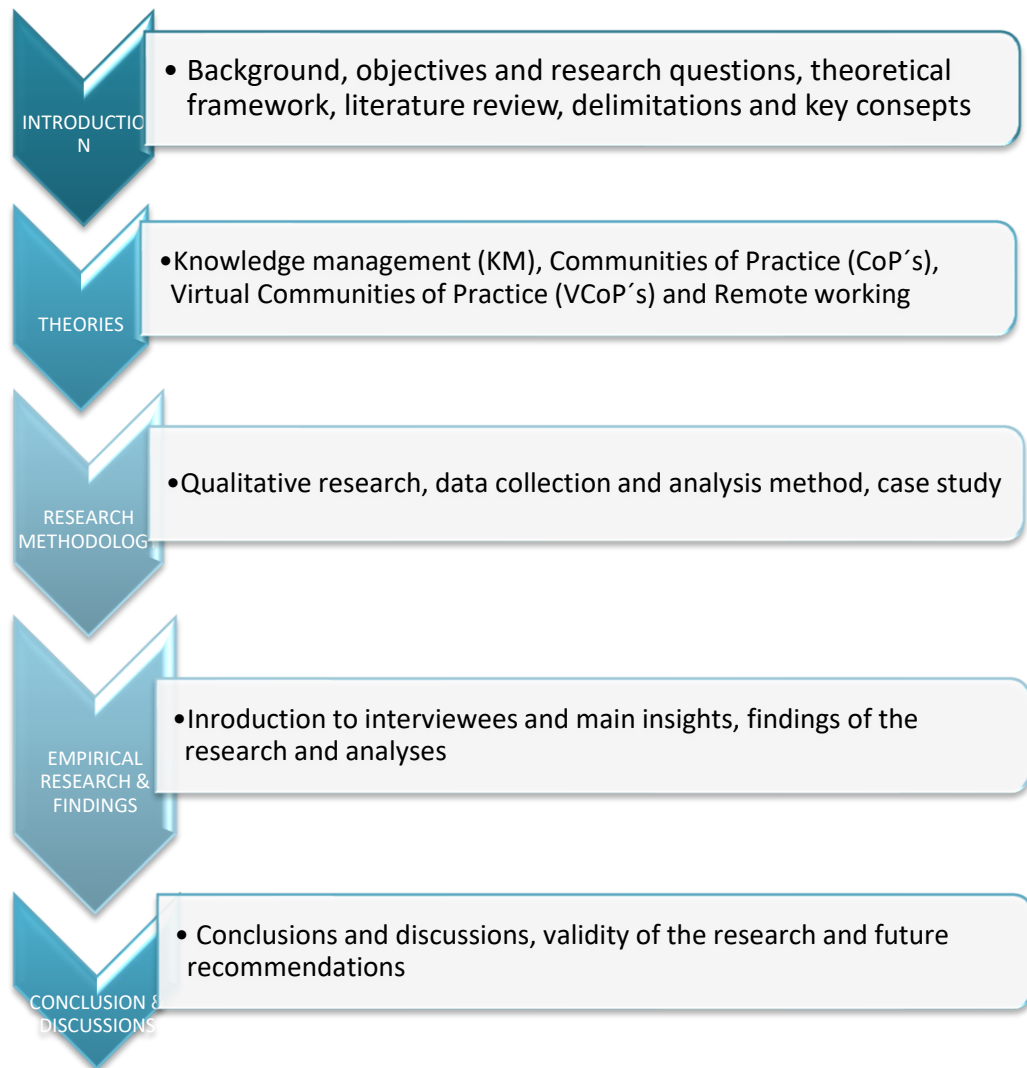


Figure 2. Research structure. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

2 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

This chapter of the thesis will explain one of the fundamental theories. The following should provide the reader a solid understanding on, what knowledge management is, how it is formed and why it may be important for research question. As the earliest studies on knowledge and knowledge management goes back decades, knowledge management today is taught and utilized in the everyday working life. Knowledge management and how it works within an organization cannot be measured by statistics or numbers. It is not numeric data, a system

regarding information technology nor a control tool. How knowledge and knowledge management is defined depends largely on how an individual interprets it. What is the individual's own experiences and intuitions and how knowledge is shared and received? As a result, knowledge management may be hard to define, follow and utilized. Hence, organizations need to build clear structures on how to operate with knowledge management practices and how they are best taken into practice. What may seem simple and ideal for some, may not be for some others. Knowledge management at its best will provide efficiency and value to collaboration in teams.

Appreciation and the act of communicating are key in defining knowledge. Unless the received information or knowledge is not appreciated nor re-communicated (passed on) to another individual, the knowledge is useless - the meaning and the value of the knowledge diminishes (Ishikawa, A. & Naka, I. 2007, pp.7-8).

As said by Zeleny (2000) and cited by Wang, S. (2002) the definition of knowledge is simply an action of purposeful and coordinated actions; this underlines that everyone is responsible and forms their own knowledge through interactions and experiences with one another and the surrounding world. Wang, S. (2002) continues to explain that with the current IT available and its capabilities data, information and resemblance of knowledge can be stored in a computer whereas it is not to be considered as knowledge itself. Since the knowledge for humans consists of beliefs, concepts and goals and is derived of coordinated actions rather than unbiased pieces of information, Wang, S. (2002) continues to emphasize human knowledge through actions.

Knowledge has been studied and researched decades ago as early as the 1960's when Michael Polanyi first published his book "The Tacit Dimension" (1966). As said by Polanyi, M. (1966) and cited by John, S.B. and Duguid, P. (2001) they claim that knowledge is two dimensional; one that is tacit and one that is explicit. According to Michael Polanyi tacit knowledge seems to be the sticky knowledge whereas explicit is the leaky one. These explanations and meanings are still used and referred to in current literature.

What makes knowledge and knowledge management interesting is the undefining truth how everyone has their own share of embedded knowledge within them. John, S.B. and Duguid, P. (1998) talk about “*know-hows*” and “*know-whats*” – know-how representing the action of putting know-what into action, having the capability of doing a certain job or action to the best of one’s abilities. They discuss the matter of putting knowledge into action- something that may not be taught in the fields of academia. One may require the knowledge yet lack the know-how of putting it into action.

As said by Zeleny (2000) and cited by Wang, S. (2002) the definition of knowledge is simply an action of purposeful and coordinated actions; this underlines that everyone is responsible of their own knowledge creation and forms their own knowledge through interactions and experiences with one another and the surrounding world.

Pasher, E. & Ronen, T. (2011) state that each company should develop a customized knowledge management strategy to fit a company’s necessities, aims and attributes as an overall business strategy. Pasher, E. & Ronen, T. (2011, pp. 35-46) continue to explain the importance of knowledge strategy where company needs to have an ongoing, never-ending development of the strategy and foresee the possibilities of new opportunities to exploit. Acknowledging the core competencies and re-evaluating them, forms an important factor of a company’s strategic business strategy. In order to stay on top, or ahead as Pasher, E. & Ronen, T. state, of the game in the everchanging world, identifying “*what we need to know*” to “*how to develop the what we need to know*” in other words “*how to develop that knowledge*” is key in managing knowledge in an organization. Organizations that are keen on learning and avoid outdated knowledge are the ones who succeed in the strategic point of view of knowledge management (Pasher, E & Ronen, T. 2011 pp. 35-46).

To be able to identify one’s weaknesses and strengths as an individual as well as an organization, one needs to acquire strategic thinking. The key element of strategic thinking is the ability to identify opportunities, expectations and behaviours. The concept of brainstorming sessions has been used for decades in organizations to create and share knowledge. Pasher, E. & Ronen, T. (pp.35-46)

introduce to a concept of “knowledge café” as a brainstorming form where organizations can utilize personnel from all levels of the company’s hierarchy and acquire various perspectives for effective communication – sharing and creating knowledge for a successful time ahead.

Effective communication requires common organizational culture and values and the backbone to it all is trust. As asserted by Pasher, E. & Ronen, T. (pp. 47-53) mutual trust within an organization forms the basis of organizational culture; culture where everyone’s beliefs, values and behavioural norms meet. An organization that encourages knowledge management and underlines mutual benefits for sharing and creating knowledge are engaged in the mutual benefits of the organization where everyone is a winner. Pasher, E. & Ronen, T. also state that well developed and customized organizational culture is a premise to successful knowledge management.

As Andreeva, T. and Kianto, A. (2012, pp. 618-619) state, there has been a lot of effort on studies concerning knowledge management processes rather than practices. KM processes consist of knowledge creation, sharing, transfer, and capturing of knowledge. The assertion is that if an organization pays too close attention to only KM processes the outcome will not provide useful and practical resolutions for the organization to utilize KM in its organizational performance. Where KM processes focus on managerial control, KM practices provide more hands-on support for businesses to benefit from managing knowledge. (Andreeva, T. and Kianto, A. 2012, pp.618-619)

Birkinshaw, J. and Sheehan, T. (2002, pp. 75-83) conducted a research on KM practices and provide a KM life cycle in the figure below. The lifecycle visualizes how an idea or knowledge from an individual develops along the way and how it ought to be utilized within in organizations. Management that understands the knowledge life cycle and its stages, are better in acquiring knowledge they need and how to develop it.

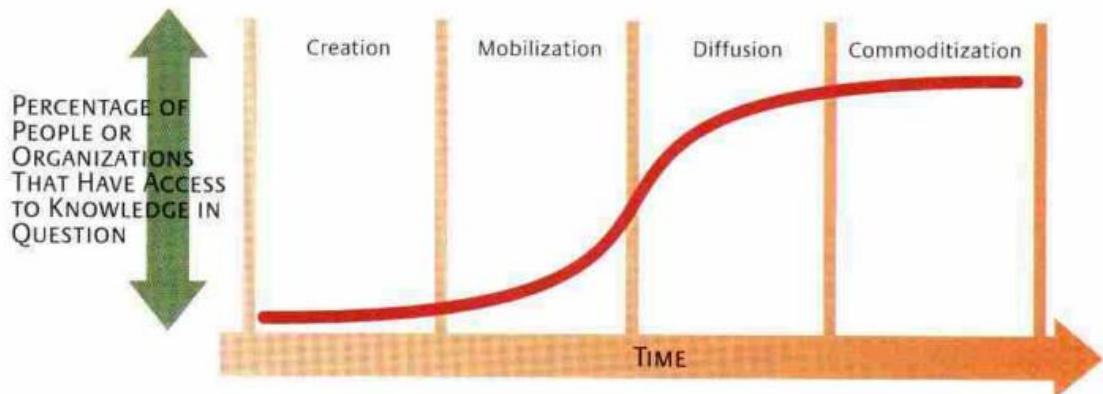


Figure 3. Managing the Knowledge Life Cycle. (Birkinshaw, J. and Sheehan, T., 2002, p. 77)

The first part of the KM cycle refers to knowledge creation where it merely is an idea, abstract and symbolic rather than actual and concrete. For the knowledge to become something concrete, it moves on to the next part of the cycle known as mobilization. That is where the idea evolves and is shared which leads to the process of seeking value from it. The diffusion stage is where the idea becomes alive, understood, and available for anyone to utilize. The idea has now been tested and developed and it may move into the next stage of the cycle. Commoditization stage is where the knowledge or an idea evolves into common knowledge. At this stage the knowledge can be found e.g., from the Internet or it can be taught at school or at a workplace. (Birkinshaw, J. & Sheehan, T. 2002, p. 76)

At its best, knowledge management can lead to external and internal advantages within a company by creating new ideas, result in the feeling of belongingness to a group, and encouraging the overall effectiveness of a company (Liebowitz, J. & Frank, M. 2010, p. 4).

As explained and revealed in this chapter, knowledge management has several different attributes to it. Knowledge itself seems evident, but as seen, it may be difficult to comprehend and utilize within an organizations business strategy. Organization through time have had ways to manage knowledge in its most beneficial ways or at least have been provided the effort to do so. The unavoidable

matter is, how the organization can develop the knowledge they acquire into practice. The following part of the thesis will provide more in-depth explanations on different types of knowledge, its transfer and creation in addition to how it correlates with remote working.

2.1 Types of knowledge

This paragraph will provide and explain different types of knowledge. Definitions for tacit, explicit, and embedded knowledge will be covered. It is important to provide clear definitions and information on the knowledge terms used throughout the research. This will provide better understanding and value to the reader.

Tacit knowledge

“We know more than we can tell” is firstly introduced by Michael Polanyi in his book *The Tacit Dimension* and quoted by Gascoigne, N. & Thornton, T. (2013 pp.3-4) as the basis of his investigation on tacit knowledge. This quote elaborates the essence of tacit knowledge as not “tell-able” as Gascoigne, N. & Thornton, T. state. Tacit knowledge is considered as knowledge that is shared through practice – in other words learned by doing. (Gascoigne, et al. 2013, pp. 3-4)

Tacit knowledge is explained as the “know-how” by John, S.B. and Duguid, P. (1998) and Machado, C. & Davim, JP. (2014) to name a few with the definition of the “know-how”. As Machado, C. & Davim, JP. (2014 p. 22) continue to explain, tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer - it is within people and an action of knowing. Haghirian, P. (2010, p. 7) asserts tacit knowledge as the individuals own know-how, embedded skills, experiences, and beliefs which makes it challenging to transfer. As Haghirian, P. (2010, p. 36) explains, this embodied knowledge is knowledge within all of us.

Explicit knowledge

On the contrary to tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge is easier to transfer since explicit knowledge is about data. (Haghirian, P. 2010, p. 7) As stated by Nonaka et al. (2014) and cited by Haghirian, P. (2010, p. 8) due to the explicitness way that explicit knowledge is, it is easily handled, transferred, and kept. It is easily

articulated in the knowledge transferring process and can be easily in written form. (Haghirian, P. 2010, p. 13)

Embedded knowledge

Embedded knowledge like tacit knowledge cannot be easily transferred and Haghirian, P. (2010, p. 45) provides a vivid example of this by explaining how Japanese businesses' still hire employees to work "for life". Furthermore, this explains why the problematic tacit and embedded knowledge transfer is not as problematic in Japan; business procedures and actions are not in an explicit form written down, merely managed within each employee. The embedded knowledge can be defined as an employee's storage of tacit knowledge. (Haghirian, P. 2010, p. 45) Like Easterby-Smith, M. et al (2011, p. 58, p. 313) explains, embedded knowledge is within the organizational culture and sometimes it may hard to acknowledge why something is done the way it is done, even if it is a written down rule.

2.2 Knowledge process and mechanism

This paragraph provides explanation on knowledge process and mechanism. It explains knowledge creation and knowledge transfer and concludes to knowledge management in remote working conditions.

Knowledge creation

As Machado, C. & Davim, JP. (2014) discuss new knowledge is created and shared from people to people and always obtains a linkage to people thus is based on facts, statistics, figures, and information. The SECI (socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization) model of creating knowledge comes from Japan and acts as a foundation of knowledge creation. The more interaction from person to person the more they get acquainted with one another. The more acquainted the more connections they share. This interaction eventually builds and reinforces trust and makes knowledge creation and sharing fluent and easier. The circle of the four elements in the SECI model not just describes knowledge creation but also knowledge sharing. (Haghirian, P 2010, pp. 36-37)

One prominent research theory introduced originally by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and cited by Easterby-Smith, M. et al (2011, p. 78, p. 641) introduces the cycle of organizational learning and knowledge creation. Including each role within the learning cycle. The SECI model aims to provide a clear picture on how tacit knowledge is transferred to explicit and vice versa. When tacit knowledge moves to tacit knowledge, it happens mainly through experience and skill sharing, stands for socialization. When tacit knowledge is moved to explicit knowledge, it happens through verbalization, articulation, and metaphors and stands for externalization. Explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge stands for the combination of various explicit knowledge forms. When explicit knowledge transfers to tacit, it happens through verbal cues and action of absorbing and internalizing knowledge. The figure below visualizes the learning cycle. (Easterby-Smith, M. et al. 2011, p.78, p. 641)

	... to tacit knowledge	... to explicit knowledge
From tacit knowledge ...	Socialization	Externalization
From explicit knowledge ...	Internalization	Combination

Figure 28.1 The SECI Model

Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995: 62)

Figure 4. The SECI Model. (Easterby-Smith, M. et al, 2011, p. 641)

Knowledge transfer

As Machado, C. et al (2014, p. 4) state that the empowering element of trust within the process of transferring knowledge amongst each other for a mutual goal. Transferring knowledge is a process that starts from the origin of the knowledge to the beneficiary. Through the process, the beneficiary can receive and adapt the communicated knowledge to practice (Ko, et al. 2005 cited by Easterby-Smith et al. 2011, p9. 108-109). As the process of transferring knowledge may seem easy and effortless, issues within an organization arise due to a matter of *“they don’t know, what they know”* (Huber, 1991 cited by Easterby-Smith, M. et al. 2011, p.109).

Whereas explicit knowledge is easier to transfer, tacit knowledge has more challenges since it is learned by doing rather than learned through textbooks. (Haghirian, P. 2010, p. 15). In an organizational point of view, selecting the knowledge that is the most useful for the organization and its individual’s performance, in addition to sharing, receiving, and applying the found knowledge into practice, are the main aspects to consider. It is vital to identify which knowledge drives the organization towards success and to whom should this knowledge be conveyed in order to achieve this success. Furthermore, it is also important to be aware of how this knowledge is received and later how it is applied. These are elements on transferring knowledge and its process. (Haghirian, P. 2010, p. 19) The knowledge transferring process may also be referred to as a learning process; when the acquired knowledge is received, an individual can then pass it on and share it for both parties’ benefit. (Haghirian, P. 2010, p. 23) The figure below provides an understanding on knowledge transfer methods.

