



Remote work well-being and HRM practices

Exploring the current situation at Schaeffler

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Abstract

The world and the way we work was changed in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In result, because of health concerns more people than ever moved to work remotely. Remote Working provides flexibility and independence for the employees but on the other hand it can have a draining effect on work related well-being. To maintain sufficient levels of well-being it is crucial for Human resource management to recognize threats and act in minimizing the strain.

The aim of the study was to gain understanding on the well-being of Schaeffler's employees in remote working environment. Another aim was to understand and find out what the company's Human Resource department could do to improve the well-being of its employees. To gain complex understanding of the current situation at Schaeffler regarding employees' well-being qualitative research method was chosen with an explorative approach. Data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews.

The theoretical framework creates the basis for the study offering insight into the themes of remote work well-being and Human Resource management practices. Combined with the data conducted in the study provides a basis for possible new well-being initiatives for the company's HR department to consider and investigate further. The results provide and insight of the employees underlying needs and bring forth possible implementations to ensure worker well-being at Schaeffler. Additionally, recommendations for further research and exploration to ensure well-being in the future are presented.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Remote work, Workplace well-being, Human resource management

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

Chapters 4 and 5 are confidential and removed from the public thesis. The basis for secrecy is section 24(17) of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), a company's business secret. The period of secrecy is five (10) years, the secrecy will end on 22 November 2031.

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Tiivistelmä

Työskentelytapamme ja koko maailma muuttui vuonna 2020 Covid-19 pandemian takia. Pandemiasta ja terveyshuolista johtuen useampi ihminen, kuin koskaan ennen siirtyi työskentelemään etänä. Etätyöskentely tuo työntekijöille mahdollisuuden itsenäiseen ja joustavaan työtapaan. Toisaalta se voi myös altistaa työhyvinvoinnin kuormitukselle. Pystyäkseen ylläpitämään työntekijöiden työhyvinvointia HR johdon tulee pystyä tunnistamaan uhkia sekä työskentelemään niiden minimoimisen eteen.

Tutkimuksen tarkoitusperä oli syventää ymmärrystä Schaefflerin työntekijöiden työhyvinvoinnista etätyöskentelyssä. Toinen tarkoitusperä oli ymmärtää ja löytää tapoja, joilla HR osasto voisi parantaa työntekijöidensä työhyvinvointia. Laadullinen tutkimusmenetelmä kartoittavalla otteella valittiin, jotta saataisiin selville Schaefflerin työntekijöiden monisyisiä tuntemuksia etätyöskentelyä ja työhyvinvointia kohtaan. Tutkimuksen tieto kerättiin teemahaastatteluita hyödyntäen. Tutkimuksessa haastateltiin kahdeksaa Schaefflerin työntekijää.

Kirjallisuus katsaus loi pohjan tutkimukselle tuoden esiin tietoa etätyöskentelystä, työhyvinvoinnista sekä henkilöstöhallinnon roolista. Teoreettinen pohja yhdistettynä kerättyyn tietoon antaa mahdollisuuden uusien työhyvinvoinnin työkalujen ja ideoiden lähempään tarkasteluun ja lisätutkimukseen.

Avainsanat (asiasanat)

Etätyöskentely, Työhyvinvointi, Henkilöstöhallinto

Muut tiedot (salassa pidettävät liitteet)

Luvut 4 ja 5 ovat salassa pidettäviä, ja ne on poistettu julkisesta työstä. Salassapidon peruste on Julkisuuslain 621/1999 24§, kohta 17, yrityksen liike- tai ammattisalaisuus. Salassapitoaika on viisi (10) vuotta, salassapito päättyy 22.11.2031

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1 Introduction

The focus of this research is to find out how remote working has affected the Nordic employees of Schaeffler. The researcher has collected theoretical framework on the topics of well-being, remote working, and human research practices. With the theoretical framework and conducted interview analysis, the researcher will provide knowledge on the effects of remote working on employee well-being.

Overall, it is worth to study workplace well-being and to find new ways to improve it, as Manka demonstrates it numerically:

“Due to neglect on well-being the cost of undone work is estimated to be at least 24 billion euros per year in Finland. To compare, it equals to almost half of the nation’s budget. The estimate of 24 billion euros includes for example the costs of premature retirement, occupational diseases, sick leaves, and the cost of healthcare” (Manka & Manka 2018, 7)

The world and the way we work was changed in 2020 due to the covid-19 pandemic. In result because of health concerns more people work remotely now than ever. Schaeffler as well has seen this shift towards remote work. Some of the employees interviewed in this research were working remotely before the pandemic but most have experienced the change as result of Covid-19. As the need to work remotely has been sudden the researcher believes that there are still ways to improve the well-being of employees in remote work further. Keeping in mind that even though the transformation was sudden it may have created a long-lasting change towards favouring remote work as an option for employees. Which in turn creates a need to sift the way of looking at this as a temporary situation we need to just get through to rather creating efficient and valid ways of supporting remotely working employees now and in the future.

1.1 Background and motivation for the research

The researcher has been studying in a university of applied sciences while the Covid-19 pandemic limited the face-to-face relations and sent students and employees to work from home. Getting personal experiences on learning how to use new electronic tools of interaction like Zoom and Microsoft teams, creating an ergonomic workstation at home and battling the difficulties of self-

managing and motivation, started forming an interest towards well-being in remote work. The researcher has had an interest in Human resource practices since high school and applied to study International Business in hopes of becoming employed in said field. Through studies and work experience the interest has narrowed down to supporting and generating workplace well-being.

Researchers interest in HR and the current situation with the pandemic is how the idea for this research was formed. Researcher's background, and plans for future, working in international settings give further motivation for conducting this study. As many international teams have employees working in different locations while maintaining working relations through remote tools. Remote working and well-being are both current and relevant interests worldwide.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

After concluding on the research topic, it is important to form a research problem. The research problem will determine the objectives of the study. How the research is conducted varies depending on what the cumulated research questions are, based on the said problem. The research problem arises from the motivation or initial idea whereas the research questions form after developing understanding on the topic, collecting theoretical framework (Berg & Lune, 2012)

Deriving from the idea of looking into remote worker well-being. A research problem, of how the workplace well-being has changed moving from the office to working remotely and whether there was something to do to improve it, was formed. Based on the problem, one research question was shaped:

RQ1: How has remote working affected employee's well-being (Mental-, Social- and Physical well-being)?