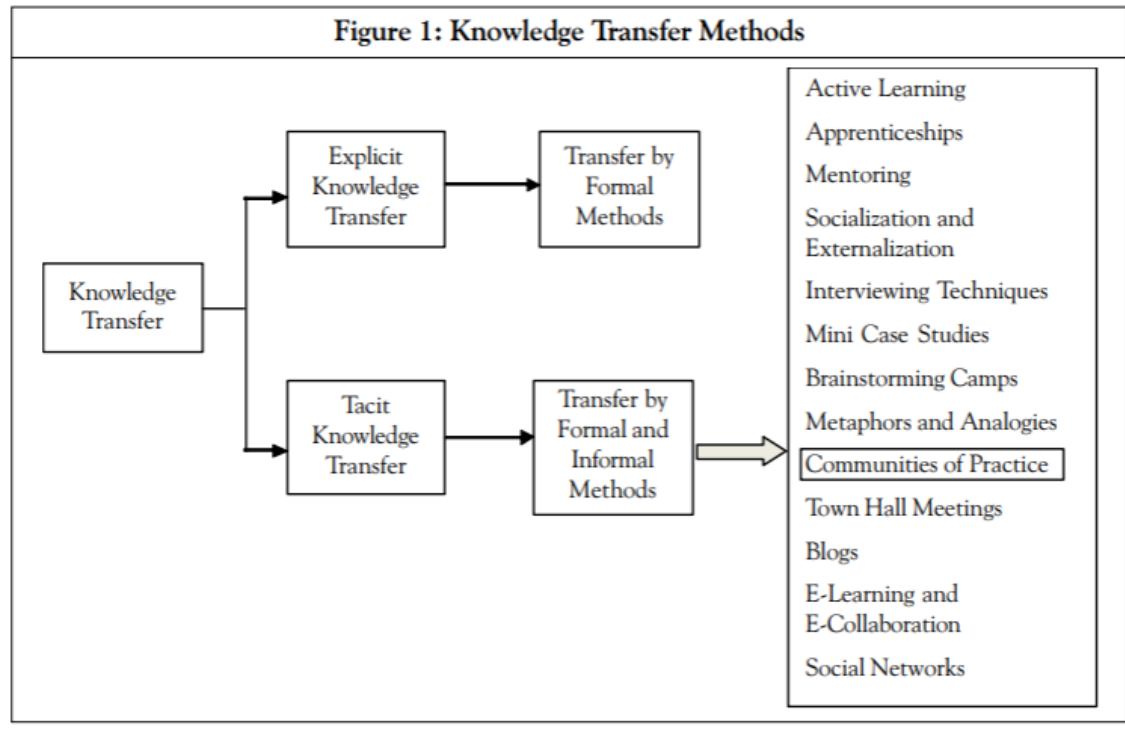


Figure 5. Communities of Practice: An Influencing Factor for Effective Knowledge Transfer in Organizations. (Krishnaveni, R. & Sujatha, R. 2012, *IUP Journal of Knowledge Management*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 30.)

2.3 Knowledge management in remote working

Now that the terminology previously has been explained and understood, adapting knowledge management practices as we know them to remote working brings new perspectives, opportunities as well as challenges. Currently, knowledge management in the way it has been taught and utilized in organizations, does not remain the same within the remote working environment and virtually. Knowledge creation and sharing are a part of a team in its everyday collaboration, new challenges appear in the new way of working remotely rather than face-to-face. As for how knowledge management is practiced efficiently, collaboration needs to have trust, mutual understanding of the organizational culture. An organization needs to also consider, what are the motivating factors and facilitators for each team member and each employee.

As previously mentioned, some forms of knowledge sharing, and the learning process happens through doing and in practice actions within the everyday “office working hours”. Remote conditions and virtuality now challenge organizations, teams, and management on new forms of knowledge sharing, creation, and transfer. Where tacit knowledge is a part of a social action and the embeddedness of knowledge is within all of us, new issues arise when considering remote working. When the action of socializing is out of the picture, transferring the embedded and tacit knowledge becomes more difficult. In remote working, organizations must focus on building new and innovative ways to share knowledge in the new norms of working.

3 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (CoPs)

The concept of communities of practice has evolved and been reflected on to knowledge management practices and now remote working. Communities of practice is, as the name refers to, a group of people sharing a common way of doing tasks, sharing knowledge, learning from, and socializing with one another. In addition, communities of practices are everywhere – it is not just a common phrase used in a work environment and development plans, but also in one’s everyday social life. CoP’s work best and most efficiently when mutual trust is shared within the team. One may even say that where there is trust, there is efficiency and that, sharing embedded and embodied knowledge leads to far more chances for success.

Trust, T. et al. (2019, pp. 108-115) made a qualitative study on communities of practice within a teaching environment- something that can be adaptable to various communities of practice environments since learning and sharing knowledge happens everywhere. The study pointed out six key elements in a successfully collaborative community of practice, which adapt to any form of community of practice environments: leadership roles, personalized learning, guiding principles, organizational support and social learning (Trust, T. et al. 2019, p.108).

As asserted by Roberts (2006) and Pan et al (2003) and cited by Garavan, T.N. (2007, p. 1) in an article, CoP's have influenced in assembling theory on knowledge creation. CoP's have, according to the article, become a strategy where communication, innovation, and learning are all combined. As stated by Garavan, T.N. (2007, p. 2) CoP's help in sharing knowledge and generate faster problem-solving skills. For effective knowledge transfer, CoP's are commonly the influencing factor. Where CoP's share the common purpose and goal, they also provide the possibility to share best practices amongst each other. (Krishnaveni, R. & Sujatha, R. 2012, p. 26)

3.1 Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs)

A study by Behal, A. (2019 pp.17) defines communities of practice ubiquitous and as something we are all apart of not only in our working environment, but within our leisure surroundings as well. The emphasizing mutual lining in communities is the feeling of belongingness and mutual engagement whether it being in a social interaction or problem-solving discussions. The dedication to a group or a community varies; some may invest time and effort while others tend to a more superficial involvement (Behal, A. 2019, p.17).

As defined in the previous section of this thesis, adding the word virtual to the concept of community of practice relegates communities to interact on-line rather than in a more traditional way face-to-face with the essence of physicality. As Lee, MR. (2021, p.2) defines, virtual communities of practices are a result of the outburst of the Internet. Lee, MR. (2021, p.4) continues to illustrate that communication in a virtual environment happens through electronical means. Organizations are no longer dependent on physicality and are not location oriented since everyone within the organization can communicate anywhere from the globe through online forums. Virtual communities like the traditional ones usually share a goal in which they all collectively work towards. The new norm is within the virtual communities and their practices to combine traditional and online ways of communicating and interaction. This is what Lee, MR. (2021, p. 4) describes as a hybrid team.

Since the global business environment today is as complex and everchanging as it is, organizations face challenges in the virtual environment that extend to more than electronic communications tools to the overall restructuring the organization. The current trend and maneuvers that the virtual business environment bring along are the deduction of costs, the ability to answer rivalries, rules, and regulations within regions of operation and the ease of accessibility to knowledge and different resources. Factors that have not only been brought by the emerge of virtual business environments but are and have been there already in the traditional form of working are now not only reshaped but furthermore enriched by the virtual aspect. The traditional business environment has changed due to the worldwide pandemic situation and has forced organizations to evolve and adapt to new ways of working. Organizations that were used to the modern open space way of working are now forced to build virtual communities and environments to work in. The global pandemic has introduced organizations to a cost-effective way of working since the traditionally physically available communities are working remotely and virtually now more than ever before. Those that remain within the physical workplace, organizations face not only restructuring of workstations and limitations of workforce present, but also sterile working environment issues need to be considered. Hence, the worldwide pandemic has brought about virtual work environment to the forefront. With this, it has brought ease of accessibility to global expertise and competence, it has enhanced customer satisfaction, and reduced travel and rent costs for organizations. These are considered as advantages whereas the disadvantages and pitfalls consist of social distancing and how it has affected the workforce mentality, cultural conflict issues are more prominent as well as issues in terms of communication and overall trust. (Lee, M. 2021, pp. 5-7).

As Lee, M. (2021, p. 8, Table 1.1) points out crucial elements that triggers the motion toward virtual communities and organizations. Lee, M. (2021, p. 8) studies these elements in the view of internal human resource and financial facilitator elements as well as external influences. In the spectrum of human resources, the common facilitators within an organization are refracturing the organization - whether to downsize or adjust overall rearrangements of the organization. Costs

are decreased by outsourcing workforce and flattening the hierarchy of an organization.

3.2 Effective leadership

Leadership, leadership styles, management, and learning all correlate and have been discussion points in many research fields. *"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"* is somewhat a descriptive way of effective and good leadership. Leadership does not only consist of adjectives to describe what leadership is, it has more profound meanings and feelings as to what is considered as a good and effective leader.

Leadership in its simplicity is explained by Draft, WH. & Palus, CJ. (1994, p.4) as part of a meaning-making process where joint knowledge aspects, culture and language are shared in a result to mutual understanding and commitment. Drath, WH. & Palus, CJ. (1994) continue to explain about interpersonal influences, where one might influence another person to do or act as they share mutual understanding of the influenced action.

As asserted by Civil, M. (2000) and cited by Behal, A. (2019, p.18) important factors in a leader consists of comprehending complex sentiments such as impersonal and un-detached belongingness that the remote environment and virtual communities assemble. As written by Bennis, W. (1989) and cited by Behal, A. (2019, p.26) the direct quotation of modern leadership is *"To an extent, leadership is like beauty, it's hard to define, but you know it when you see it."*

When considering and defining an effective leader in the virtual world and virtual communities (VCoP's) a leader must adjust to a geographically wide spread of locations within the community and respecting and obtaining the differences within them. An effective leader must co-exist, adapt, and seize with others ideology, values, and mindset. An occurring situation of co-operating with strangers who one may never meet in person, an effective leader must deal with conflicts and rivals of priorities, new disputes, and changes. (Behal, A. 2019, p. 27).

3.3 Effective e-leadership

E-leadership is defined as leadership that happens virtually. E-leadership not only means an electronic leadership style but also everchanging and an evolving environment (Lee, MR. 2021, pp. 17-18).

Managers of an organization face new challenges when they need to combine the traditional leadership style and the virtual ones. Some team members are still present physically in an office environment whereas others may work mainly online in another location, geographically distant from one another. Lee, MR. (2021, pp.4-5) defines a virtual manager as someone who mainly uses electronic means to communicate with its team members and can co-operate ensuring communication among the team members, share control and enhance trust, build relationships and provide motivation. Some aspects that are important and crucial in a more traditional leadership form. Lee, MR. (2021) continues to define e-leadership and virtual communities' ways of working as a non-traditional form of work as it only increases in the current world.

E-leadership skills are just as important as the traditional form of leading or managing a team. Crucial to a successful virtual community and effective e-leadership include training of virtual skills as well. As Lee, MR. firmly points out, many MBA degrees of business mainly focus on teaching different types of leadership and theories, yet the actual practice of these vital skills are largely neglected. When Lee, MR. continues to explain, management as a leadership form not only is it a strive towards mutual goals but it is the action behind it – how to motivate, encourage, plan and control. The “e” in e-leadership is defined as electronic yet to an extent and may even be an old-fashioned definition. Even though e-leadership does in fact utilize the available electronic tools, the more modern way would define it as evolving – a leadership style that is constantly changing and adapting to its business environment in addition to comprehending and acknowledging leadership in its structure (Lee, MR. 2021, pp. 38-41). As defined and shown by Nadler, D. et al. (1990) and cited by Lee, MR. (2021, p. 39) the behaviours of a charismatic leader could be adaptable and conveyed into the leadership as we know it today.

Table 2.1 Three Elements of Charismatic Leadership

<i>Envision the Future</i>	<i>Energize Others</i>	<i>Enable Others</i>
Share a clear vision	Show enthusiasm	Be supportive
Set high expectations	Express confidence	Be empathetic
Model positive behaviors	Demonstrate success	Express confidence in others

Figure 6. Three Elements of Charismatic Leadership. (Nadler, D. A., et al. 1990, pp. 77-97 cited by Lee, M. 2021, p. 39)

To have an effective and efficient e-leadership, styles and theories of management as it has been in the traditional norms, needs adaptation to current ones in the virtual environment. Upon adapting to these, management will have much more abilities to succeed in each task within the virtual environment. (Lee, MR. 2021, pp. 40-41)

Lee, MR. (2021, p.43) continues to explain, that to have fully committed teams the feel of ownership is a necessity. Empowering employees through problem solving scenarios, and decision-making processes is a part of feeling ownership and self-management aspects. Being able to regulate and oversee own personal performance is what an effective e-leader should strive to be.

3.4 Effective communication

As describes well by Garnett et al., (2008) and cited by Nwabueze et al. (2018, pp.51-52), communication in an organization is formed through lateral, downward, and upward communication streams where each stream of communication provides the counterpart new ideas, shared innovations, problem solving tools, and feedback in order to obtain mutual goals. This figure below by Nwabueze at al. (2018, p.52) strives to provide better understanding of these communication streams, the action of the communication within a stream and all the counterparts in an organization in its simplicity.

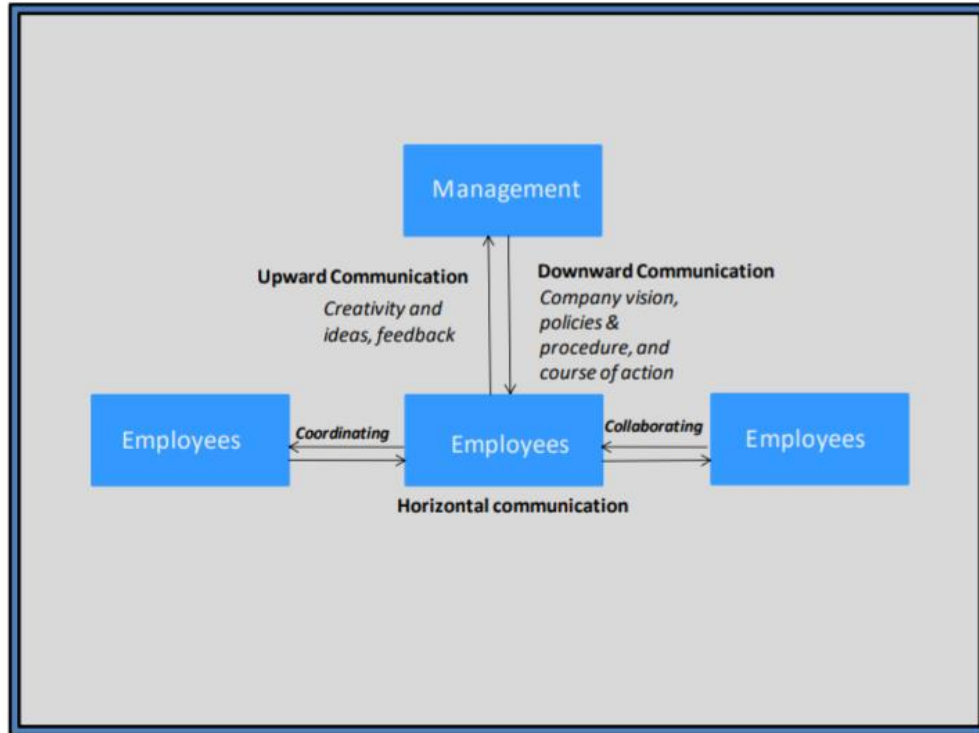


Figure 7. Achieving competitive advantage through effective communication in a global environment. (Nwabueze, U. & Mileski, J. 2018, Journal of International Studies, vol. 11, no. 1. p.52)

As Aziz, K. (2003, pp. 7-9) indicates, the spoken language and the action of speaking is rarely taught within the line of business and business management. The focus is on execution and procedures rather than the spoken language – communication. Yet we expect a manager to accomplish and assimilate these equally well. Aziz, K. (2003) continues to explain three different variables on what constitutes as an effective communicator that acquires attention in regards to communication skills: a clear message on what you wants to say and how; and audience in regards of whom you are communicating and the environment in which the actual communication happens (Aziz, K. 2003, pp. 7-9). It is also important to note that that an important feature of effective communication requires skills in listening and the ability to make the counterpart feel like their point of view is also taken into consideration.

3.5 Virtual communication

In virtual communication, one may only perceive the counterparty. Virtual communication lacks facial expressions, body language and the physical presence of another person with whom one is interacting. Virtual community happens online, through online chat, discussion platforms or via email. Furthermore, the actual communication happens without the actual presence of another person. Due to the change of the traditional business environment where the new norm is in virtual teams and organizations are more or less in virtual communication. Virtual communication tools vary from email to online chat rooms and videocall platforms just to name a few, yet each virtual community are required to select tools that are the most suitable for their use and purpose. There are multiple ways of virtual communication available for teams and individuals alike. Due to the advancement and frequent use of the virtual tools, many teams and individuals collaborate in real-time platforms. In order to achieve an effective communication in a community virtually, team members need to be engaged in sharing the common result and goals in addition to find best solutions for information and knowledge sharing. One of the main and most used virtual communication tools today is still email even though it does not share information in real-time. One might keep in mind that using email as a communication tool is still an impersonal approach without facial expressions or body language. Thus, using similar aspects, regimes, and tones in an email as one might use in a face-to-face meeting is thought to be more efficient in comparison using formal writing styles and approach. Since the physical interaction, body language and nonverbal conversation is out of the equation, utilizing the online tools to the best of each team members' abilities and understanding the common ways of working are major factors in effective communication. Each team member should have common and set ways to use online communication tools. Depending on the message one and outcome one may want to get across, appropriate tools should be used and should be prior agreed upon. For example, if a manager is set to provide "bad news" or personal data, the best way to communicate is face-to-face rather than using an email. The management should be able to teach and coach its team members to an effective way of communication online and how to share knowledge with one another.

Hence employees and management should feel a shared understanding on mutual tasks as well as be able to provide their own perceptions also within the scope of providing feedback and acknowledgements. Misinterpretations are common in the virtual communication environment and virtual organizations should be aware of these and how they appear. Whereas facial expressions and body language are apparent in the traditional face-to-face interactions, in the virtual world they are not elements that exist hence misinterpretations may be present and should be accounted for. For example, communicating humour, irony and sarcasm is extremely hard without the verbal and face-to-face interaction hence needs more clarification within the virtual space. The lack of facial gestures and expressions, body language and inflection and tone and articulation of voice are lacking in the virtual communication sphere, the written text is what the beneficiary of the message receives. (Lee, M. 2021, pp. 87-92).

3.6 Soft skills

Interpersonal skills and correlations are about knowledge sharing which elaborates organization's team's collaboration and task orientation in achieving mutual goals, sharing values and visions. Furthermore, investing in interpersonal skills within an organization improve relationships resulting in building and maintaining trust (McNeish et al. 2010 cited by Nwabueze et al. 2018, p.53).

As Hardina, D. (2012, p.26) indicates, interpersonal skills are about engagement whether towards a task or towards a common goal it is something that a team share. Interpersonal skills are among other things, social cooperation scenarios attaining actions through providing and receiving information, skills, aid, and guidance. Hardina, D. (2021, p. 60, p.74) continues to explain that interpersonal skills relate strongly to building and developing relationships that are in correlation with trust and sharing power amongst team members or a community. A community to be in joint harmony, a manager or a team leader needs to be aware of all the challenges one might face within the virtual community environment. Not only cultural differences on time usage but interpersonal skills on how one might perceive a certain task or issues around trust and motivation among the virtual community are extremely crucial areas of challenges that the management should take into consideration (Lee, M. 2021, p. 34). Whereas collaborating in a team

face-to-face facial expressions and body language are present and within a virtual team these nonverbal signals are missing. For the management to gain team members' trust and improve communication skills within the virtual environment, managers ought to utilize virtual one-on-one technologies in interactions among peers. When considering interpersonal skills of an e-leader or within the scope of e-leadership, interpersonal skills include being able to motivate, influence, build trust, manage conflicts, and acquire negotiation skills are just to name a few. Having a set of clear objectives and rules in addition to setting clear roles are also important interpersonal skills to acquire. (Lee, MR. 2021, p. 169)

According to Robles, M. M. (2012, p. 455) soft skills are considered as people skills. People skills are not technical attributes or know-how traits, but elements of interpersonal skills that include personality features. According to a study conducted by Robles, M. M. (2012, p. 455) ten primary soft skills emerged that are listed below.

- Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening
- Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful
- Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable
- Integrity – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right
- Interpersonal Skills – nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills
- Positive Attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident
- Professionalism – businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised
- Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense
- Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative
- Work Ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance

Figure 8. Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. (Robles, M. M., 2012. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), p. 455)

As seen from the Figure above, traits of these interpersonal skills aka soft skills are extremely important in being a part of a successful and efficient team. Capturing most of the traits will most likely ensure a sufficient team, whether in the traditional form of face-to-face or a virtual one.

Communication skills

When co-operating in a team or a community of practice, good communication skills are extremely important – not only for the team members collaborating but also for the management. Like Friedman, K. (2011 p.308) expresses, that every presentation, public speech, meeting, or a conversation is an opportunity - opportunity to improve, motivate, learn and be passionate and show passion towards the task at hand. Excitement, enthusiasm, and passion is contagious (Friedman, K. 2011, p. 308).

Leading a project and a team requires a mutual consensus, identifying personal motivational factors, and conflict management skills. The facilitator of a group or a team must incorporate good communication skills to unite the team. Good communication skills include listening, writing, and public speaking aspects. Not only does a functional team encourage each other to learn, but also facilitate team duties by ongoing communication. (Hardina, D. 2012, p. 13)

3.7 Trust

Trust in its complex and diverse meaning, can be explained as communication in which the counterparties share common values, and where the ability to take risks and vulnerability exist. Perceivability of others and their behaviours and reactions define and provide the basis for building trust. (Camilleri, MA. 2021, p. 23) As Cheng et al. (2014) and cited by Camilleri, MA. (2021, pp. 22-23) trust can be divided into two categories, individual and social trust. The individual trust is what is considered as trust that has already been built with someone familiar and known. The other category is social trust. This form of trust is on the contrary, with someone unfamiliar and unknown. These segmentations of trust can be seen in actual content within the working life or as Cammileri, MA. (2021, pp. 24-25) provided, with students. When given a task, the cooperative counterparties have two choices, either to work together or not. Depending on the situation of being in an individual or social trust atmosphere, the interaction or cooperation can turn out to be successful or the contrary. Whilst the lack of trust will inevitably turn a possibly successful cooperation into an unsuccessful one.

Needless to say, trust is an extremely important and valuable aspect in any scenario of a community- whether it being a face-to-face setting or a virtual one. Behal, A. (2019 p.20) underlines trust in a VCoP setting – the leader of a community must be able to create trust in the virtual setting to accomplish set objectives for the community. To form meaningful and strong social relationships, trust acts as a key component in maintaining and building them. Essentially these relationships foster and develop easier transfer of knowledge and creates a sense of belongingness to a group. Therefore, effective communication within an organization enables trust. (Camilleri, MA. 2021, p.20) Within the organizational perspective, trust forms a basis to becoming loyal and committed. How each person reflects and perceives trust consists of the communication each face and engage in. Due to the advanced technology platforms used daily and the increase of remote working conditions, the interaction and communication in a face-to-face matter is merely decreasing.

As Lee, M. (2021, pp. 82-83) states, trust in a virtual organization and virtual communication scenario can be built with an easy flow of communicating presumably to obstruct feeling of isolation or misunderstanding furthermore to improve decision making processes and engagement within teams. Lee, M. (2021, p. 94) continues to assert that trust can be reinforced by communicating face-to-face in the traditional business environment and through video platforms within a virtual one. The role of trust is in sync with leadership and its roles hence the management plays an extremely important role in building trust among its teams.

As cultures vary and teams become more and more multicultural which are in correlation to ways of working, communicating and understanding, usage of time and resources and perceiving trust. Different variables for cultural differences and issues are explained through Hofstede's "*Six Dimensions of Culture*" and acknowledged by Lee, M. (2021, pp.118-134). The dimensions go through how and what is perceived the differences between each culture and what are the dominating factors and ways to absorb culture. Through the dimensions of cultures and leading multicultural teams which are the common norm today, are all factors that management in an organization and particularly each manager needs

to consider when interacting with cross-cultural teams. Within the virtual organization, utilizing the online communication tools, the management are provided an opportunity to build trust and relationships among team members, no matter the cultural differences. Some team members may need more attention, time, and effort whereas for some trust and relationship building may become more natural and easily. Trust is a part of any team, whether traditional or virtual one, and is considered as an important element within the culture of the team (Lee, M. 2021, pp.118-134).

As a leader or a facilitator of a team, one may need to be aware of one's own personal biases and values. To work effortlessly across cultural boundaries, requires working around personal values that may limit collaboration. It may be a process that will last for a lifetime, learning from and about each other. (Hardina, D. 2012, p. 10)

4 REMOTE WORKING

Now that the new norm is working remotely and the interrogations leading teams in the remote environment There has been a transformation and no longer is the onsite working method, the traditional way of working, the only accepted norm. This transformation to remote working has only significantly increased due to the current pandemic. Challenges that management and leadership styles face among others are issues and matters around trust and productivity. Not all businesses are able to foresee what the remote working conditions will bring or has already brought nor will be able to react accordingly.

The pressures that companies nowadays face are aspects around remote working and how remote working will affect a company's efficiency and profitability. Remote working has been a part of the society as a form of working for some years now, only in recent years has it become popular and have the tools for it

developed. The new generation is living a world where remote working is a common factor, and the availability of customer service happens through online chats rather than face-to-face. This has rapidly changed organizational structures in ways such as the decrease of physical stores and relying less on face-to-face assistance. More and more people are reluctant to leave the comfort of one's own home and will much rather go online to sort out their issues whether it being placing an order on a product or in search for customer service.

Where Cook, S. (2019, p. 96) points out, the management should undergo assessment of each team in regards of organizational change such as remote working. Having said that, the current COVID-19 pandemic has forced businesses of all areas to work remotely and there has not been time for assessment. It has been more of a "learn as we go" type of situation. Not all businesses have had previous experience of remote working, or it has been limited to a certain type of work.

As Cook, S. (2019 p.12) indicates, remote working is increasingly growing as a form of work, not dependent on location or working hours as we have embraced as the norm, rather depending on technological advancements and flexibility in its overall implication of the word. Cook, S. (2019 p.15-16) continues elaborating several different benefits of remote working from the employee to management perspective that include flexibility, time saving issues, the overall balance of life including stress matters and satisfaction aspects.

Organizational benefits towards remote working include cost saving issues, engaging satisfied and loyal employees, attractiveness and diverse workforce that are not reluctant on geographical location. Management of an organization however face challenges in the leading aspects of employees with remote working. Where traditional management has been focusing on evaluating employee engagement and success through the visible attendance of work, the current form of working remotely has brought management to measure and evaluate success through the actual outcomes and results (Cook, S. 2019 pp.15-20). The following figure illustrates management through the traditional and present measurements. The figure aims to clarify the difference between the traditional and current management and how the form of control has shifted.

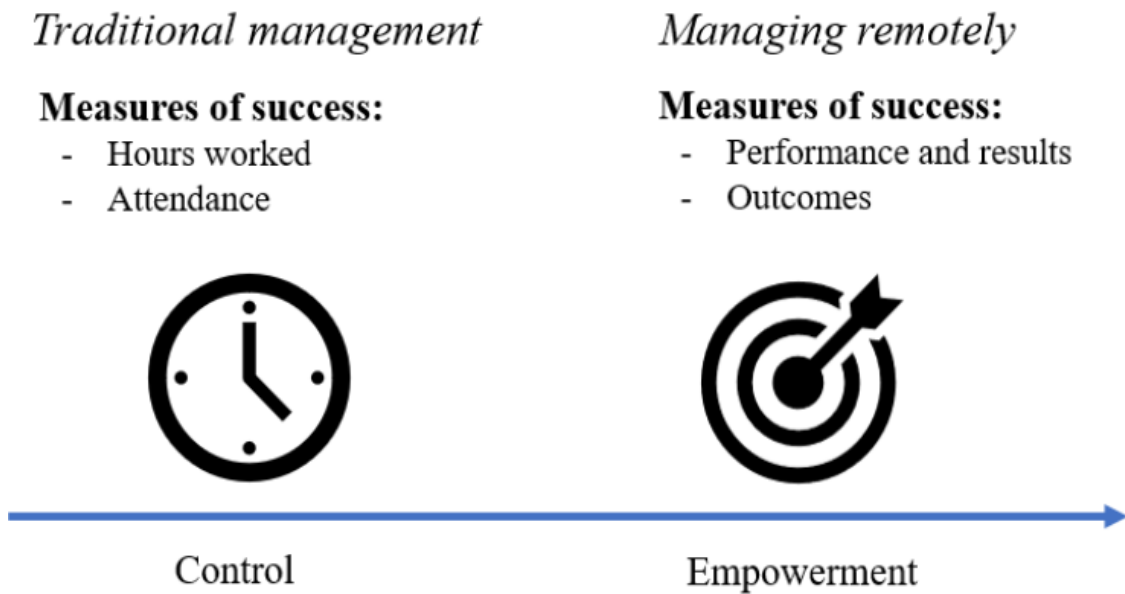


Figure 1: Traditional management vs managing remotely

Figure 9. Making a Success of Managing and Working Remotely. (Cook, S. Ely, Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom: ITGP. 2019 p.21)

As remote working has only increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost two decades ago the remote working environment was more concentrated. Where currently remote working extends to all areas of businesses, formerly free-lancers and consultants were already accustomed to the remote way of working. On-site employees tend to have more hands-on leadership and management supervision whereas the remote environment continues to evolve with new business processes and management styles. (Cook, S. 2019, pp. 15-22). As Cook, S. (2019, p. 20) points out, management and the organizational culture too often focus on supervision and control. As the figure above clearly reinforces this, empowerment in the remote management aspect comes from trust. The management concurrently needs to be able to trust that each team member does what is expected of them and works on mutual goals. No longer is the supervision of employees managed through time factors, but through actual results of the tasks at hand. (Cook, S. 2019, pp.20-22) As Lee, M. (2021, p. 42) states, empowerment

is a part of self-management. Remoteness brings new ways of measuring productivity and how it is monitored. Ensuring what is expected of each team member and how to get to the goal, inevitably leads towards trust. (Cook, S. 2019, pp. 20-22)

According to a research conducted by Microsoft (2021), the previous year has permanently changed the way work is conducted. Microsoft states that remote working is here to stay, it has already become the new norm of working. In addition to working remotely, some will inevitably go back to the office. As Microsoft (2021) indicates, this is a hybrid work model. According to their research, employees are keen on the hybrid model. Employees want flexibility that remote working brings, and employees also want more face-to-face collaboration within a physical workplace. Organizations and managers ought to utilize the flexibility that remote working brings. In addition, leaders need to focus on how people work as well as when and where. These attributes are introduced to the new working environment from the remote working sphere. (Microsoft, 2021)

The current COVID-19 pandemic has introduced remote working as a broad concept to all areas of businesses. The post-pandemic era will bring new challenges as well as opportunities for businesses to operate in. What happens within businesses after the pandemic, will determine the overall business culture, how innovation and talent is maintained and allured. Challenges that Microsoft in its research found out, were linked with personal well-being, and creating meaningful connections within the remote working environment. The research found out that many employees felt disconnected from not only co-workers but the overall working environment.

4.1 Managerial viewpoints on remote working

As Cook S. (2019) has identified factors that pursue an organization to invest in remote working, the management benefits in cost and time matters in addition to committing employees. On-site working has rapidly changed into remote working and managers now need new tools on measuring performance and monitoring them to maintain successful and efficient work environment that are not physically present in the everyday working atmosphere.

In an organization aspect, losing the face-to-face interaction and collaboration within the team means finding new approaches. Utilizing the current IT systems for joint online meetings and sharing work is evident, but also providing team members the possibility to go through online newsletters on current events and sharing experiences may be useful. Where team communication is important for an effective collaboration, one-on-one interaction is equally that. The management need to provide one-on-one attention to an individual, including mentoring and teaching methods. Not to neglect an individual of a team is important for each team member to feel a part of a team as a needed and desirable asset. (Cook, S. 2019, pp. 21-24)

Cook, S. (2019, p. 16) indicates several advantages of remote work in the management point of view. Where there are cost saving aspects, there are also increase of job satisfaction and less work absence issues when it comes to remote working. Employees may even work more hours at home rather than on-site and in the organizational point of view, management is able to attain a larger scale of experts and specialists since there is no necessity at an on-site workplace. Therefore, the organization will benefit of loyal employees and employees in return will perform by giving their best at work. As for the employees, it is shown that where job satisfaction has also increased the balance between social and working life has outcome to a less stressed environment and an overall improvement of well-being. (Cook, S. 2019, pp. 15-16)

As the research conducted by Microsoft (2021) states, the management outcomes into the most satisfied in relation to remote working. On the contrary, according to the research, the ones that felt most challenging and struggles in remote working were single employees. The management now face challenges in maintaining and resulting in a satisfactory outcome to all levels of the organizational hierarchy. (Microsoft 2021)

4.2 Employee experience on remote working

According to Cook, S. (2019 p.14) employees see remote working beneficial and if able choose the flexibility it brings is seen as a competitive advantage that an employer can offer to an employee. No longer is the traditional way of working in

an office from 9-5 the self-evident way, rather having the possibility to adjust and make one's own schedule seems to be the new norm and favourable way of working. In addition, the current technology enables ease of remote working. Sharing information and collaboration online through IT systems are continuously developing and have been utilized for many years already. This provides the employee the desired flexibility and easy access to work that is not location reliant. (Cook, S. 2019, p. 31, p. 72)

Whereas remoteness now takes away a part of a social element of an individual's day, management need to consider this aspect as well. How might the lack of social encounters affect an individual's mental health and what if the feeling of isolation arises. (Cook, S. 2019, p. 24, p. 26) As Microsoft (2021) stated in the research, employees indeed are keen on keeping the remote working possibility and see it as an attractive aspect. However, it also shows that employees are digitally exhausted and isolated. The social aspect of in-person meeting and ways of working are evidently lacking from remote working. Therefore, the hybrid model of working introduced by Microsoft in their research, is most likely to be the most popular method of working in the post-pandemic time. (Microsoft 2021)

4.3 Organization's viewpoints on remote working

Where there are several benefits for remote working in regards of employee and management perspectives, organizational benefits exist as well. When an organization has fully committed and satisfied employees it has direct positive impacts to the organization. Like previously explained, management, employee and organization aspect are all in correlation with one another. Remote working provides new possibilities for an organization. The cost reduction elements are furthermore attractive qualities which provide a competitive advantage. Currently, employees are keen on remote working and the flexibility and balance it brings. Therefore, allowing for its possibility would be beneficial for an organization. Each organization has a culture of its own. Remote working may also bring a more comprehensive organizational culture to the organization. The potential outcome could be a diverse organizational culture which meet the demands of all within the organizational hierarchy. (Cook, S. 2019, pp. 15-16)

Furthermore, businesses can now develop their remote working and see the possibilities it brings about. Rather than seeing remote working as a threat, businesses should see it as an opportunity. What remote working has leveraged is the lack of control from the management. Management of organizations face the utter reality of now losing some parts of employee control. However, what businesses ought to see specially for the management is the opportunity that remote working brings. However, what businesses ought to see is the opportunity specifically for the management to demonstrate trust within the employees. Trust that the work is done, efforts are made, and common goals are met. Remote working does not only provide new opportunities for businesses to utilize, but it also brings new businesses and development to more rural areas due to the lessening of the need to commute from different locations.