To gain further knowledge specifically to find out if new actions should be taken to additionally assist the well-being of workers, two sub questions were formed:

RQ2: How would the employees and managers want their well-being to be supported in remote working conditions?

RQ3: What measures should HRM implement to support workers and managers well-being especially when in remote work settings?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This research report consists of five main chapters:

Chapter one, Introduction familiarizes the reader to the topic. The chapter covers the overview as well as shows the background for the research. In addition to, personal, professional, and academic motivation of the researcher to conduct this study is shown and the research questions are introduced.

Second chapter the Literature review, this chapter further describes the concept of the research. It shows the theoretical framework important to the research, through secondary data. The three central themes for forming the theoretical framework were well-being at a workplace, HRM practices and remote working.

Third, the methodology chapter thoroughly introduces the research approach and methodological choices of the study. This chapter covers information on the data collection, data analysis and the plan for research quality and ethical concerns of the study.

In the fourth chapter, Results where findings from the conducted interviews are presented. Data and quotes from the research are shown here.

In the fifth and last chapter, Conclusions, and discussion, research questions are answered. The build theoretical framework is reflected on the research results. Suggestions for new practices to study further and implement at the workplace are shown in this chapter. In addition, reliability of the research and ideas for future researchers are discussed.

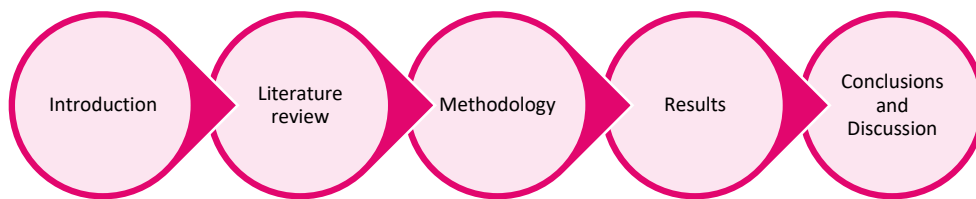


Figure 1. Structure of the research

2 Literature review

Literature review chapter helps to understand the concept of the research. It shows the theoretical basis for the research, through secondary data. For this research, previous studies, and articles, on the three central themes; Well-being at a workplace, HRM practices and remote working, were studied to gain a general understanding of the research problem. Additionally, some published books, websites, and reports, were used to build the theoretical framework.

Within the key themes well-being at a workplace, HRM practices and remote working sub themes emerged. Firstly, all concepts were defined in a broad sense before diving further. Three main areas of well-being were revealed while building the theory base and they were mental, social, and physical aspects. Which are then considered on their own and then as part of remote work well-being.

2.1 Well-being definitions and approaches

Well-being is a broad idea. In the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, the concept of well-being is defined as: “a state of feeling healthy and happy” (Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, n.d.). Well-being can be broken into 3 aspects; 1st a person’s feelings such as happiness or anxiety, 2nd their functions as their sense of competence and belonging on an

individual and a social levels and 3rd how a person sees and evaluates their own life, whether they are satisfied with it (Michaelson, Mahony & Schifferes 2012).

Peter Warr & Karina Nielsen (2018) divide well-being into three dimensions as well but instead approach it in respect of scope. Firstly, through the biggest lens Warr & Nielsen describe it as “context-free” in which case well-being can be measured with a person’s satisfaction and happiness in life in general. Then secondly, well-being can be studied at more specifically in one area of life. in the case of this theses through workplace well-being. Which can be measured in work contexts, work stress, work satisfaction etc. In third most narrow scope well-being can be analysed through examining a person’s feelings towards their salary or relationship with their manager and how that affects their work satisfaction, therefore well-being.

The need to define well-being has been fundamental. When looked at the world and our societies, many practices for example; government, schools and even parental ways of families rely on the enhancement of life. Hence, understanding the definition of well-being can be seen crucial. The definition of well-being has formed throughout time, the two first perspectives hedonism and eudaimonism are the steppingstones of modern thinking of well-being. These two concepts with hedonistic thought of well-being consisting of pleasure and happiness and eudaimonic thought, where well-being lies in the actualization of human potentials. In multiple studies it has been suggested that well-being would be best looked at when combining aspects from both hedonic and eudaimonic phenomenon. (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Hedonic

Well-being looked at from hedonic desire or happiness dates to Aristippus, a Greek philosopher from the fourth century B.C. in his world view the purpose of life was to experience the highest amount of enjoyment and that well-being is derived from the sum of a person’s pleasurable/ hedonic moments. His way of thinking has been followed with many others. In the modernised hedonic thinking the focus on happiness or well-being isn’t only on the level of physical hedonism, but rather it can also be about attaining positive outcomes and accomplishing set goals. (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Eudaimonic

Eudaimonic view of well-being dates to Aristotle, in his way of thinking he insisted that true happiness comes from the expression of virtue, in other words from doing things that are meaningful. Eudaimonic well-being stems from the idea that not all valued outcomes generate well-being when attained. They can produce pleasure to the person but not necessarily wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

2.2 Dimensions of workplace well-being

Workplace well-being in general

The history of researching workplace well-being dates back over 100 years to the 1920s. The origin of the research consisted of measuring stress on an individual level. Stress was seen as a physiological reaction to work strains e.g., noise, cold and toxins. When studying the workers negative feelings towards these strains, the researchers were able to prevent physiological illnesses related to the stresses. Hence the study for occupational safety and health came into being. Little by little researchers added aspects of psychological well-being to the concept as well (Manka & Manka, 2017).