4.4 Remote working viewpoints – Webinars

As part of the research and to acquire much needed viewpoints on the remote working environment, the researcher participated on a webinar conducted on 22nd of April 2021 by Talentchain. In addition to the Talentchain webinar, the researcher participated a webinar on 12th of May 2021 by Howspace. Both webinars shared a common curriculum around remote working. Talentchain focused more on the current remote working conditions aspects whereas Howspace webinar focused more on aspects after the pandemic is over.

“Onnistuneesti työelämään poikkeusaikana” in English “Successfully into working life during the pandemic” by Talentchain - Soldem

Webinar by Talentchain had viewpoints and discussions with the new workforce; they had the young generation who are about to graduate and few who had quite recently graduated and are currently working remotely. Talentchain also had viewpoints and discussions from the employee side; they had a human resource manager, a CEO, and a customer relationship manager, all of whom were from different companies. The discussion in the webinar was divided within those previously mentioned panels. The researcher took notes during the webinar to gather the main points of both sides of the attendees. This provided the researcher help

to conclude the main discussion and points from the webinar as part of the research.

The first part of the webinar was the discussion with the students or as Talentchain refers to as the “youngster’s panelists”. The webinar had discussions on important issues today with the current pandemic and current remote working environment. The discussions included topics around, expectations, feelings, and overall thoughts on the working life today within the scope of remote working and the pandemic. The webinar kicked off with discussion on working life in the current remote environment. They shared thoughts and feelings around isolation, feeling the lack of social elements within the remote working environment and insecurities in being alone away from your co-workers and the working community. They shared their fears in transitioning from the student life into the working life with the presence of the pandemic. What resurfaced were thoughts on how to become part of the working community and the lack of support from other co-workers. In the aspect of becoming part of a working community, they felt that the remote working environment will provide challenges to the employees in terms of orientating the new work force and making them feel part of the community. In addition, they addressed important issues around the wellbeing of individuals working from home or remotely without the social face-to-face interactions. The panelists provided concrete examples on how an employee could take care of the wellbeing of their workforce in the remote environment. These were, through training programs, courses, being able to provide room for open discussions and communication. When asked, what are the inspiring aspects in working remotely, the answers consisted of learning new ways of doing things and being more independent. Taking more responsibility and having the freedom to work independently resulted in change being a good aspect and breaking the norms through remote working a good feature. When talking about, what makes a successful interaction between employees and employers within the remote environment, the discussion included features around being open, having trust and quick responses. In addition, having the social aspect in the remote environment by simply asking “how are you?”. One of the panelists expressed it by saying “*Rather have quick frequent (meetings) often than longer rarely.*” (Soldem, 2021)

The second part of the webinar was the discussion with the employee panelists. The employee's perspective within their discussions were on orientation and efficient leadership aspects. In addition, the discussion consisted of challenges in the current working environment and how wellbeing and stress management aspects are taken into consideration in relation to remote working. Addressing the challenges and seeing them as new possibilities to be utilized and taken in as new knowledge can provide value in the remote working environment. The HR manager discussed and addressed sharing knowledge, incorporating company's culture, and forming new CoP's as challenges they have encountered in the remote working environment. The HR manager also highlighted that within the remote working conditions, the different dynamics of a certain group have outcome into a new meaning. The comparison here is when working face-to-face or within the same working environment physically, it may be easier and more dynamic to point out the individuals who are keen on helping the new work force, and even taking more lead on the overall team by suggesting mutual lunches and meetings. The dynamics of a group are more visible when working face-to-face; the personas become more apparent as well as the overall the working knowledge and experience of a certain individual. The customer relationship manager pointed out features on successes during the pandemic and the remote working conditions. The customer relationship manager discussed about the importance of the orientation of new workforce and how its only highlighted within the remote environment. The overall orientation process needs to be well thought out and planned, yet the remote environment brings along more expectations and needs on peer support and enhances working cultural aspects. A new concept "a working godparent" arises within the discussion; these are utilized especially with the new workforce and their aim is to include the new workforce into the working culture and outcome in feeling of belongingness. Since the face-to-face interactions within the office is now lacking, virtual coffee meetings are frequently held through Microsoft Teams. This is to ensure the more social aspects, asking peers how they are without any meeting agendas. When working within an office environment, sharing knowledge, and asking for assistance is done rather easily and effortlessly. Currently due to remote working conditions, organizations have had to adapt and make sharing of knowledge and helping through online platforms. Again, teams can utilize Microsoft Teams platforms for certain groups to chat and

share their knowledge. This is where the peer support has moved to in the remote environment. The CEO pointed out that they have had online orientation programs already prior to the pandemic. So, the transition was rather easy for them. Having said that, prior to the pandemic a new employee had many face-to-face meetings and interactions with several people from the organization. This meant, that the new employee had access to several different employee's hands-on knowledge and ways of working which on contrary is now missing due to remote working and the lack of face-to-face meetings. During the discussion, the mention of the importance of face-to-face knowledge sharing is quite impossible in certain fields of businesses. More hands-on work is often difficult to transfer remotely or online. When talking about well-being at work, the employer panelists were surprised at how their organization's surveys resulted in increasement of well-being at work in relation to remote working. One can have more impact on how to perform own working tasks and company hierarchy may present as lower due to Microsoft Teams meetings. The explanation for this was online meetings may present people as more equal and organizations are not able to include the entire organization employees more efficiently to the meeting. When the employer panelists were asked to provide benefits considering leadership and orientation remotely, efficiency was highlighted in the discussion. Due to remote working, employees can focus on the task at hand without interruption contrary to the face-to-face or office environment situation. (Soldem, 2021)

The pandemic has inevitably resulted in that the newly hired workforce might have never seen their employer face-to-face. A situation that just few years ago seemed impossible and irrelevant has now become the new norm. Also, many employees can work from anywhere and are not location-oriented meaning they do not have to be within the same city as the employer. The importance of utilizing and ability to use different online platforms was also discussed and highlighted. Organizations should be able to educate all employees to the available online platforms and take full advantage of them. As discussed in the previous paragraphs, social aspects are lacking in the remote working environment. Peers are now not able to read body language and facial expressions. When working within same working space, one might be able to see if someone is feeling down or something is bothering them. (Soldem, 2021)

**“Työn uusi malli – miltä työelämä näyttää pandemian jälkeen?” in English
“New design for work – how does working life look like after the pandemic?” by Howspace**

The webinar conducted by Howspace included three main speakers who guided the webinar. The audience had the possibility to involve themselves into the discussion by adding comments and initiating comments to the discussion. In comparison to the earlier webinar by Talentchain, this webinar was more of a free speech formation. Howspace speakers had discussion around how old ways of working is now adapted and changed into the current remote working conditions. They referred to a study *“Miten Suomi voi?”* in English *“How is Finland doing?”* conducted by TTL (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health) and released in February 2021. The study concluded that even though the overall wellbeing in the remote working conditions in Finland has increased during the pandemic particularly in the beginning of the pandemic, most young adults now feel the decline of their overall wellbeing. As mentioned by the speakers, it is an ongoing and current investigation on how the remote working has and will affect the overall wellbeing of the population. The effects of the overall wellbeing were discussed and explained by the speakers. Social capital was mentioned several times during the webinar – especially the lack of social capital now in the remote working environment and how it does not increase in the remote working conditions as much as in the prior working conditions. The social interactions, informal discussions about work, after work gatherings all correlate to the lack of social capital. It is not developing in the remote working environment and most likely has now the effect of the decline of wellbeing in the remote working conditions. What organizations have implemented are virtual coffee breaks, virtual gatherings, just to name a few. This is done in order to increase the social capital – yet it is not enough. Currently with the pandemic, the small talk needs to be separately scheduled, and one needs to organize it. One also mentioned how individuals are more and more independently managing themselves. It was pointed out that when “going back to the old ways of working”, this might be a difficult thing to address. They continued to address issues that make social capital hard to develop and make concrete. One speaker highlighted the importance of asking simple how are you and to be curious of the counterparty’s world. The speakers

address that the current online tools and technology does support the social capital now in the remote working. In addition, the current AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools that are available for organizations to utilize provide aid for the social capital as well. (Howspace, 2021)

The speakers addressed hybrid working model as the next topic in the webinar this was done in two distinct ways. One being location orientated aspect where one works from home and the other aspect is the meetings where same team are all differently located, some being physically at the office and others at home. The figure below, provided by Howspace, demonstrates these aspects.

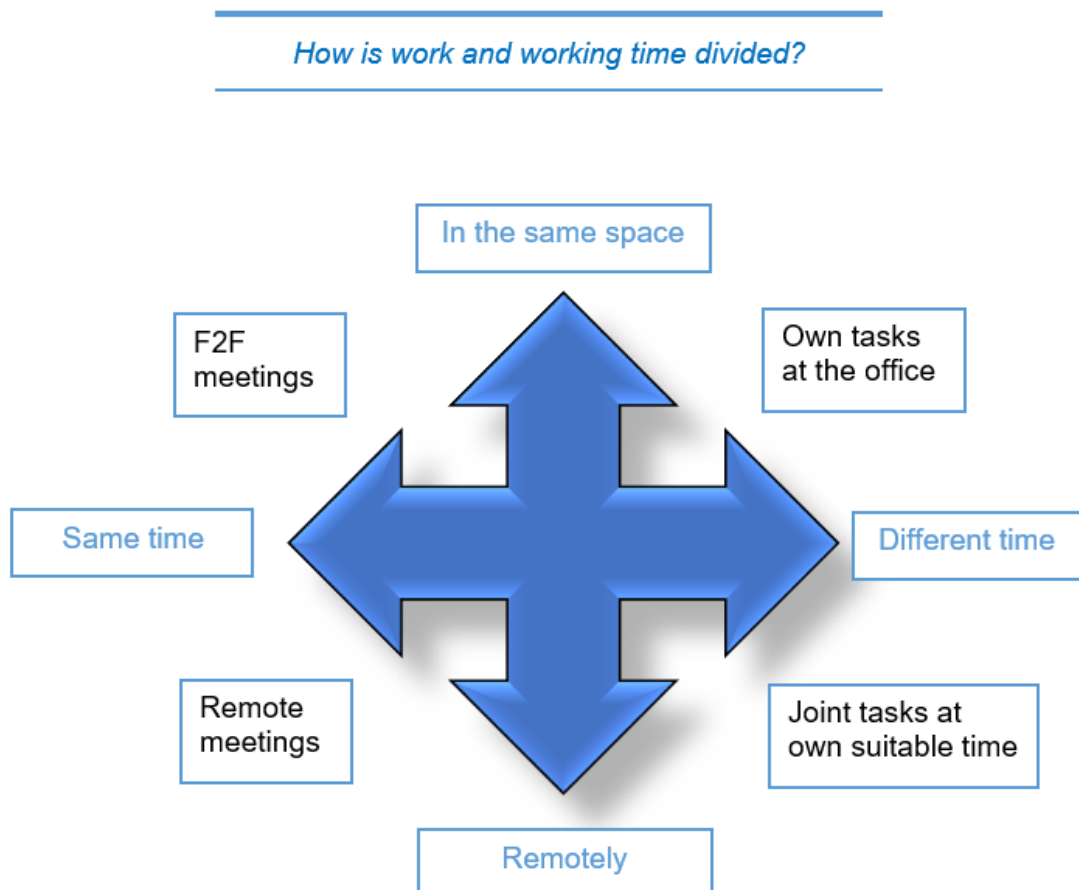


Figure 10. “How is work and working time divided?”. (Howspace, Webinar. 2021).

In the future, the speaker addressed working as working at the same time and working at different times. It also includes working at the same location as well as working remotely. The left arrow means at the same time and the right arrow

means at different times. The vertical arrow on the top means in the same space and the arrow below means remotely. The speaker demonstrated that in the future the hybrid model of working means that the balance of these four aspects will change dramatically. Most likely the way working remotely will stay, but also working in the same space and at the same time will be integrated into it. Working together will inevitably change once the pandemic is over. The discussion delved further in the ways in which working will develop in the future. The webinar speakers provided all the participants to an online questionnaire on, how they think their way of working will be formed in the future. The following alternatives were provided, and the overall average of the participants will be demonstrated as well:

- Doing own work, remotely = 3.9 points
- Doing together, remotely = 3.4 points
- Doing together, at the office = 2.7 points
- Doing own work, at the office = 2.1 points

The results show that the participants are most likely to work independently (own work) remotely in addition to working together remotely. The physical location at the office are the least favorable aspects. Time will be a critical aspect in the future and will provide the context. In addition to the location, everyone has their own place to work. (Howspace, 2021)

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the thesis provides knowledge on the research methodology. The chapter goes through explaining the chosen research methodology, data collection and analyzing method.

This thesis has a theoretical and empirical parts where the theoretical will provide a solid basis on understanding the key concepts investigated throughout the thesis including knowledge management (KM), communities of practice (CoP's) and virtual communities of practice (VCoP's) as well as remote working. The empiri-

cal part will be conducted through qualitative research method providing understanding on the experience of knowledge management transfer and practices. In addition, how CoP's are implemented and changed in the remote working conditions within the companies.

Since the thesis aims to answer questions "what", "why" and "how" the case study approach has been chosen (Lapan, SD, et al. 2011 p. 249). According to Cinneide, B.O. (1997) the recognition of an unfilled need is a part of the case study approach; the thesis aims to identify changes on the CoP's implementations in align with KM practices in the remote working environment. In addition, how these are utilized in practice and how these practices have changed within the scope of remoteness and virtuality. A case study aims to explain a certain phenomenon for example an important issue or a current circumstance. An important element of the case study is examining how individuals experience and interact with phenomenon. In addition, it provides in-depth data of the researched phenomenon. (Lapan, SD. 2011, p. 243) The initial starting point of a case study starts by making a research plan on how to collect and find the appropriate questions to gather the data for the specific phenomenon. The case study questions the researcher needs to clarify is what data needs to collect, from who the data is collected from, and here and when data is collected. (Lapan, SD. 2011, pp. 251-253)

5.1 Qualitative research

As stated by Ray Rist (1977) and cited by Taylor, SJ. *et al* (2015, PP. 18-19), qualitative manner to research extends to be more than a data collecting approach, it acts as a way of perceiving the observed and factual world. Taylor, SJ. *et al* (2015, pp.18-19) continue to explain how qualitative method for researchers is providing explanation to how people perceive meaning into their lives as they experience it. Since this thesis assesses how remote working has changed the approaches to CoP's and KM practices within an organization, the chosen research methodology is appropriate hence approaching the goals of the thesis. In order to provide comprehensible data from the research, qualitative method needs a set of limitations to obtain the required results and goals. The limitations provide

better overall understanding of the research and provide the researcher guidelines and frames to which to work around. As the qualitative research method is based on a theory or is guided by a theory, this approach is appropriate for the research. (Lapan, SD. 2011, p. 69) The research has a small segment in which the researcher used quantitative analysis method, explained in more detail in the next chapter. Lapan, SD. (2011, p. 7) states quantitative research includes statistics, numbers, and figures. Quantitative research assesses something that can be measured through numbers and amounts (Lapan, SD. 2011, p. 7).