Now a days the idea of workplace well-being on a basic level is seen to be an individual experience comprised of safety, health, and the appeal of one's work. The employee's well-being has an impact on the workplace atmosphere and professionalism and increases motivation, commitment, and productivity. Improvement of well-being reduces occurrence of sick leave (Ministry of Social Affairs and health, n.d.). Similarly, Manka & Manka (2017) suggest that workplace well-being is an interpretation of an individual's experiences and a company's management, and procedures of which success can be measured.

The responsibility of upkeeping workplace well-being is a joint effort. Employers' responsibility is to secure a safe work environment, good management, and fair treatment of the employees. In turn employees' responsibilities, in promoting wellbeing at work, lie in maintaining their personal abilities and professional skills. Whereas supporting a good workplace atmosphere is everyone's responsibility (Ministry of Social Affairs and health, n.d.).

According to the occupational safety and health administration of Finland (n.d.) an essential part of ensuring workplace well-being is the regular evaluation of workplace stressors. The responsibility may lie on the line managers, HR or it can be outsourced. If the evaluation of stressors is not done or it's done inadequately, needed precautionary processes might not get identified and therefore executed.

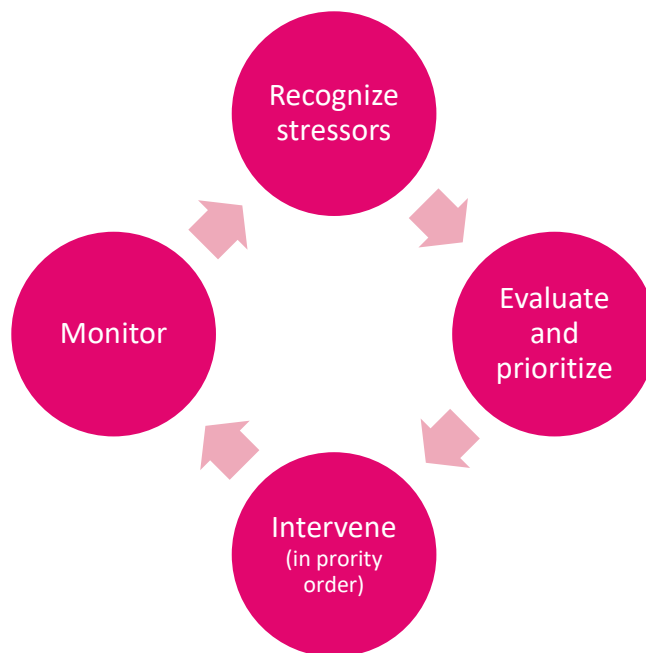


Figure 2. Improving the well-being of employees (adapted from occupational safety and health administration of Finland, n.d)

To demonstrate the effect of poorly monitored employee well-being Manka & Manka (2016) showcase the estimated costs of workplace well-being neglect. One study shows an estimate cost of sick leaves in Finland which adds up to 11,5 billion euros in a year. Other studies e.g., conducted by Finish institute of occupational health estimates the overall neglect of well-being cost to rise up to 41 billion euros in a year whereas the ministry of social affairs and health estimates the total loss to be 24 billion euros in a year. These numbers estimate the losses that occur due to for example; sick leaves, premature retirement, occupational accidents, occupational diseases, etc. Even with variance in the numbers they are all measured in billions of euros.

Workplace well-being is additionally more than measurement of stressors and the absence of symptoms. In the development of workplace well-being, it is valuable to pay focus to the

employee's individual assets, positive outlook, and the achievement of happiness. In the modern workplace just diligence and obedience alone are not enough. The focus of appreciation has shifted towards enthusiasm, creativity and taking initiative (Manka & Manka, 2016)

To foster well-being from employees, own assets point of view Manka & Manka (2016) introduce infusing concepts of positive psychology to a workplace. By analysing and focusing on one's strengths and utilizing said strengths can help employees lift their outlook to more positive levels as well as to build a buffer against negative feelings. Along with for example; flexible work environment, innovative surroundings, possibility of advancement and positive feedback from employer can increase the number of positive thoughts towards one's work. Promotion of positivity and employees' skills accompanied with the prevention of stressors is what well-being at a workplace consists of when simplified.

Physical well-being

Physical well-being is often seen as the easiest to observe and straight forward aspect of well-being. Manka & Manka (2016) recommend first paying attention to the physical working conditions and functionality and fixing arising problems, after which it is easier to start developing other areas of well-being such as psychological and social concerns. In Finland there are also laws in place for the protection of the employee's workplace health and safety such as Occupational Safety and Health Act (2002).

One aspect of physical well-being are ergonomic solutions. For this research the focus is on an office and knowledge workers' ergonomic approach. In an office setting, workplace accidents are rare. Yet employees often report feelings of tiredness, pain in the arms, shoulders and neck, and problems relating to eyes. These are typical problems related to working on a computer for long periods of time. To diminish said problems different ergonomic factors should be monitored. It is recommended that when working on a computer, a short break should be taken once every hour to get up and stretch as sitting in one position for long can cause problems to the musculoskeletal system. Taking breaks also eases the drain on the eyes from working on a monitor. Proper equipment is crucial for supporting the physical well-being. Adjustable office chair along with an adjustable desk which is big enough to fit all needed equipment on it. A person's back and wrists

should be supported, and the monitor should be on a proper level conformably to the eye level. Additionally, the office set up should be built so that a person can face the door hence when interrupted lifting the head is enough to take part in the interaction (“Toimisto- ja tietotyö”, n.d.).

An employee’s own lifestyle plays a crucial role in their physical well-being. If an employee possesses a good physical performance, they are more likely to avoid job related physical accidents and strains. Well maintained physique also strengthens psychical well-being as it is a good way to destress on one’s free time. Exercising is everyone’s own responsibility. Some small acts of everyday life that are meant as exercise are easy to integrate to work life. If possible, biking rather than driving or taking a buss, choosing stairs instead of a lift or escalators, walking to a nearby restaurant for lunch and taking walking brakes during the day. Additionally, to exercising paying attention to one’s eating habits is crucial for work well-being. Adequate lunch break should be provided. An employee is responsible for themselves to eat healthy and regularly to avoid energy drops and turning to quick and sugary fixes. These factors help an employee to stay focused and healthy in their work (“Elintavat ja työhyvinvointi”, n.d.)