As cited by Lapan, SD. et al. (2011, p.8) and stated by Merriam (2009) qualitative researchers often seek to understand and rediscover phenomena through people's own interpretation of experiences. These experiences are explained as on how individuals build and absorb the surrounding worlds. Lapan, SD. et al (2011, p. 8) continues to explain that qualitative researchers strive to investigate how an individual interacts on a day-to-day encounter. Interpretivist is a category and a perspective a qualitative researcher can undertake. It provides a perspective in which the qualitative researcher can view the individual's mindset on how and what their interpretation of the world is. As a part of the interpretivist research type, commonly they ask open questions about the researched phenomena and allow the questions to expand and even change. (Lapan, SD. et al. 2011, pp. 8-9) Qualitative research is focused on people rather than numbers and statistics. Qualitative research aims to understand and explain an individual's experiences, feelings, and emotions. The qualitative research method focuses on asking questions to enlighten an individual's own reflection and awareness on the phenomenon at hand. (Lapan, SD. et al. 2011, p.9)

5.2 Data collection and analysis method

The data collected for the research has been conducted through interviews. The chosen participants for the research are all in the field of customer service and divided into management and employees. The management here includes personnel with subordinates and the employees are the subordinates from different companies. The research focuses on analysing only with the division of these two groups. The comparison of the analysed data comes from practices of CoP's,

VCoP's and KM before and after remote working conditions. This research answers the question on how remote working conditions have changed or are changing in the approaches of CoP's and KM practices. All the interviews were conducted in the manner of confidentiality. The confidentiality aspect means that all the interviewees are unable to be linked to a specific company nor can the analysed data be associated with any of the interviewees. (Lapan, SD. et al, 2011 p. 36) Rather than being able to conduct the interviews face-to-face, the interviews were conducted online. The common approach for the qualitative researcher is to conduct interviews face-to-face in order to gather data, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic this approach was not applicable. The qualitative researcher may also utilize the face-to-face situation as an observation tool to gather more in-depth data to be analysed. However, this research is unable to utilize the observation method for data analysing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the timeline in the research. (Lapan, SD. et al. 2011, pp. 69-70)

As previously mentioned, interviews are a common tool used in the case study method. Lapan, SD. et al. (2011, p. 256) state, the interview questions should be conducted in a neutral way rather than be guided into the direction of what the interviewer expects or needs. Lapan, SD. et al (2011, p. 256) continues to explain the necessity of keeping the interview questions simple which means asking only one thing rather than combining numerous matters into one or several questions. To collect usable data for a research, the questions should not be formed in a yes or no format rather the researcher will gain more usable data if the interview questions are in an open-ended format. The researcher will gain usable data if the interview questions are in an open-ended form. This will provide the interviewee the possibility to provide more detailed data for the researcher to analyse. Paying attention to the way the interview questions are formed as well as the order of the questions asked, may have an impact on the research results. (Lapan, SD. 2011, p. 256)

The analysing of the data has been conducted through views of communities of practice in particular virtual communities of practice. The underlining matter is that trust as well as productivity are the concerns within a company in working

remotely. Thus, these aspects will be elaborated further in the upcoming empirical findings chapter.

6 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

This chapter of the thesis will provide information on the empirical research. The aim of the research is to define and determine the changes on KM practices and CoP's in the remote working environment. This will show the effects on how knowledge management is distributed to remote working conditions as well as to discover how communities of practice exists in remote working. As remote working has become more and more common in several areas of business, the lack of a community and belongingness to a group or a team is relevant in aims of figuring out how this will affect motivation and effectiveness. How will the trend of remote working affect knowledge management practices and matters around communities of practice? How have these well adapted manners and practices been transferred to remote working conditions?

The empirical part of the research was conducted through semi-structured interviews and in an open-ended form. The aim of the interview questions was to provide the interviewee the possibility to express their own behaviour and experiences. The research included 3 management position interviewees and 5 employee interviewees. All the interviewees were in the same line of business within customer service. The interviewees were chosen by in which the business itself had little prior remote working experience. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the businesses were forced to adapt to remote working conditions.

Prior to the actual interview, two separate pilot tests were conducted. This provided the researcher a better understanding and knowledge on how the interview questions should be formed in order to answer the main research question. The pilot testing helps the researcher to obtain and collect valuable information on the research questions and the way the questions are understood by the interview-

ees. By testing the research questions in a pilot test case prior to the actual research, the researcher will be able to figure out if indeed the questions provide the needed information for the research. (Lapan, SD. 2011, p. 256)

As the two separate pilot test interviews were conducted, the researcher modified the interview questions according to the received feedback and discussions. The researchers aim was to have an open discussion on the research topics and have the research questions function as a guideline for the discussion. The researcher wanted to keep the interview questions in an open form to provide the interviewee a relaxed and free form for answering. The interview included several pre-interview questions which included yes or no answer forms as well as inquiries related to the actual interview questions. The pre-interview questions were made to provide knowledge on what type of an interviewee is in question. The pre-interview questions included short questions on their working experience, prior experience in remote working conditions in addition to current experience in remote working. Furthermore, the interviewees provided answers on knowledge sharing and transferring tools. The pre-interview questions were divided into three sections: first included basic information on the interviewee, the second part included pre-pandemic questions and the third part included current (pandemic) situation questions.

6.1 Introduction to the interviewees

This paragraph introduces the interviewees in the research. As all the interviews were conducted anonymously and with confidentiality, the research will not provide detailed information of the interviewees nor will the data be linked to the interviewees. All the interviewees work within the same business field around customer service by way of exception for one whose business field is education and one who works in HR. The employees are range from rather new employees to some which have several years of experience as employees. The management have a similar scope of variety. All the interviews were conducted and recorded through Microsoft Teams and total duration of the interviews was 7 hours and 58 minutes with an average of 57 minutes per interview. Simultaneously to the recording of the interviewees, the researcher made notes to gather the key points of the interviews. This helped the researcher to analyse the data appropriately

(Lapan, SD. et al. 2011, p. 260) The recording of the interviews helped the researcher to return to the interview data, to listen and take new notes repeatedly during the last steps of the research process. As an aid to the researcher, the interviews were divided into three different main categories: knowledge management questions, communities of practice questions and remote working questions. This division of the interview questions helped the researcher when gathering the data together and going back to the interview questions.

The figure below demonstrates the interviewees in the division of management and employee. The figure includes gender and working experience in years and provides a visualization of the interviewees. As mentioned previously, the data for the figure was gathered through the pre-interview questions. Profession and age were excluded from the figure below due to the lack of additional value to the research.

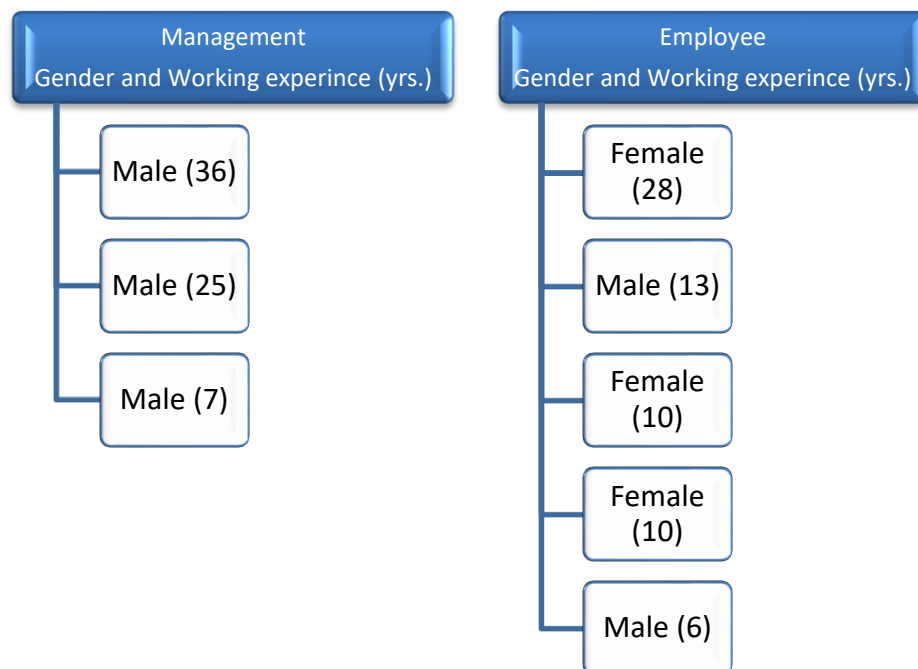


Figure 11. Introduction to the Interviewees. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

As part of the research and prior to the interviews, the researcher sent all the interviewees soft skills figure presented in Chapter 3 as Figure 8. The researcher required the interviewees to rank the provided soft skills from 1-10, 1 being the highest priority and 10 being the lowest priority. The researcher demonstrated the soft skills figure as “In relation to effective leadership and CoP’s, please rank the

following soft skill attributes from 1-10". This provided the researcher attributes on how each interviewee as an individual considers effective leadership and CoP's attributes. Having said that, the task was complex since all the provided soft skills can be considered as equally important. The researcher's aim was to gain an overall and personal details about each interviewee and what they consider as the highest priority in terms of effective leadership attributes and CoP's. The figure below visualizes the feedback from the interviewees considering the soft skills figure.

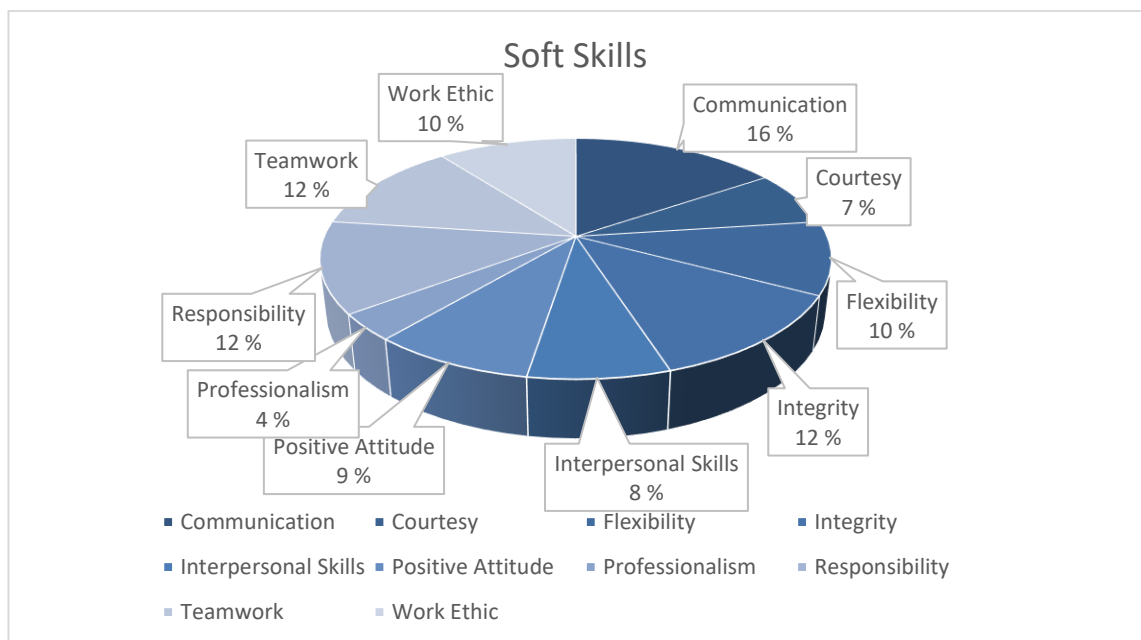


Figure 12. Results on Soft Skills. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

As seen from the Figure 12 above, communication rises to be the highest priority with professionalism deemed the least priority. This provides the researcher important information in analysing the results on the change process of KM and CoP's. Where communication was ranked highest, teamwork, integrity and responsibility were ranked as second with equal importance. Flexibility and work ethic being the third highest importance. These results may have correlation to the current remote working conditions. As according to the research theoretical framework, these soft skills align with the provided theories in CoP's and KM processes. When these soft skill attributes are ranked as indicated above, it provides the knowledge of how communication acts as a key component to CoP's and efficient working environment.

6.2 Insights on KM

The following paragraphs provides the main highlights of each interview around each research topics, KM, CoP's and remote working. Only the main points of each interview answers have been selected by the researcher for each paragraph to come. More detailed and in-depth answers from the interviewees are found in the Appendices part of the thesis. Since the interview had open-ended questions, the interviewees felt free to discuss matters at their own pace with the guide of the researcher. Occasionally the interviewees answered an interview question prior to asking it. Due to this, the researcher chose to pick out the answers that were related to one another by combing them. This assists in gathering all the interview data into an understandable and easy to follow entity.

This paragraph will provide a summary of the main insights from the interviewees in relation to KM practices and KM processes within the remote working environment. The comparison aspect will be on the face-to-face working environment to gather data on the possible changes. The paragraphs combine the insights from the management and employee side, providing a summary from all of the interviews.

As part of the interview, the researcher included KM questions regarding how information and knowledge is shared in the remote working environment. The aim was to find out, how knowledge and information sharing practices have changed within the current remote working environment. In addition, the aim was to find out what tools are currently utilized. According to the interviews, online tools such as Microsoft Teams are utilized in the remote working environment daily. Some utilized Teams even in the pre-pandemic situation, whether it being a training session, meeting with peers that are working from home or meeting with customers. The pandemic situation has forced many to utilize several online tools and use multiple online communication channels in aims of efficient and collaborative communication. As one of the management side interviewees pointed out:

“Teams allows a more interaction approach. Through Teams one can quickly set up meetings and join them. The pandemic has brought new options and has forced in learning to utilize new tools.”

As stated by the interviewee new tools are evidently introduced to the remote working environment, constantly upgraded and new platforms created. The constant upgrades and new tools outcomes into a constant learning process. Employees and the management are constantly learning new aspects on the remote tools as they develop, and their own know-how develops. One of the interviewees also pointed out the important element of recording online meetings and trainings. When a meeting or a training session is recorded, one can quickly and quite effortlessly go back to the recorded material. During the pandemic, many companies have been forced to utilize online platforms like Teams for educational purposes. Through the recording element now the access to learning has only increased. Like one of the interviewed said:

“Now that we are able to record for example discussions through Teams, this enhances learning.”

And another interviewee from the employee side stated similar insights:

“The good thing about information exchange in a remote way, there’s always a record of things. I can look back and scroll through my WhatsApp and see what was said. It resolves misunderstandings or disagreements but also makes people more aware of what they put in there.”

When it comes to utilizing mobile phones, it remains to be a settled practice not depended on remoteness. The interviewees stated that mobile phone in particularly the WhatsApp application, is in their daily use. Many have several different WhatsApp groups they share information through. Many stated the WhatsApp being for the informal discussion and the place where small talk and not related to work discussions happens. All the interviewees stated that email is in their constant use, whether being remote or physically at the office. Comparing the pandemic, remote working environment to the on-site physical office environment, the major difference are the face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face meetings are the most common method of transferring and sharing knowledge in the on-site physical office environment. Many of the interviewees stated that they weekly

or monthly meetings in the office. Many also stated that sharing of information and knowledge happens at coffee or lunch breaks.

To conclude from the interviewees, the tools utilized in the remote working environment have not necessarily changed they have rather increased. Whereas in the face-to-face environment according to the interviewees, email, WhatsApp, and online platforms like Teams were utilized daily. In the remote working environment, the same tools are still used yet they are used at a more intense time capacity. And the tools have also increased into several other additional tools, depending on the company and what information is being shared and transferred.

6.3 Insights on CoP's and VCoP's

This paragraph will present the main insights from the interviewees considering CoP's and VCoP's in the remote working environment. The aim was to gather information on what the interviewees considered as an efficient and ideal community to work in. The following will provide the combination of insights from the management perspective and the employee perspective.

In Chapter 3, the researcher introduced the concept of soft skills. For many, all the attributes covered in Chapter 3 may be considered equally important when considering an efficient working community or a team. According to the interviewees, a good working community consist of collaboration and good communication skills. One's own mindset is seen important, in addition to having clear expectations and clear roles. Many may feel out of place or not as clearly managed in the remote working environment where the lack of face-to-face encounters exist. Collaboration according to the interviews is seen as having the ability to help one another, include humour to the discussion and maintain trust. As one of the management side interviewees stated:

“If people are working with a good attitude, are ready to commit to tasks and inherit a good state of mind these I would consider as one of the most important things. Good collaboration as a team, helping each other and setting clear roles in addition to utilizing one's professional skills in a flexible way I consider to be important.”

One of the interviewees provided insights on efficient working environment attributes as follows:

“Cohesiveness, everyone one feels part of the team and everyone feels important. Good humour, I consider working with a smile on my face rather than having my forehead crinkled. With a good working atmosphere, you are still able do a good job and this supports in achieving better results.”

In the remote working environment, everyone is dependent on online tools and platforms to work. Utilizing these are the only ways of communication and forming new working communities virtually. On a new employee perspective, forming or becoming part of a community in the virtual environment may seem difficult. Some may say it to be harder than in a face-to-face scenario. To ensure that each team member is important and inherits feeling of belongingness to a team or a group, one of the interviewees stated:

“An incredibly important task, especially considering a new employee. It is a manager’s role to welcome the new employee and to make them feel included, to provide possibilities to see and experience different tasks and get to know everyone from the working environment.”

Forming communities, whether from a new employee perspective or someone with several years of experience within the same employer, is important for the overall well-being of an employee. When working remotely, the challenges of sharing knowledge and dealing with possible conflicts occur and may present to be slightly more difficult task in comparison to the face-to-face environment.

To conclude from the interviewees, including small talk, humour, structure, common goals, and clear individual roles are seen as attribute to efficient team and working environment. It may be that the remote working conditions only highlight the importance of these attributes due to the lack of the physical working community and management presence. According to the interviewees informal discussion ascended when addressing the feeling of belongingness to a team. Asking

“how are you” and having one-on-one discussion are seen as important attributes.

6.4 Insights on remote working

This paragraph will provide the main insights from the interviewees in relation to remote working and leadership matters. As explained the division of the interviewees was conducted as management and employee parties. The following will address insights from the management and the employee side.

Whether working remotely or physically near to one another challenges are always present. They might present themselves as noise, interruptions, time management issues, communication matters or feeling appreciation to name a few. In addition to the challenges, facilitating and limiting factors of remote working are addressed in the following part of thesis.

According to the interviewees, the challenges that the remote working environment brings is the lack of face-to-face social encounters. Facial expressions and body language rarely exist in the remote working environment. To have camera's on during an online meeting is the closest to a face-to-face encounter that one can receive in the remote working environment. One of interviewees described challenges in the remote working environment as follows:

“With the current online tools available, one is able to share and transfer knowledge rather well. But the lack of personal face-to-face encounters and discussions is a challenge. When working remotely the encounter or interaction is always to be taken (booked) separately. In the working community environment personal contacts and discussions happen easily. Whereas the remote working environment encounters tend to be more formal with the lack of other discussion. From the management point of view, if you have many subordinates, often the manager needs to book separate meetings with each subordinate, and this may cause time management issues.”

Many companies currently have ongoing questionnaires and surveys to find out, how remote working is perceived as and if in the future should be part of everyday

working. Where some might see remote working as a facilitating matter, some might see it as a limiting factor. According to the interviewees, the majority see remote working including facilitating factors more than limiting ones. One of the interviewees pointed out the efficiency of online meetings. Stating that online meetings tend to be more to the point rather than going off topic too much. Additionally, what many interviewees pointed out was, that due to remote working they feel more efficient in their overall work and have fewer distractions.

The lack of face-to-face encounters and social discussions, many felt that sharing enthusiasm and creating team spirit tends to be more difficult in the remote working environment, seen as a limiting factor. Not being able to have discussions on coffee breaks and over lunch are lacking within the remote working environment. One of the interviewees addressed the matter of facilitating and limiting factors as follows:

“Online meetings may be considered more efficient in the remote working environment. Meetings tend to be shorter and to the point leaving out the other discussions. When working remotely, I consider the work to be more efficient due to less distractions. From the management point of view, being able to create and improve team spirit and enthusiast people around you in the remote working environment is a limiting factor.”

Including a new employee perspective on remote working, some stated that the orientation process can be considered as a limiting factor. In addition, the self-management attributes. When introduced to a new team and working community, it almost happens automatically within the on-site physical office space. One is able chat to different people simultaneously and observe hands-on actions on the working community. These are attributes that are lacking in the remote working environment. One interviewee stated the following:

“My calendar is booked from morning till late afternoon with Teams meetings, without any breaks. So, there are meetings after meetings. If you do not take care of scheduling your own lunch break, someone will book that time from your calendar for a meeting. Difficult to self-

manage oneself. As a new employee, it also difficult to be part of the working community and get know everyone. Since there is no possibility to have those face-to-face coffee breaks, it is hard to get to know people on a more personal level. We have adapted to an online coffee get together on Fridays, yet it is still not the same as meeting face-to-face.”

As stated before, the lack of body language and facial expressions are present in the virtual environment. Face-to-face interactions and discussions are seen more personal and in-depth. One of the interviewees stated that they would much rather meet a new person face-to-face than online since it outcomes into a more profound and in-depth feeling of the counterparty. As one of the interviewees explained, when asserting the discussion into face-to-face interaction:

“When negotiating for example with a customer, meeting face-to-face you are able to see facial expressions and the connection is made easier. Personally, a lot more challenging in the remote working environment.”

To conclude, there are many facilitating and limiting factors around remote working. Some of the interviewees found remote working an efficient way to work, with less distractions and more abilities to focus on a particular task. Some found it more flexible in terms of place of residency, and through time management. Having said that, the interviewees were concerned with developing and maintaining connections towards co-workers and customers in the remote working environment. Since there is the lack of face-to-face encounters, creating mutual team spirit, sharing success and orientation aspects become more difficult and challenging in the remote working environment. Many stated that remote working does bring efficiency to work, flexibility to own time management and outcomes into factors that help one’s personal life balance. The main limiting attribute towards remote working asserted by the interviewees was the lack of face-to-face discussion and social encounters.

7 ANALYSES OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter of the thesis provides analyses of the conducted research. The aim is to provide an analysis of the conducted interviews and analyse the main points from the interviews. The chapter demonstrates the main differences and similarities with the face-to-face and remote working environment in relation to KM practices and CoP's.

7.1 Analyses of the findings

From the conducted interviews, what face-to-face adds value in are the social encounters and the presence of the management and peer support. The interview found out that remote working inherits more value adding attributes in comparison to the face-to-face environment. Having said that, according to the interviewees there is great value and importance in the social encounters. More specifically as a new employee, the social encounters add more value in terms of forming communities and work teams in addition to the orientation process. The face-to-face environment is considered more familiar and easier. It is important to note however that all the interviewees have had several years of working experience and are accustomed to the face-to-face and physical office environment. Interpretation from the interviewees in regards of the face-to-face environment was that the connections formed easier and more effortless. The scenario stands for students, co-workers, and the management. As seen from the Figure 13 below, there are more attributes in regards of addition value to the interviewee. Remote working conditions allows more flexibility with the working life and personal life balance as well as personal time management. According to the interviewees the flexibility brings value in the remote working conditions and brings freedom in choosing the location of where to physically work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the online tools are the key for virtual communication. According to the interviewees, there are several different platforms and databases to utilize in the remote working environment. Highlighted in the interviews, the communication works as long as the online tools work properly. Some mentioned the self-management aspect in relation to remote working. The self-management aspects

have only increased during remote working. An employee is no longer under direct surveillance within the physical office but is more dependent on self-management. This is seen as a value attribute although has limitations where many seek for more hands-on guidance and support from the management in the remote working environment.

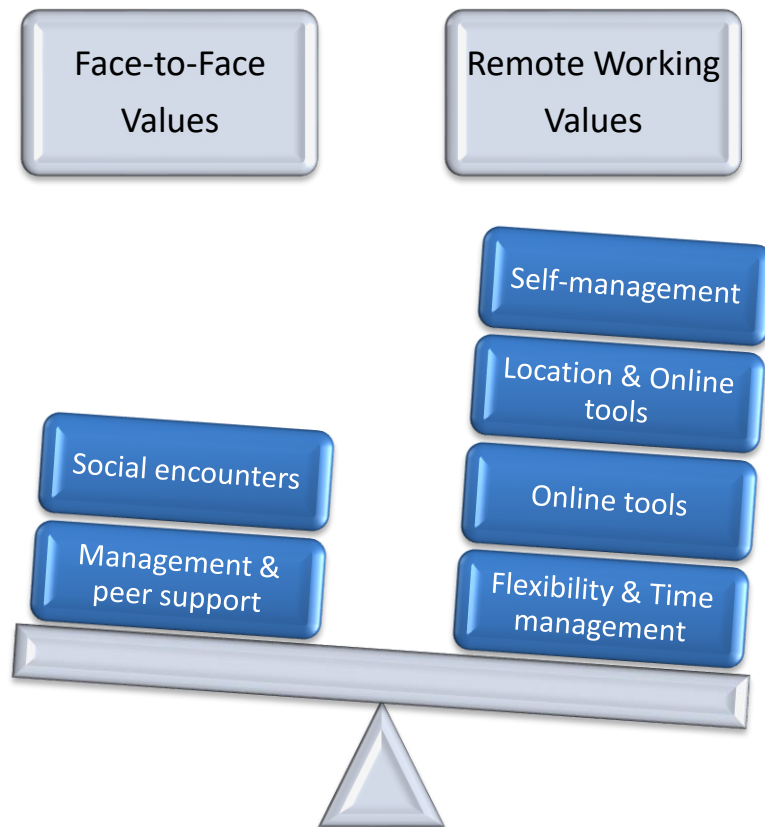


Figure 13. F2F (Face-to-Face) values vs. Remote Working values. (Nurhonen, L. 2021).

The research's theory discusses the combination of face-to-face and remote working, a hybrid model of working. Organizations need to address the values that both face-to-face and remote working brings to employees. As addressed by many of the interviewees, the hybrid model of working would outcome as the primary and best way of working. Achieving values from both sides of working. Even though remote working values seem higher, the impact that the face-to-face working environment brings can not be dismissed or neglected. By combining the two, organizations address the well-being of all employees.

The Figure 14 below aims to demonstrate the key findings of the research in regards of knowledge transfer in the pre-pandemic conditions. When on-site and physically at the office environment the combination of social encounters and online tools are utilized to share and transfer knowledge and information. As mentioned in Chapter 2, explicit knowledge tends to be easier to transfer whereas tacit knowledge is the more problematic one. When knowledge is tacit, in the pre-pandemic situation its transfer becomes easier in a face-to-face environment in comparison to the remote working environment. Sharing knowledge tacitly one can observe and learn by doing. Whether it happens in the weekly or monthly meetings, coffee, or lunch breaks or in the daily interactions. Explicit knowledge is the written form, the data that can be passed on to everyone. It is the same for everyone. As addressed by the interviewees, to transfer the explicit knowledge online tools and platforms are utilized for example Intranet, emails, and cloud storages. Even in the pre-pandemic situation, many utilized same online tools as in the remote environment for example Teams. In the pre-pandemic environment, other tools to share and transfer knowledge were WhatsApp, training, and brainstorming sessions.

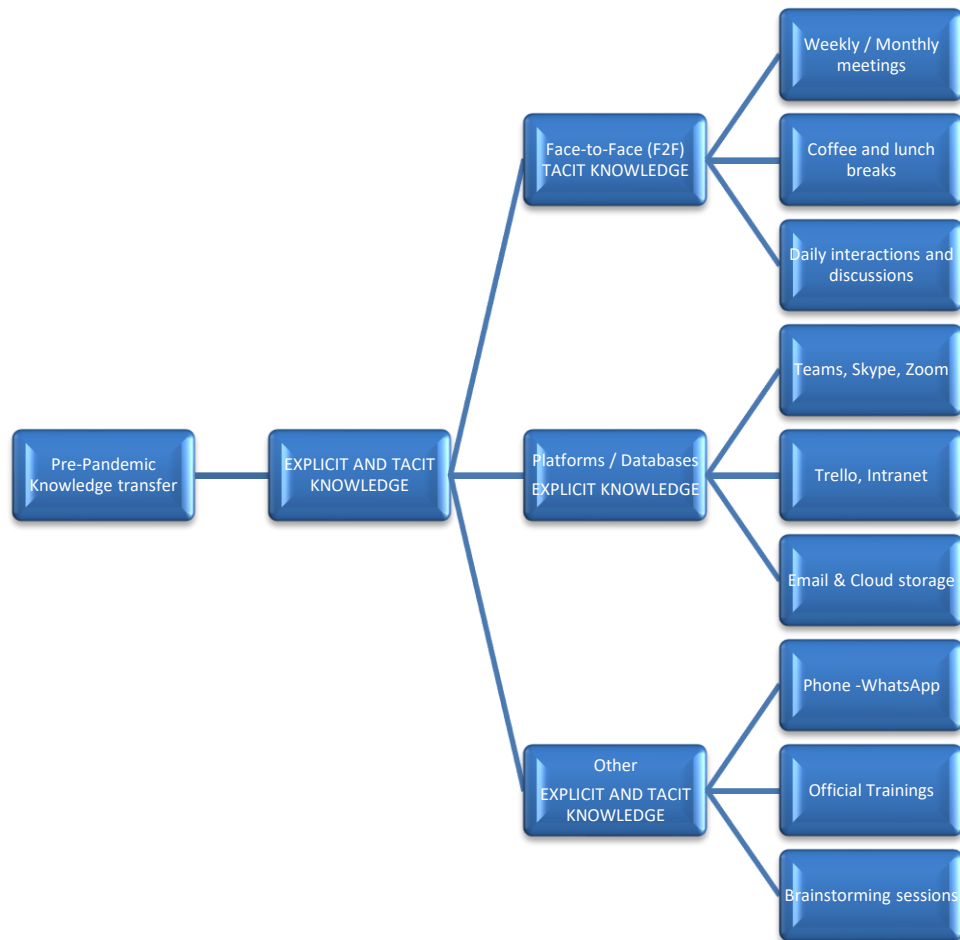


Figure 14. Pre-pandemic (On-site) Knowledge Transfer. (Nurhonen, L. 2021).

According to interviews, the pre-pandemic situation utilized all the tools available, from online tools to face-to-face meetings. Many stated that having the face-to-face interaction improved their ways to share their thoughts, knowledge, and information. The interviewees stated it to be easy in the face-to-face environment by being able to not only utilize the face-to-face interaction but also having online platforms and tools included.

The Figure 15 below aims to demonstrate the key findings of the research in regards of knowledge transfer in the remote working conditions. It primarily concerns with the lack in the remote working environment of face-to-face interactions. According to the conducted interviews, one is only able to hear the tone of the voice rather than seeing facial expressions or body language. The virtual platforms Teams, Zoom and Skype are the new “face-to-face” interactions in the remote working environment. Tacit knowledge is hard to transfer in the face-to-face

environment but becomes even more challenging in the remote working environment. The lack of being able to observe someone or the overall culture of doing things becomes challenging in the remote working environment.

In the remote working environment, knowledge is shared through different databases for example Miro, Padlet, Intranet and cloud storages. This explicit knowledge is the written form of knowledge and tends to be rather easy and effortless in the remote working environment according to the interviewees. In addition to the databases, email, WhatsApp and webinars are utilized to share knowledge.

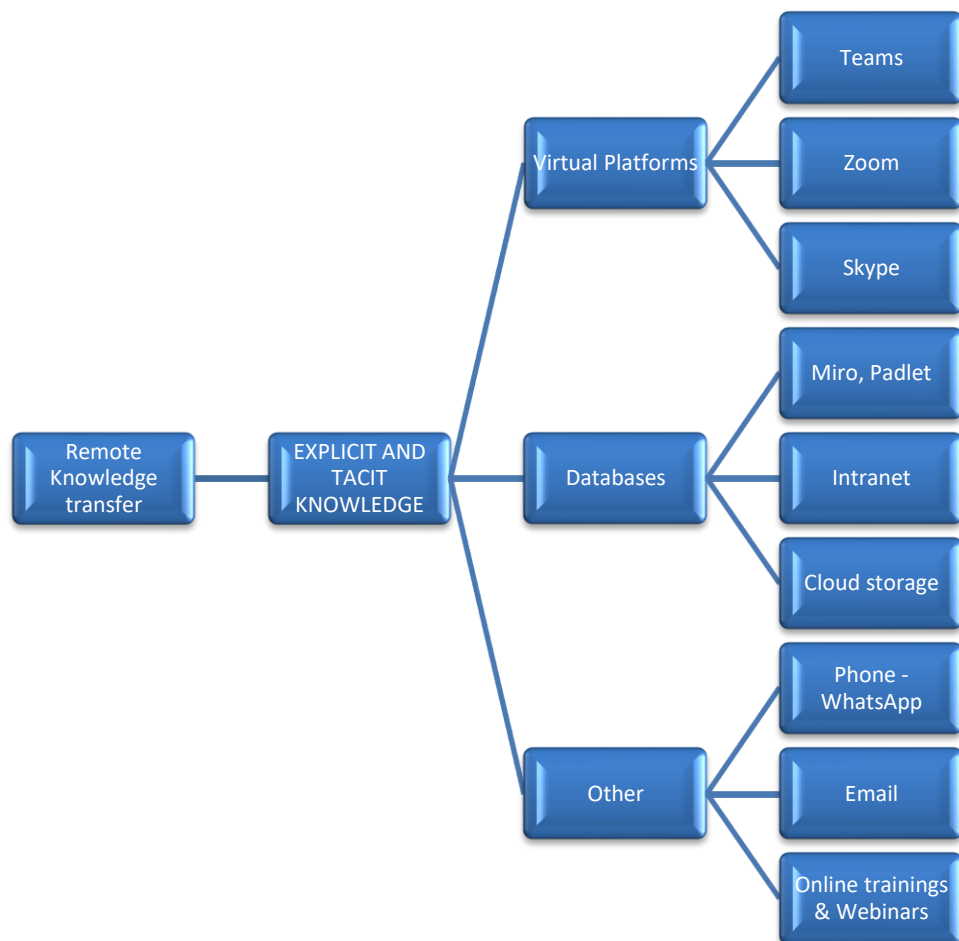


Figure 15. Remote Knowledge Transfer. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

According to the SECI-model by Nonaka and Takeuchi 1991 introduced in Chapter 2, knowledge has the four components socialization, externalization, combi-

nation, and internalization. Within the remote working environment, the challenges appear in the transfer of tacit to explicit knowledge. When verbal interactions, facial expressions, body language and observations from other are lacking in the remote working environment, the tacit knowledge is ever harder to transfer. When Birnkinshaw and Sheenan (2002) stated the KM knowledge creation cycle, presented in Chapter 2, it also addressed how knowledge is created. From the interviewees, the shared knowledge transfers through online platforms, tools, and databases. Utilizing all forms of knowledge. What merely is lacking in the remote working environment is the face-to-face interactions. As shown in Figure 5 in Chapter 2, tacit knowledge can be transferred through formal and informal methods whereas explicit knowledge through formal methods. For tacit knowledge to transfer, it needs social encounters or new forms of social encounters where face-to-face forms are not present in the remote working environment. From the interviewees, it was clear that communication with co-workers and management is important. People might interpret information and knowledge differently, so in order to have mutual understanding communication is key.