Mental well-being

In the ever-changing world employees are expected to adapt to new situations and environments but also work as drivers for the changes themselves. Many organizations require their employees to self-manage their own work which can bring positive elements of flexibility and control over one’s own work. Psychological wellness at a workplace can be connected to the ability to self-mange and feel content about it. Psychological capital is one part inherited through genotype and upbringing, one part due to the circumstances such as level of education and wealth, and one part on which a person can affect themselves through learning (Manka & Manka, 2016).

One aspect of psychological capital is self-reliance. How much a person trusts their capabilities, influences their actions. The more an employee believes in their abilities more eager they are to take on new challenges and do their best to reach their goals. Psychological self-reliance is often specific to different aspects of work, certain tasks are more rewarding and easier than others. A person can learn to grow their self-reliance by identifying what they are good at and by completing and thriving at tasks. They can start by taking on smaller responsibilities and going on

from there. Important part of growing one's self-reliance is the feedback from colleagues and managers showing that they trust and recognise the achievements (ibid,2016).

Hopeful outlook on life as well as optimism are seen as psychological capital. An employee with a hopeful outlook on their work life is more eager to set goals and to reach them. They are often independent and motivated to find even complicated solutions to achieve their goals. At a workplace task that involve independent goal setting, adaptable ways of reaching set goals and rewards for reaching them increase an employee's psychological capital of hopefulness. Optimism directly affects an employee's well-being. The outlook they have on life and how they perceive it, whether they focus on positives and accomplishments during their day or negatives and failures either lightens or burdens their workplace well-being. Optimism can be increased by self-inquiry, purposefully finding, and documenting nice moments and little accomplishments, by relaxation exercise and focusing on appreciating things in life. The more a person pays attention with intent to specific things the more they start remarking them in the future (Ibid.,2016).

Experience of stress affects well-being. Stress is often seen as negative and draining however, a right amount of stress can create a motivating pressure to work towards one's goals. It is crucial to identify what amount of stress is positive and when it starts affecting work negatively. Stress has many negative effects on work, lack of motivation, tiredness, shorter working memory etc. There are many triggers for stress by, identifying, using the model as demonstrated in figure 2., it is easier to correct the balance. Stress can be identified to come from too large of a workload or personnel conflicts for example (Ibid., 2016).

Social well-being

Sense of community and the interactions between community members generates social capital. Social capital can be an asset to both an individual and the work community when it strengthens the trust, reciprocity, and networking between community members. As an asset it enhances the community's ability to meet its goals and the well-being of its members. On the other hand, social capital can have a negative effect on work well-being if the community is narrowminded and has a tendency to leave some of its members out. The creation of social capital can be divided into 2

aspects, capital building form management, and capital building from the community (Manka & Manka, 2016).

In the traditional management model work has been seen as a necessity where employees do their work only for income. In this model the employer's responsibility is to take charge and keep an eye on their subordinates with a mindset that the employees try their hardest to avoid work. In modern management models the employees are seen as useful and important people who want to be treated as individuals. In this management model it is the employer's responsibility to make their employees feel valuable and seen (Ibid.,2016). The new modern management model has its focus on enhancing the social well-being of the employees.

Modern management is seen as dynamic and interactive way of leading where the responsibilities are not falling on merely the manager but rather on the whole team or community. The goals are shared, and all team members work to attain them. The dynamic working style builds trust between community members and managers, it allows flexibility and control to the employees to take control of their work as well as offers the manager an opportunity to work alongside their personnel and divide the responsibilities (Ibid.,2016). Modern management model is a key component in remote working conditions, where it is impossible for the managers to keep an eye on the employees unlike in an office setting.

Social capital additionally forms within the community members. It builds from ordinary everyday interactions. To build positive social capital that enriches the well-being of its members it is crucial for the employees to develop and maintain their skill level to cope with their normal tasks. Furthermore, keeping up communication skills for example, asking for help if needed, asking and giving feedback, and overall building from the small interactions such as greeting others, being polite, saying thank you and apologising (Ibid,2016).

2.3 Human resource management purposes and practices

Earlier in time when most work positions required manual labour with little expertise and in which training was rapid and cheap, management of humans as a resource to the company was fairly

simple. Going from getting hired to working until retirement within the same company was common. In today's environment, in industrial countries, management of human resource is more complicated. Many professions require higher levels of expertise, these people are more difficult to firstly find and then to keep as many competitors are seeking employees with the same expertise requirements. Earlier workers were happy to have a secure job, now a days when competition is high for skilled workers simply a job is not enough. There are different perks that companies can try and lure candidates in by offering competitive pay packages, valued training opportunities exedra. Additionally, employment regulations and laws add their own challenges to the management of humans as resources to the company. "The basis of management is always the same: getting the people of the business to make things happen in a productive way, so that the business prospers, and the people thrive" (Torrington, Derek, et al.,2017,5)

Human resource management as a term is generally used in two different ways as Torrington, Derek, et al. (2017) describe. Firstly, it can be used in a generic way to describe the structure of HRM activities within a company from a personnel management point of view. Primarily HR managers responsibility is to ensure that a company has the right number of employees with needed skillsets. To reach this goal identification of staffing needs and job roles must be sufficient including knowledge of different contract types. After which comes the recruitment, training and retaining of the workers along with letting go the unneeded personnel as conditions change. After securing the right people the next objective of HR management is to ensure that they are committed and motivated through means such as training and development possibilities as well as reward systems. Another core activity of HR managers is to manage change. In many industries change is frequent and to stay on top of it, right recruitment and plans need to be in place. One of the most important aspects of change management is employee involvement as without it conflicts and delays can be expected. HR managers key responsibilities also lie in administration and reputational objectives.

The other use of the term human resource management sifts the focus from personnel management, workforce centered view more towards resource centric view. It consists of the same core activities but the philosophy behind it is different. The resource-oriented philosophy is highlighting long term strategic planning and the provision and deployment of human resource (Ibid.,2017)

2.4 Remote working and it's specificity in well-being

In the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, the concept of remote work is defined as: “the practice of an employee working at their home, or in some other place that is not an organization's usual place of business” (Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, n.d.). In 2020, millions of people started working remotely for the first time due to the covid-19 pandemic. As Senz (2020) reports based on a survey of 1800 people in mixed sized businesses, respondents believe that one third of companies with employees working remotely at least part of the time will continue to do so even after the pandemic. This is supported with a study conducted by Gartner (2021) Where 2400 hybrid work (mix of remote and on-site days) employees were surveyed and only 4% of them would decide completely to return to the offices as their desired choice. Gajendran & Harrison (2007) has identified that remote work as an option can increase the satisfaction of an employee when perceived as a privilege from their employee. Benefits of remote work include for example, money savings from transportation costs such as train tickets or gas as well as clothing bought especially for work.

It is safe to assume that remote working and hybrid work models are increasing choices for many employees and companies, therefore focusing on the improvement of well-being in remote settings is going to be crucial. As Bartik & Cullen et al. (2020) suggest that the sudden shock of moving into remote working due to Covid-19 could infuse permanent change because of to two core reasons. Reason number one is that many companies have now paid the fixed costs associated with infusing remote working methods such as licenses for certain digital tools and remote office equipment after which remote work is now optimal. Reason number two is that many companies could have provided remote working options pre Covid-19 already but didn't due to inexperience and lack of coordination. Going forward many companies have had to adapt quickly and now have the tools and experience to allow remote working.

Same aspects as listed in section 2.2 apply to remote work well-being as well with certain further detail. In physical well-being the focus shifts to providing ergonomic equipment to an employee's home office. Many factors such that a person is responsible for their own good physique apply. As suggested by Saunders (2021) in remote working conditions it is even more crucial to give your eyes a break from the monitors once in a while as remote working often implies working on a computer for long periods of time day after day. She suggests using every opportunity to work

away from the computer as a person can for example, if possible, do all brainstorming with a pen and paper, and instead of video call, time from time using regular calls while walking outside and while eating lunch or taking coffee breaks it would be best to stay away from the computer. She argues that many experience technology fatigue from spending days connected to technology even on physical level as persons muscles get affected of the fact that they stay still and try to be visible to others within a camera's range.

From the mental well-being point of view. Same technology fatigue affects the mental state as a person has to pay attention to multiple faces on a screen while being aware of the fact that others can also see them (Saunders, 2021). Similar type of technology fatigue is reported by study conducted by Gartner (2021) where people reported feeling drained from the need to be always online and available. Many companies have invested on creating different ways to track performance and measure time spent at work as a way to substitute to the normal ways of tracking work time. Gartner's 2021 Hybrid Work Employee Survey found out that employees are nearly 2 times more likely to pretend to be working than in office settings due to the feelings of tiredness of having to be available at all times.

The ability to control one's work and having flexibility on deciding how and when to complete tasks added to a person's psychical well-being and their feeling of hopefulness and motivation (Manka & Manka, 2016). The flexibility of one's work is a definite upside in remote work settings. Working from home saves an employee the time they normally use to commute to work. Additionally, they are able to spend more time at home having lunch with family members and doing simple chores while taking part on conferences for example. These are aspects many find valuable. However, the line between work and free time easily gets blurred (Schieman & Young, 2010). Maintaining boundaries is crucial for well-being in remote work. When commuting to the office many find the commute and getting ready for work to be the transition between work and free time. It is suggested to try and maintain these traditions as much as one can to make the separation. Taking the time to get ready for work and even walking around one's building before and after work to simulate commute. Furthermore, opening up honest conversations with family members or roommates to set boundaries when one is available for them as even though working at home doesn't mean their work is less important and thus interruptions are okay (Giurge & Bohns, 2021). Furthermore, according to Dockery and Bawa (2020) while working from home

employees tend to work longer hours compared to the office settings. Working longer hours in turn can have a negative effect on family dynamics at home for this reason as well setting clear boundaries is crucial.

The social aspect of well-being and the community dynamics often consist of simple day to day communication as mentioned in chapter 2.2. Maintaining this while working remotely can be challenging. Levit, A. (2019) proposes few qualities virtual teams should possess to maintain desirable group dynamics. Firstly, group members should be able to work independently and take responsibility of their own work, they should be accountable and assertive if needed to ensure open communication. Secondly clear setting of goals and roles as well as rules and protocols are crucial to ensure easy going remote work. Everything should be transparent as misunderstandings happen more easily when working remotely. Thirdly building strong relationships with team members is key to ensuring team bonding. It is suggested that team members meet face to face at least more than once in office - as well as social settings to create better understanding between each other. Likewise, in remote conditions staying actively in touch by phone calls and text messages especially immediately if something is not understood is recommended.

2.5 Human resource practices for remote work well-being

As mentioned in chapter 2.3 Torrington, Derek, et al. (2017) stated that one core function of HR is to manage change and that an employee involvement is a key factor for successful change management. When changing workplace location from office to remote conditions one could only assume employee involvement to be an important part of said change. Manka and Manka (2016) suggest reviewing well-being by following certain numerical data and comparing it statistically. Numerical data can consist of for example, number of sick leave days or a number of reported accidents within a certain period of time. They also suggest collecting proactive data which could be quantitative or qualitative. This sort of data can be collected through varied surveys. One model of surveys is self-assessment which could be useful in times of change to form an understanding of how the employees are coping and whether they have improvement suggestions. By comparing collected new data to existing patterns it is possible to notice whether something needs more precise attention. Manka & Manka (2017) remark that in some cases employees might be reluctant to take part in multiple surveys if they find them to be ineffectual as they feel that the information they give doesn't lead to actions.