The Figure 16 below aims to demonstrate the key findings of the research in regards of CoP's in the pre-pandemic conditions. CoP's in the pre-pandemic environment were rather easy to form. One may observe on how work is done, what are the practices of doing certain tasks and one is able to observe facial expressions and body language. Many stated in the interviews, that the connection to their co-workers were made through informal methods such as having "after-work", coffee and lunch breaks and after work activities and "get togethers". According to the interviewees the facilitating attributes in the face-to-face scenario, were that is quick, and the working hours are clear. When it comes to new employees, the orientation process is considered easier in the face-to-face environment according to the interviewees. The limiting attributes in the pre-pandemic situation were the noisiness, restlessness, and the inability to focus on a task.

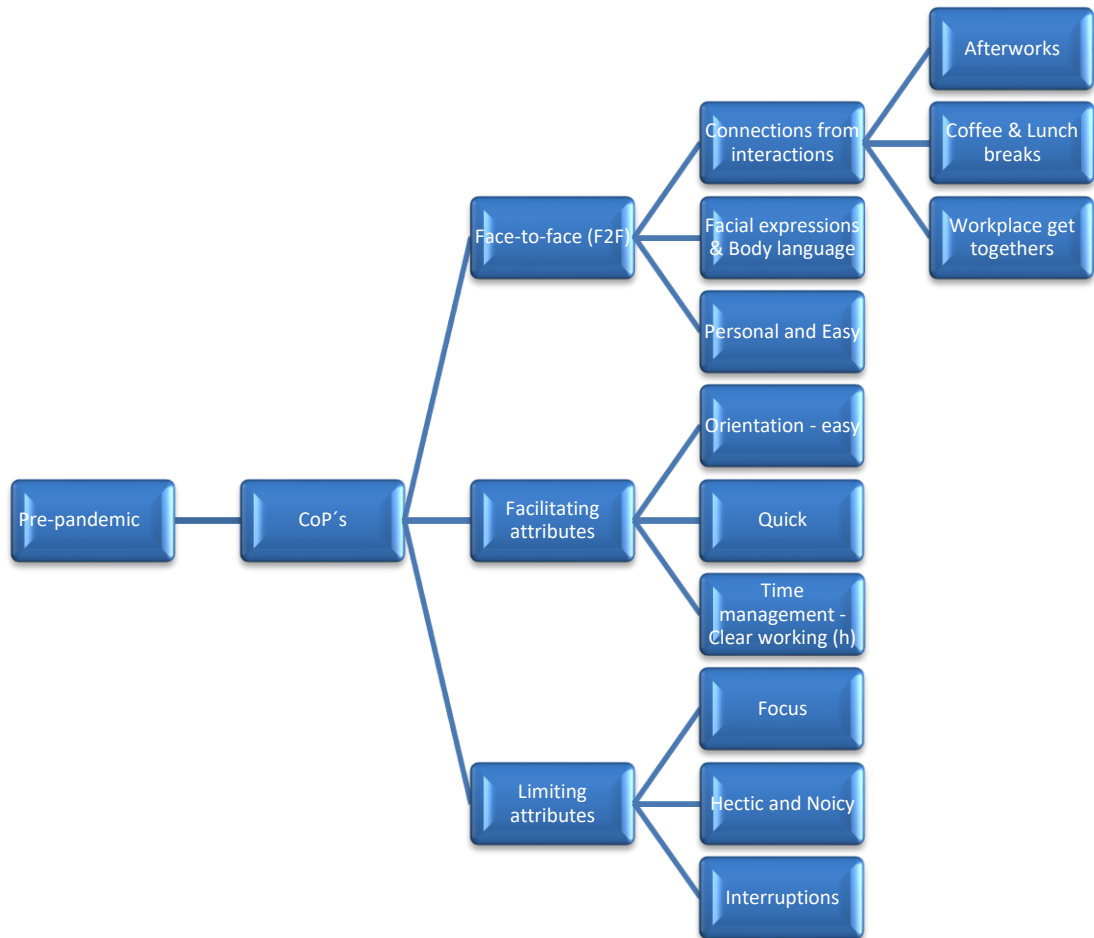


Figure 16. Pre-pandemic CoP's. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

In the pre-pandemic situation CoP's were formed rather easily due to the presence of face-to-face encounters. However, the limiting attributes by the interviewees were addressed with significant impact. Many of the interviewees asserted that within an open office space, it may be hard to focus and concentrate. Many addressed that interruptions were constant. Whether it being from a co-worker asking for help to phone ringing, in the physical office space interruptions were happening daily.

The Figure 17 below aims to demonstrate the key findings of the research in regards of VCoP's in the pandemic conditions. Virtual communities are reluctant on online tools to work. All the communication and connections happen online. The only thing that is missing in the remote working communities are the actual physical contacts that the face-to-face environment brings. This lack of physical contact is deemed to limit the wellbeing of workers and this is also reflected in the interview answers, although it can be noted that there is substantial biased in that most interviewee is standardized to work in face-to-face environment. More likely than not, future working environments will further adapt the hybrid style until it too becomes the norm.

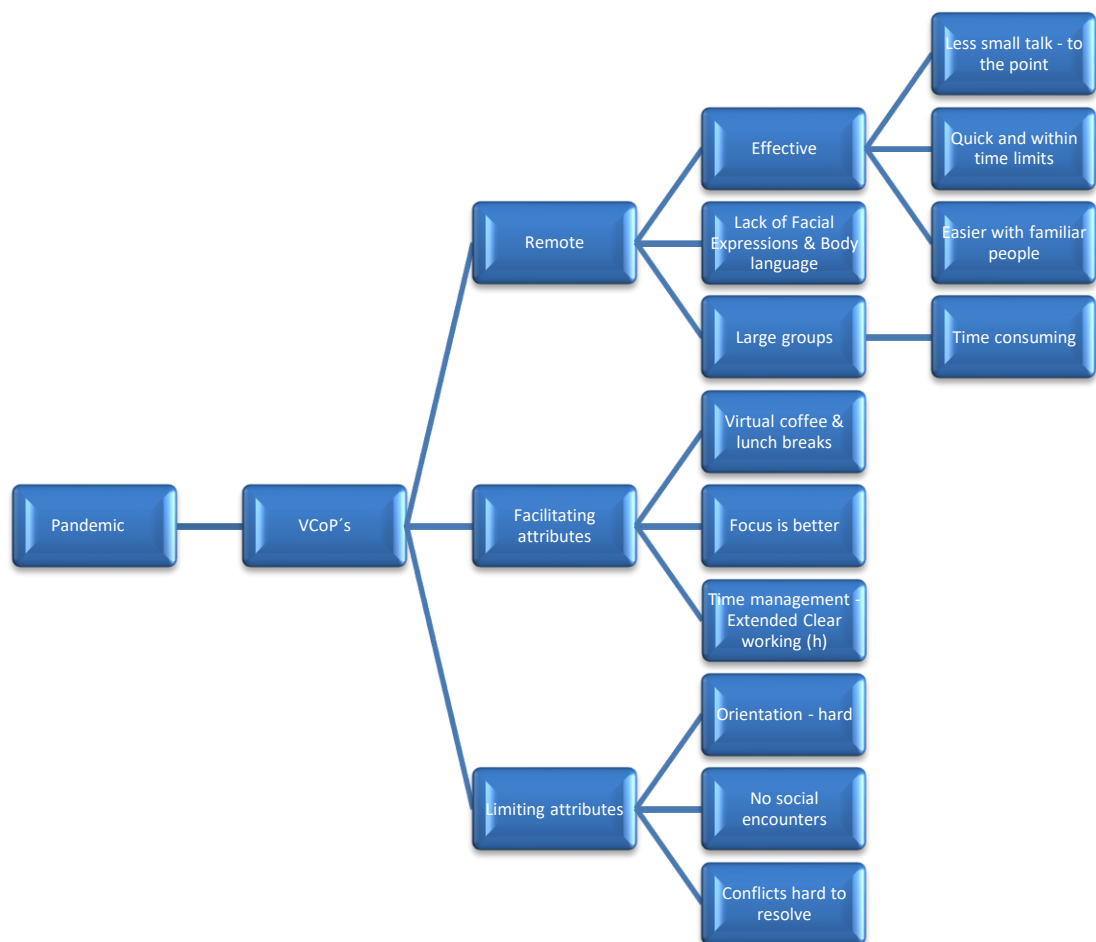


Figure 17. Pandemic VCoP's. (Nurhonen, L. 2021)

As Figure 5 in Chapter 2 presents, tacit knowledge is transferred through CoP's. When virtual, the transferring process becomes even more difficult. As explored in Chapter 2, tacit knowledge is hard to transfer because it is learned by doing, in practice. One needs to be able to express themselves through online tools rather than face-to-face. In addition, the communication within the community happens primarily without facial expressions and body language. The lack of this valuable communication aspect can have a significant negative effect on building trust and the feeling of belongingness. This was as supported by the empirical data gathered from the interview questions. On the other hand, in the remote working environment, the facilitators according to the interviewees were attributes around flexibility which in today's world, is seen as a great commodity. People live fast paced lives which includes plenty of travelling and moving around, thus time flexibility and location independence are great facilitators to these specific needs. Another advantage which was brought up in the interview is the ability to focus better, be effective and able to manage own schedule of work in a more flexible way. Although it becomes an issue of which is more of importance: the ability to focus and be productive due to lack of social distractions or the ability to form trusting and inclusive social bonds which improve wellbeing. This aspect is a topic that could be further explored in future studies.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The final chapter of this thesis will conclude the entire research theories in correlation to the discussion of the empirical findings of the research. This chapter will provide answers to the main research question as well as the sub-questions mentioned in the first chapter. The first part of this chapter will discuss the findings and discoveries of the sub-questions of the research. The second part will conclude the main research question in addition to the validity of the research. The suggested future research agendas will be introduced and deliberated as well.

8.1 Main findings and discussions

The sub-research questions aimed to research, what value, what benefits and how are effective knowledge management and CoP's processes constructed now in the remote working environment. According to the constructed interviews and attended Webinars, building efficient knowledge processes and communities within the remote working environment, correlates to the overall well-being of the organization. The following will provide insights on the values and benefits of KM processes and CoP's.

- *What value do CoP's and KM practices provide to an organization?*

Effective knowledge management processes aim to provide an organization clear vision on what is needed to be known and how this information can be managed, CoP's form the necessary foundation on how knowledge is shared and created. Based on data from the interviewees, many considered the remote working environment as more effective than being physically at an office space because there are fewer interruptions in the remote working environment and the flexibility of working hours. However, the face-to-face interactions that are now lacking in the remote working environment leaves an unpleasant feeling of loneliness and isolation. Many feel that the combination of face-to-face and remote working would be an ideal way of working because one is able to reap the benefits of both the flexibility and increased focus provided by remote working conditions but also the social aspect from the face-to-face encounters contributes to the overall feeling of belongingness and increased social capital. As asserted in the previous chapter, values from remote working outweigh face-to-face working. The theories presented in the research previously underline this statement.

- *How are knowledge management practices utilized in remote working?*

Knowledge management practices in the virtual working environment are utilized through online tools and platforms. Orientation for new employees happen virtually and companies operate the orientation process online by introducing the company's culture and ways of doing things. One-on-one and team meetings are happening daily. Through different online tools in the virtual working environment, everyone shares and creates new knowledge and passes it along. Many are

learning new ways in self-management. In the remote working environment self-managing is mandatory. Being able to acquire new knowledge and sharing it is happening in the remote working conditions online rather than face-to-face meetings.

- *Why effective knowledge management and communities of practice are beneficial to companies and to remote working?*

Efficient KM processes and CoP's are crucial for a company to maintain a competitive edge and continue being innovative. Due to remote working, according to the interviewees, clear roles, mutual goals, and self-management are present in the remote working environment, which then enables companies to hire new workforce on a global scale, not simply based on location. This will result in more competitiveness within the overall businesses and as well access to high quality workers. The overall well-being of an employee should be one of the priorities to a company. Companies are currently providing online surveys to acquire knowledge on how their employees are feeling in the remote working environment.

- *How has remote working changed companies' approach to communities of practice (CoP's) and knowledge management (KM) practices?*

The main research question was to research how KM and CoP's practices have changed in relation to remote working. Inevitably prior to the research one might state that practices have dramatically changed when it comes to knowledge management practices and CoP's. Stating the obvious, remote working has taken away the physical presence of interaction with one another. Yet the practices of the actual knowledge transfer methods have remained rather same. According to the conducted interviews, the online tools that are utilized in the everyday working environment are same as what they would use in their face-to-face working counterpart. The way they differentiate is the time they use them. In a face-to-face encounter, one can quickly and effortlessly discuss a certain matter and quite rapidly get to a conclusion. Whereas within the remote working environment, one might need to send emails, book a time to have an online meeting, which all in all becomes more time consuming.

The way information is passed on in the remote working environment inherits nuances of how the received information is perceived. Facial expressions, tone of voice and body language is lacking thus the interpretation is left only within the transferred message. This aspect of contrasting tacit and explicit transfer of information is vital for companies and organizations as they move forwards in the future. Based on data obtained from interviews, all viewed online platforms and tools in a positive light, which indicates that tacit information will have to be adapted in some way to the overall KM and CoP. Methods of achieving this adaptation within a remote working setting could be a potentially valuable research study in the future. The theories introduced in the research correlate with the empirical findings of the research.

Validity of the research

This paragraph will provide the validity and reliability of the research. The pilot test interviewees may have provided the research some addition value presumably in a way that the interview questions in the research were thoroughly analysed. Prior to the actual execution of the interview, an external review for the research questions prior and the data analysis draft was conducted. The aim was to provide trustworthiness and reliability for the research and an external opinion on how the research questions and findings were initially interpreted. (Lapan, SD. 2011, p. 265)

8.2 Future recommendations

Having a research on the new workforce (graduated) and their ability to adapt to remote working conditions, would provide an excellent viewpoint on future research. The new workforce has nothing to compare to in terms of old habits, ways of working and previous working environment and communities. This could provide the researcher important viewpoints on how organizations have adapted and incorporated new ways of including new work force to online communities. How organizations have restructured their orientation processes in addition to online

knowledge sharing and transferring methods. Concurrently many organizations execute remote working condition surveys to gather valuable information from their employees. An interesting aspect may be in comparing workforce that have had years of experience in working face-to-face and physical offices to currently having a new position and new employee within the remote working environment.

Another future recommendation for research could include identifying crucial areas where and what may be the key issues in the lack of community of practice within the remote working conditions. In addition, poor knowledge management processes could be further studied to provide solutions for improvement having, including the remote working aspect within the research. Having employees in a global scale working remotely would provide extensive information on cultural differences and their interpretations on knowledge sharing and transferring as well as forming teams and working communities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Soft skills prior to the interview

Please fill out prior to the interview.

In relation to effective leadership and CoP concepts, please rank the following attributes from 1-10. (1= highest priority, 10=lowest priority)

- Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening
- Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful
- Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable
- Integrity – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right
- Interpersonal Skills – nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills
- Positive Attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident
- Professionalism – businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised
- Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense
- Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative
- Work Ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance

Appendix 2

Interview questions

Pre-Interview questions:

- Please provide information about Yourself
 - Age, gender, and profession
 - Total working experience in yrs.
 - Has remote working been an option for You prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - If yes, in what capacity has working remotely been used in the past? (How has remote working been divided within Your work week)?

Pre-pandemic situation:

- What online tools did You use at work before the pandemic to share and transfer information?
- How often did You use these tools?

Current (COVID-19 pandemic) situation:

- Are You currently working remotely? If so, how would You estimate the ratio (%) between online and face-to-face? (What about on a weekly basis? How is Your working week divided (hybrid/full-time)?
- Based on Your experience in terms of remote working, what are your preferred ways of transferring information? (How do you think that would have been different if face-to-face?)
- Has Your company provided education/training/seminars to utilize these different tools/communication platforms? If no, why do You think that is?

Remote working questions

1. What do You consider to be the main challenges in remote working? Provide your main challenges in Your day-to-day job.
 - (How would it be different if face-to-face?)
2. Has remote working been more of a facilitating or limiting factor? Please explain why.
3. Could You specify which areas has been affected? (What areas do You feel has improved due to working remotely?)
4. How has remote working influenced Your approach to working in general?
5. Has there been a situation where you thought “a good old face-to-face /peer-to-peer” meeting would have easily resolved an issue?
6. How has Your expectations in terms of remote working aligned with the reality of remote working?

Communities of Practice (CoP's) questions

1. In Your opinion, what are ideal qualities of an efficient and positive working environment?
2. Suppose that You are the manager / As a manager, what can You do to ensure that Your team feels more included?

➤ (How would it be different if face-to-face?)

3. How can a manager support You in Your personal process of achieving goals?

➤ (How do you think that would be different if face-to-face?)

4. A Conflict situation occurs between co-workers, please describe how you would resolve it virtually (in the remote environment)?

Knowledge Management questions

1. Do You feel completely comfortable using the current online tools and communication platforms? If not, what would make it a more comfortable experience for You? If yes, what made it comfortable?