Ergonomic and safe work environment is part of employees' rights, it also ensures efficient work as brought up in chapter 2.2. Ensuring physical well-being when in remote settings is partly employees own responsibility when it comes to maintaining one's own physical fitness and healthy lifestyle ("Elintavat ja työhyvinvointi", n.d.) and on the other hand providing sufficient instructions and needed equipment to employees to do their job is the organizations responsibility.

Gartner (2021) suggests creating a completely new model for remote work and identifying job roles and work design accordingly. They argue that trying to maintain same customs that were in place while in the office environment can be counterproductive for the employee's well-being. One instance of maintaining old habits is investing money on new tracking systems to have the same visibility over employees as in office. Rather they suggest shifting the focus towards empathy-based leadership and finding ways to emphasize results instead of tracking performance inputs.

Similarly in an article by Carnevale and Hatak (2020), they suggest companies to assess their work design and to recognize how remote working affects the work culture. With fewer face to face social contacts the culture of the workplace might change. They recommend adapting entrepreneurial insight to management by supporting some key characteristics observed to be attained by many entrepreneurs. These key characteristics include being open-minded, active, and positive in the face of new situations. Additionally tolerating uncertainty and appreciating independence and flexibility. By implementing these values into the work culture can be valuable for the organization and its employees in the midst of change.

As discussed in chapter 2.4 the line between work and free time can get blurry and work hours longer. Suggested by Chen (2021) it would be beneficial for human resource managers to set policies in place to regulate and assure reasonable work hours as well as training to support employees to set boundaries and expectations for working from home and maintaining family responsibilities. Additional other trainings are also suggested to attain new skills for the new work environment including ICT knowledge especially on cybersecurity hazards as they may be more common in remote work.

2.6 Summary of the knowledge base

In this chapter the most relevant factors of the literature review were identified, which in turn created the base for this research and research questions. Based on the theoretical framework main concepts emerged which were: Well-being at a workplace, HRM practices and remote working. Three main areas of well-being were revealed while building the theory base and they were psychological, social, and physical aspects.

On the physical level of well-being paying attention to an ergonomic workstation whether in the office or working remotely from home is the key element to well-being. Additionally sufficient breaks and healthy eating play a role in ensuring efficient work. Ensuring physical well-being is the employees as well as employers' responsibility.

On the social level a sense of community and the interactions between community members generates social capital which in turn can as an asset enhance the community's ability to meet its goals and the well-being of its members. Social capital is formed within the community members, employees, and managers (Manka & Manka, 2016). In remote working conditions maintaining social contacts is more difficult and thus requires more creative input. Setting clear goals and roles as well as rules and protocols are crucial for successful remote work. Everything should be transparent to avoid misunderstandings (Levit, 2019). The goals should be shared, and all team members should work to attain them. The dynamic working style builds trust between community members and managers (Manka & Manka, 2016)

The mental aspect of remote working is multidimensional and complex. On one hand it caters surroundings for flexible and independent work which can create well-being as wellness at a workplace can be connected to the ability to self-manage and feel content about it. It provides the ability to control one's work thus increasing motivation and making balancing home life easier (Manka & Manka, 2016., and Giurge & Bohns, 2021). On the other hand, remote working can have negative effect on one's mental well-being as working from home is found to increase the number of hours spent working (Dockery and Bawa, 2020). It can also impact separating work and free time and create a feeling of needing to be available at all times (Gartner, 2021).

When it comes to human resource practices employees should be involved in change to create devotion from their part and to reduce the risk of rejection (Derek, et al.,2017). One way to measure employee satisfaction and to collect input is to facilitate surveys (Manka & Manka, 2016). Identifying work design and updating roles to fit new work methods is crucial (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Offering employees sufficient training, information, and enforcing policies eases the transition and upkeep of remote working.

3 Methodology

In the methodology chapter the research approach and methodological choices of the study are thoroughly introduced. This chapter will cover information on the data collection, data analysis and the plan for research quality and ethical concerns of the study. The chosen research methods were decided based on the following main research question and two sub questions:

RQ1: How has remote working affected employee's well-being? (Mental -, Social - and Physical well-being)?

RQ2: How would the employees and managers want their well-being to be supported in remote working conditions?

RQ3: What measures should HRM implement to support workers and managers well-being especially when in remote work settings?

The purpose of this research was to gain understanding on the well-being of a company's employees in remote working environment. The data conducted in this study provide a basis for possible new well-being initiatives for the company's Human Resource department to consider and study further.

3.1 Research approach and methodology

According to Malhotra (2010) a research design is the core of organizing the research project. It sets the structure for measures to be taken to give answers to the research questions in a valuable and efficient way. Research design is built from:

- identifying the research questions (chapter 1),
- designing the steps of the (exploratory) research (chapter 3.),
- creating an interviewing form for data collection (appendix 1.)
- indicating the data collection process and sampling size (chapter 3.2)
- developing a data analysis plan (chapter 3.3)

Based on the research questions a **qualitative** research method was chosen. Creswell's (2007) notions on qualitative research support the researcher's logic, for example: "We conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people" (ibid.,40) and "We use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining" (ibid., 40). As stated in the chapter 1, the move from office to remote working has been sudden in most cases due to Covid-19 therefore extensive research on the feelings of a company's employees towards their well-being has not been conducted. To study said phenomenon the goal is to create an understanding of the current situation.

Explorative approach is chosen for this study to create awareness and to detect alternative strategies of action. The way Malhotra (2010) describes explorative research gives reason for the researcher to choose this approach: "the objective of exploratory research is to explore or search through a problem or situation to provide insights and understanding" (104.). The exploratory goal of this research is to showcase arising themes to the human resource department of Schaeffler for them to consider taking on new well-being initiatives or to further study the findings. As Malhotra (2010) states, "the findings of exploratory research should be regarded as tentative or as input to further research" (103.).

A fine example of qualitative research method with an explorative approach used in this research is that the researcher originally intended to observe workplace wellbeing by studying interactions

of different members of the work community; employees, supervisors and HRM specialists. By interviewing members from all three levels. The researcher conducted a preliminary study, interviewing the company's HRM specialist to prepare herself. During the preliminary study the researcher gained new insight and it became clear that there was a need to obtain understanding of potential problems concerning remote working and employee well-being. Based on the preliminary study the researcher was able to reform her initial research questions to better fill the needs of the company. One of the core ideas in qualitative research is to listen to the participants and to learn of the problems from the participants point of view. A researcher cannot expect the study to go exactly as planned. When the research process starts the initial study phases might need altering to fit the arising themes. This is what gives qualitative research the emergent design (Creswell, 2007).

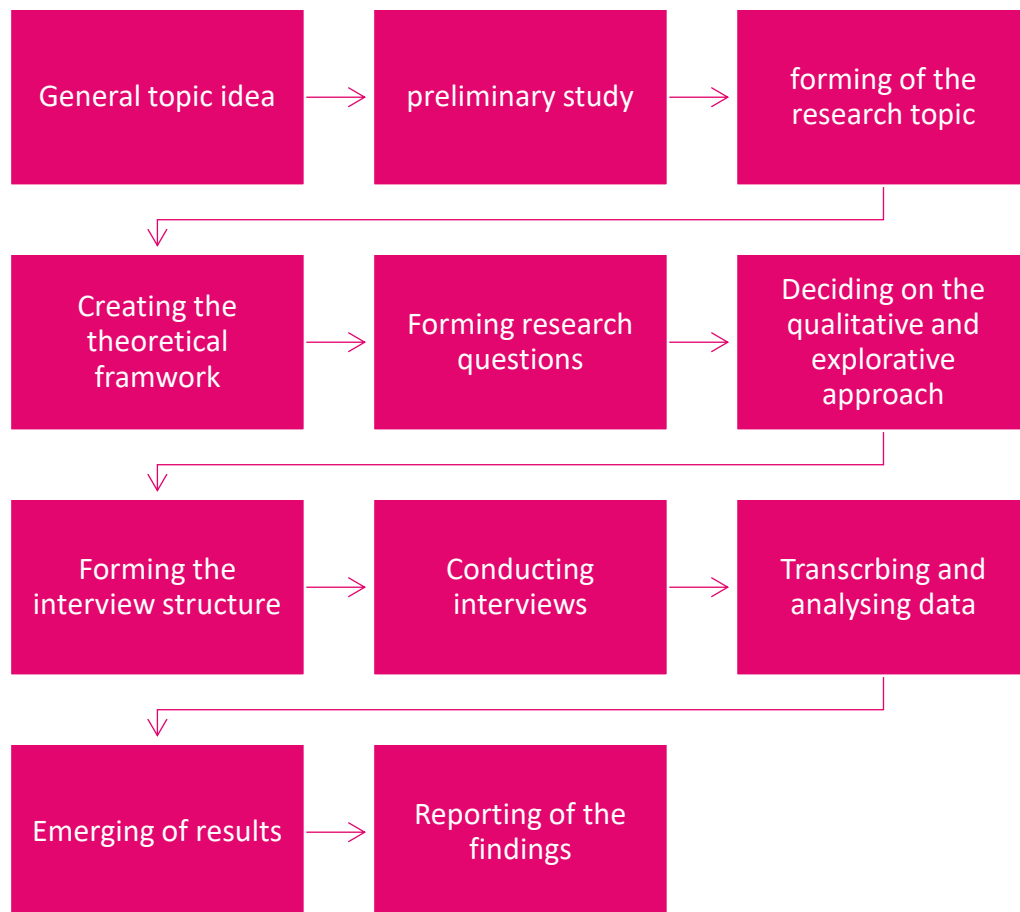


Figure 3. Research approach, methodology and implementation

3.2 Data collection

Data collection chapter should include the identification of the nature of the collected data as well as the details on how the data was collected. This is important as based on these descriptions someone would be able to replicate the research. Ability to replicate the research study shows that the efforts of the researcher has been objective. Showcasing the data collection methods also enables the reader to decide how credible they view the research to be (Berg & Lune, 2012).

The researcher chose to use Semi-structured interviews as a research method for the study. Semi-structured interview is often used in qualitative study to ask open ended questions. It consists of a defined interview structure in which the issues and areas of topic are stated. The advantage of using a semi-structured interview is that the researcher can explore the discussed themes further if needed. Also, the order of the questions can be flexible to better suit the flow of conversation. The interview structure nonetheless ensures that the same areas of topic are discussed with each participant (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). It was important to the researcher to have the option to ask further questions and to change the order of discussed topics if it was in favour of the flow of the interview. This way the researcher was able to gain a better understanding from the perspective of the participants.

The company has offices in over 100 countries, in this research the focus was on the Nordic branch to keep the population and sample size manageable. This limited the population to under 80 people with a similar workplace culture. After the preliminary study the researcher changed her original sampling plan but kept the initial method for research which was interviewing. She decided to consult the formerly interviewed HR manager by asking her to identify eight (8) possible participants to take part in the research. Snowball sampling, which is a technique in nonprobability sampling (participants not chosen randomly) where firstly interviewed participants are asked to recognize others who are part of the target population, was used to utilize the expertise of an insider to identify participants with a wide range of insight (Malhotra, 2010). The researcher believed, the sample of eight (8) employees out of ~80 to be sufficient for reaching the point of saturation, meaning that no new data emerges even if interviews would continue (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The increase in attaining new knowledge was rapid at the beginning of interviews but started to decline after 6-7 interviews were done. Point of saturation was reached.