2. Many things have changed in the past year, specifically we have had to rely more on online tools which has affected the way we exchange information. How has this experience been for You?

3. Has the concept of trust changed for You within the remote working environment? How confident are You that You can trust and rely on information exchanged online?

4. Working remotely has influenced our ways of learning new skills and gathering new knowledge, how has this experience been for You?

5. Imagine a situation, where You have vital (important) information that needs to be passed on to your co-workers. How would You pass the information along to Your co-workers virtually (in the remote environment)?

➤ (How do you think that would have been different if face-to-face?)

6. Follow-up question: Imagine a situation, where you hold a very urgent (time pressured) piece of information that needs to be rapidly and efficiently passed on to your co-workers. How and what tools might You utilize in sharing the information virtually (in the remote environment)?

➤ (How do you think that would have been different if face-to-face?)

7. Imagine a situation due to information gap there was a misunderstanding. How would You deal it with it now (remotely) or face-to-face? (Information was not passed the right way)

➤ (How do you think that would have been different if face-to-face?)

Appendix 3

Main insights from all the interviewees. First part covers the main insights on KM, the second part covers the main insights on CoP's and the third part covers the main insights on remote working.

The main KM insights from the interviewees:

The first three will cover the management interviewees. When addressing how knowledge and information is shared and transferred in the remote environment in comparison to face-to-face interaction, one of the interviewees from the management side stated the following:

“Pre-pandemic face-to-face and email was used daily (in sharing and transferring knowledge). During the pandemic, email, mobile phone, and Teams are the most utilized tools. Teams allows a more interaction approach. Through Teams one can quickly set up meetings and join them. The pandemic has brought new options and has forced in learning to utilize new tools.”

The second interviewee indicated the following in sharing and transferring knowledge:

“Pre-pandemic face-to-face over coffee machine, Teams for each team, Trello and Intra pages are the most utilized tools daily. The quiet information gets lost quite easily in the remote working environment and currently I phone my closest co-workers easily sometimes just to ask how they are doing. Now I utilize email and phone daily. Now that we are able to record for example discussions through Teams, this enhances learning.”

The third interviewee stated information and knowledge sharing as follows:

“Pre-pandemic we had weekly and monthly meetings with the staff. This allowed a more personal approach through talking face-to-face. I also utilized email daily. Now during the pandemic, I utilize email and Teams. Teams is efficient and quick also efficient in sharing presentations. External junk is not there.”

The following will provide insights from the employee side within the same approach as done previously with the management side. The first interviewee from the employee side provided insights on sharing information and knowledge as follows:

“Pre-pandemic face-to-face and email quite extensively, also platforms like WhatsApp. Face-to-face was the most utilized way of communication. During the pandemic different WhatsApp groups have been formed. And now Zoom is utilized in meetings or class gatherings. In terms of my work, what I would love is not constant change. I would just learn that one and it would apply to all different styles and protocols. The good thing about information exchange in a remote way, there’s always a record of things. I can look back and scroll through my WhatsApp and see what was said. It resolves misunderstandings or disagreements but also makes people more aware of what they put in there.”

The second interviewee provided insights on sharing information and knowledge as follows:

“Pre-pandemic phone and email were the main tools. Also, joint cloud computing or storage has been used, it is also utilized today. Currently we use Teams intensively and other online platforms like Miro and Padlet. I also need to utilize Zoom and Skype.”

The third interviewee provided insights on sharing information and knowledge as follows:

“Pre-pandemic email and Skype and WhatsApp. In addition, we have intranet for our own team. Now during the pandemic, I’d say email and Teams. In Teams we have different group chats. There are currently too many chats to follow; there is information overload. I’d say prior to the pandemic, our manager filtered out some of the information and shared the important information. Now currently, you are your own micromanager.”

The fourth interviewee addressed aspects around sharing information and knowledge as follows:

“Pre-pandemic mainly email and face-to-face as well as intranet. Currently the main tool is Teams and Skype. Also with the closest team members, we call each other on a daily basis and also utilize email. Our WhatsApp group is only for informal stuff, not related to work.”

The final interviewee provided insights on sharing information and knowledge as follows:

“Pre-pandemic face-to-face and email was utilized daily. We have a group WhatsApp, but not for work related issues. Currently Skype is used daily in addition to email. Depending on what kind of information needs to be passed on e.g., guide traditional email. Maybe a combo, if it is something very important, I can send a Skype chat that I am about send you an email.”

Insights on CoP’s an VCoP’s

The first three interviewee insights are from the management side, continuing to the employee side. When asked about ideal qualities in relation to an efficient working environment, one of the interviewees from the management side stated as follows:

“If people are working with a good attitude, are ready to commit to tasks and inherit a good state of mind these I would consider as one of the most important things. Good collaboration as a team, helping

each other and setting clear roles in addition to utilizing one's professional skills in a flexible way I consider to be important."

The interviewee continued to explain, how to ensure everyone feels part of the team from a new employee perspective as follows:

"An incredibly important task, especially considering a new employee. It is a manager's role to welcome the new employee and to make them feel included, to provide possibilities to see and experience different tasks and get to know everyone from the working environment."

The second interviewee from the management side asserted efficient working environment attributes as follows:

"Cohesiveness, everyone one feels part of the team and everyone feels important. Good humour, I consider working with a smile on my face rather than having my forehead crinkled. With a good working atmosphere, you are still able do a good job and this supports in achieving better results."

Pursuing to what are the attributes that as a manager one is able to ensure feeling included and part of the team:

"I try to encourage employees plenty. I try to share information and bring together teams and their knowledge. I try to explain the background on why and how certain things are done. In a face-to-face scenario, I'd say that there are similar aspects. Joint events are important for people to get together on a common task."

The third interviewee from the management side, indicated efficient working environment attributes as follows:

"The information flow between departments and between teams is important. In addition, communication and working together for common goals. In general, conflicts between people take away from efficiency."

Continuing to address how a manager can ensure the feeling of including to a team, taking a more conflict point of view:

“Addressing difficult issues are easier face-to-face. Having coffee breaks are important since you can discuss small-talk and address certain situation more efficiently. These coffee breaks are lacking in the remote working environment.”

The following will provide insights from the employee side within the same approach as done previously with the management side. The first interviewee from the employee side and with business field from education, addressed efficient working attributes as follows:

“I would say structure is the first thing. A lot of the times small talk is not so small, it’s a cultural thing. Cover the things and go them through step by step and whatever time is left cover social things.”

When asserting good management skills and what attributes apply in considering the management to ensure the feeling of belongingness to a team, the interviewee provided the following insights:

“I would say transparency. Before beginning on a topic, I would in the first 5 minutes, wrap up on what has been discussed and what has been covered to make sure everyone is on the same page before moving forward. Sent out a general summarization, a memo and have a system where every person is responsible for acknowledging that they have understood it. Face-to-face this would feel a bit too robotic. I think it would be clear since you see that everyone has heard you.”

The second interviewee provided insights on efficient team and working environment as follows:

“Depends on the team and the overall feeling. We have had informal coffee moments prior to the actual meeting to have discussions that aims to raise the atmosphere. I’d say having one-on-one discussions

at least once a month with different people, ideal would be once a week. Also, that the online tools work will effect on the efficiency.”

When asserting good management skills and what attributes apply in considering the management to ensure the feeling of belongingness to a team, the interviewee provided the following insights:

“As a new employee and considering the management and orientation, I’d say to include in meetings and assigning own work responsibilities will provide cohesiveness. And of course, introducing to people.”

The third interviewee addressed efficient team and working environment as follows:

“Team spirit and working for a common goal. I also feel that a bit more relaxed environment and humour are important aspects.”

And continued to provide insights on good management skills and attributes to ensure the feeling of belongingness for a team:

“If I were a manager, I would try to take utilize each person’s strengths and remember to ask how they are doing. Also, to ensure that each team member feels important and good at what they are doing. I would say being face-to-face this would be easier; body language and facial expressions are hard to interpret when working remotely. It is harder to have remote brainstorming sessions rather than having them face-to-face.”

The fourth interviewee provided insights on efficient team and working environment as follows:

“A good working environment is where everyone has their own clear roles and trust in that everyone does their job. And having personal good work ethic. We have once a day group Teams meetings, to have a more informal discussion.”

Continuing providing insights on good management skills and attributes to ensuring the feeling of belongingness to a team as follows:

“Having more informal discussions and virtual gatherings. Having things that are not so much related to work.”

The fifth and the final interviewee from the employee side discussed efficient team and working environment as follows:

“If I think about office meetings and I’d say having them online are more efficient. The extra drivel is left out and kept within the time frame. But on the contrary, when working all the time remotely, the extra drivel and babble is also important. Having a good combo of small talk and efficient working and having humour and fun is also important.”

The final interviewee provided insights on good management skills and attributes to ensure the feeling of belongingness to a team as follows:

“Sharing information is important and everyone is up to date in what is happening. When face-to-face sharing information is easier and quicker rather than in the remote working.”

Insights on remote working

One of interviewees described challenges in the remote working environment as follows:

“With the current online tools available, one is able to share and transfer knowledge rather well. But the lack of personal face-to-face encounters and discussions is a challenge. When working remotely the encounter or interaction is always to be taken (booked) separately. In the working community environment personal contacts and discussions happen easily. Whereas the remote working environment encounters tend to be more formal with the lack of other

discussion. From the management point of view, if you have many subordinates, often the manager needs to book separate meetings with each subordinate, and this may cause time management issues.”

And continued to address the matter of facilitating and limiting factors as follows:

“Online meetings may be considered more efficient in the remote working environment. Meetings tend to be shorter and to the point leaving out the other discussions. When working remotely, I consider the work to be more efficient due to less distractions. From the management point of view, being able to create and improve team spirit and enthusiast people around you in the remote working environment is a limiting factor.”

When asserting the discussion into face-to-face interaction, the interviewee explained:

“When negotiating for example with a customer, meeting face-to-face you are able to see facial expressions and the connection is made easier. Personally, a lot more challenging in the remote working environment.”

The second interviewee from the management side expressed challenges in the remote working environment by stating the following:

“Sometimes technical challenges arise due to the online tools that are used. Another thing would be over efficiency and by this, I mean, that calendars are fully booked for the entire working day. What is also missing from is the typical coffee break discussions. Also, you are unable to read the counterparty’s reactions and facial expressions.”

And continued to express facilitating and limiting factors as follows, taking a more personal approach:

“I consider remote working to be more of a facilitating factor to me. Operating the daily routines is easier, it is easier to move from home to different hobbies. I don’t consider remote working to be a limiting factor. Only limiting issue would be meeting a new person. I would much rather meet a new person face-to-face rather than online. At least for the first time.”

When asserting the discussion into face-to-face interaction, the interviewee explained:

“It would be desirable to meet face-to-face when dealing with complex issues or when you need several opinions on something. Also, important to meet new employees face-to-face for the first time. It leaves a different dynamic and a more personal relationship and experience.”

The third interviewee from the management side revealed the challenges in remote working as:

“Body language and perceptions are left out of the online meetings. There is a lot of silent communication in the mix. As a manager you are supposed to be able to pick out also the silent communication from the discussion. In addition, you are not completely sure if the message got across and what the overall thoughts were. In addition, the technical issues in having your and the meeting participants mics on mute.”

And continued to provide insights on facilitating and limiting factors as follows:

“I believe that the society is able to work in this dispersed manner. If your work does not necessarily need the physical presence, there is the ability to gain savings from remote working. Saves in manners of energy, resources, and infrastructures. This supports location free thinking in regards of remote working. I also feel that remote working makes one’s personal life a lot easier.”

When asserting the discussion into face-to-face interaction, the interviewee explained:

“When addressing conflict situations, remote working conditions are more difficult. In those situations, the importance of face-to-face meetings are highlighted.”

The following will provide insights from the employee side within the same approach as done previously with the management side. One of the educational fields of business interviewer provided insights on regards of remote working and its challenges as follows:

“The hands-on way of working has been taken away, so it is more difficult remotely or in a virtual situation. Doing it online is not the same thing. However, when it’s a chat situation by creating WhatsApp groups they are good in specific questions and receiving specific answers. Their generation may even prefer to share and to speak, answer via online tools rather than face-to-face”.

Due to the different field of business, the answers from the educational field interviewer have a different approach compared to the other interviews. Asserting the facilitating and limiting factors of remote working, the interviewer stated the following:

“It’s been both facilitating and limiting. Facilitating it’s been more transparent, you are able to see what’s been said and the flexibility in considering where you work. Being able to multitask in every sense in addition to being able to do what I need to do when I want to. Limiting factors are that it is less personal, and I do have to spend more time in preparation. And you do need to explain more thoroughly. Some form of communication is lost. The constant changing of platforms are also limiting.”

Continuing to discuss about matters around face-to-face encounters and interactions, the interviewer asserted the following:

“Administrative things definitely. Resolving conflicts, super difficult to solve online. Whereas face-to-face I would illustrate it to them. I can’t

do it through email, too much explaining and the possibility for misunderstanding is too high. Something that could have been resolved in five minutes if face-to-face, now took 3 hours going back and forth on the chat (online)."

Second interviewer asserted remote working environment challenges with a new employee perspective:

"My calendar is booked from morning till late afternoon with Teams meetings, without any breaks. So, there are meetings after meetings. If you do not take care of scheduling your own lunch break, someone will book that time from your calendar for a meeting. Difficult to self-manage oneself. As a new employee, it also difficult to be part of the working community and get know everyone. Since there is no possibility to have those face-to-face coffee breaks, it is hard to get to know people on a more personal level. We have adapted to an online coffee get together on Fridays, yet it is still not the same as meeting face-to-face."

The facilitating and limiting attributes in relation to remote working is stated by the interviewee as follows:

"I feel I can do a lot more work, since I am able to start my day earlier. My working day exceeds often. It is also very distressing to work on the computer all day without any breaks. I feel my day gets to be very heavy. I feel remote working as both facilitating and limiting. I would choose to work half of the time from home and half of the time from the office. I like that you could also get the social aspects from working face-to-face yet I do like to not having to have to leave to the office. I would say working remotely does increase your productivity and efficiency. On a personal level, the lack of social encounters and peer support is missing in the remote working environment so I'd say that it is emotionally difficult to work remotely sometimes."

Continuing to address face-to-face interactions in more detail in the following:

“Yes definitely. When creating something new like processes, it is very difficult to do it through Teams or by yourself. I’d say that especially in creative work, planning and inspiring is a lot easier when face-to-face. When it comes to orientation, it is also very difficult and hard remotely. A lot easier when it is done face-to-face.”

The third interviewee addressed the challenges on remote working as follows:

“Even though I like to work remotely, I sometimes feel quite alone with certain things. I am used to working in an open office and having people around me. I’d say I am not able to get the help I want as fast as I need it through Teams. The challenges I encounter in the office are noise and interference issues. I get easily strained in an open office space.”

Continuing to the facilitating and limiting attributes of remote working:

“I consider it to have more facilitating factors. It enables the possibility to live anywhere. My personal free time has increased, and I don’t use as much time to travel to work. I can start my day already at 7 am and be finished by 3 pm. As a limiting factor, I’d say that not being able to see each other face-to-face.”

The face-to-face interactions were discussed by the interviewee as follows:

“In my employment, we are used to working with online tools for example meeting customers through Teams and exchanging emails. Not so many visible changes since we are not used to meeting customers face-to-face. The face-to-face aspects comes more through the working community.”

The fourth interviewee had the perspective of a rather new employee. The interviewee provided insights on the challenges in remote working as follows:

“Orientation has been a challenge even though I personally did not feel it to be too difficult. In a face-to-face orientation situation, there would have been the possibility to ask more and have a discussion.”

Whereas in the remote environment, I need to find out information by myself from Intra for example. The orientation remotely is now more independent.”

When addressing the facilitating and limiting attributes, the interviewee provided the following insights:

“I consider it to have more facilitating elements. Effectiveness has increased. There are many interruptions in an open office space. Even though my working days often exceed, I don’t consider it a bad thing. I have the possibility now to continue working on a certain task, if I want to and since there is no rush to get back home.”

The face-to-face attributes were further discussed as follows:

“If we were at the office in the open office space, it would be easier to ask help from your peers. It would be a bit quicker to get an answer. Yet I feel there are not many factors I see that cannot be dealt with remotely.”

The final interviewee with most work experience from the employee side provided insights on the challenges faced in relation to remote working as follows:

“I would say IT tools, for them to work properly. You can encourage and help your peers more easily when working face-to-face. Helping out your peers in remote working is not as easy as it is at the office.”

Addressing the facilitating and limiting factors by the interviewee as follows:

“Working remotely has less interferences and you are fully able to focus on the job. It also enables you to schedule your day rather more freely than being at the hectic office atmosphere. It also does not take time for me to physically go to work. It is easy to merge your personal life to your working life.”

Discussion about face-to-face meetings and interactions with the final interviewee happened throughout the interviewee. Here are the main points from the interviewee:

“I don’t consider a face-to-face meeting to have additional value when considering a client meeting. I think the online meeting almost were more in-depth and longer when online. When it comes to your working community, face-to-face you can ask your peers easily for help versus booking for a specific time when working remotely, it is not as spontaneous in remote working. In the office atmosphere I am more likely to extend my day rather than in the remote working remotely.”