The sample (see table 1.) consisted of people from all the company's Nordic offices to unify the concept of well-being within the company's culture. The sample also consisted of both employees and supervisors and had male and female representatives. The participants had all worked remotely at least part time within the Covid-19 pandemic and could therefore communicate their experiences.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants summarized

Distribution factor	Number of participants	Total % (N=8)
Country		
Sweden	5	62,5%
Finland	2	25%
Norway	2	12,5%
Gender		
Male	6	75%
Female	2	25%
Role		
Manager	3	37,5%
Employee	5	62,5%
Service years		
>10	3	37,5%
3-9	4	50%
<3	1	12,5%

As previously stated, the interview was semi-structured. The interview structure was defined by pretesting and forming it with one of the company's occupational safety and health representatives to make sure that the interview would cover all themes needed. The person that took part in the forming of the structure is not part of the final sample as the researchers own stands might have affected the results. The interview structure consisted of four (4) themes:

- Introductory questions

- Identifying questions on how the psychological-, sociological- and physiological wellbeing elements have changed due to remote work
- Identifying questions on what well-being initiatives are in place already
- Feelings question on how well supported the participants feel and what more could be done

Interviews were conducted utilizing Microsoft Teams. This method was used as the participants were in different cities or countries as the researcher. The researcher kept her camera on each time to simulate a face-to-face setting. Respondents had an option to choose to keep their camera on or not. Six (6) participants out of eight (8) had their cameras on. The interviews took place in a time span of five (5) business days 4th of October – 8th of October varying from one (1) interview per day to a maximum of three (3) interviews in a day. All interviews were performed within business hours. The meeting times were designed by the researcher's informant, HR manager who was able to see all employees' schedules and to arrange suitable meetings whenever was best for the participants. The interview was designed to take a maximum of 30 minutes. Interviews were performed in English as a common language between respondents and the researcher, excluding two (2) interviews in which the participants were Finnish, and the native language was used to create a more relaxed environment. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009) testify in the name of providing the participants with a list of interview themes beforehand thus familiarizing the participants with the interview topics. This should promote a level of credibility, validity, and reliability as the participants have time to digest and prepare for what is asked of them. The participating employees were given a brief introduction of the researcher and topic containing three (3) research questions showcasing the themes that would be explored. This information was provided alongside the Teams conference invitation on the 30th of September.

3.3 Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2007) the core elements of analysing qualitative data are, firstly turning the data into text format then breaking down the data into smaller parts, classifying the parts into categories, combining the categories, and formerly looking at the categories from a bigger picture, making interpretations and then presenting the data through figures and discussion. The

researcher audio-recorded all interviews and afterwards transcribed them in a clean read style in which the researcher removed repeated words, “ums” and pauses as well as irrelevant communications to the topic. The overall context and meaning of the sentences however were not changed.

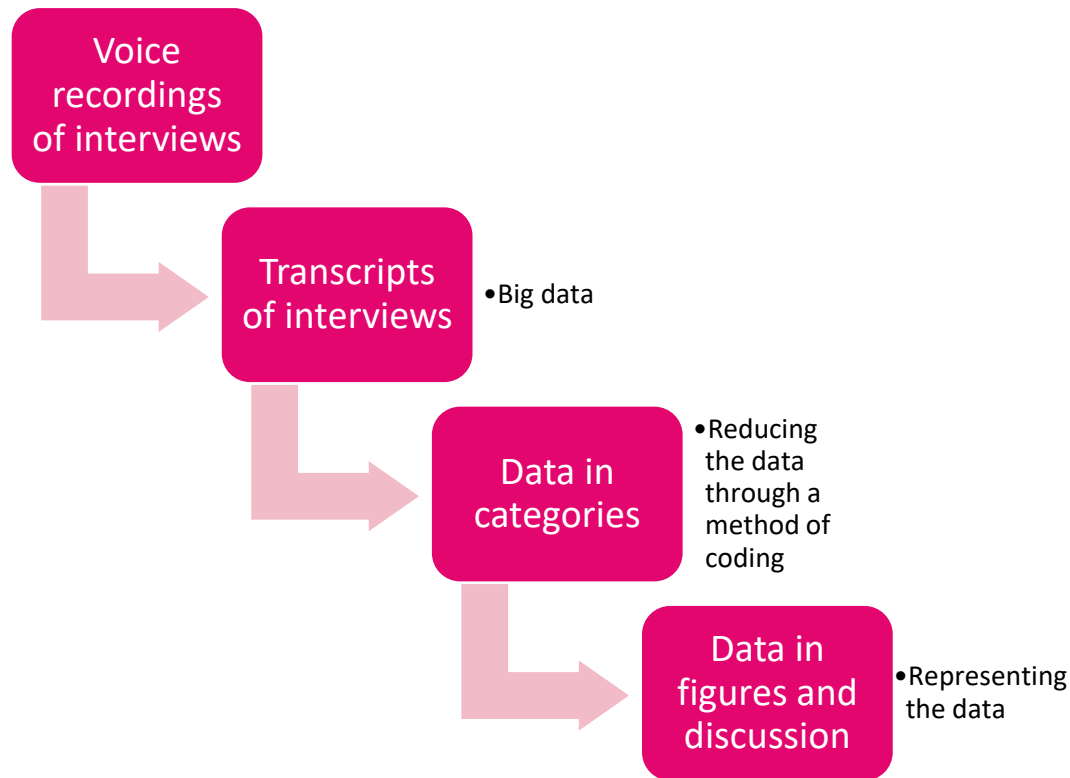


Figure 4. Processing the data from interviews (adapted from Creswell, 2007,148)

For this research the data was processed as Creswell (2007) demonstrated and as is shown in the figure 3. The audio records consisted of eight (8) interviews varying from 13 minutes 15 seconds to 28 minutes and 2 seconds. 30 minutes were reserved for each encounter. Out of all interviews 46 pages of transcribed text, with the font Calibri size as 12 and line spacing 1,5, was formed. Based on the text documents and the original interview frame, categories emerged. Categories were coded and key words and ideas were compartmentalized under suitable codes. Following categories emerged from the data: C1 Physical well-being, C2 Social well-being, C3 Mental well-being, and C4 Ideas and hopes for improvement. Additional coding was used for the anonymity of participants and instead of names codes such as interviewee 1 (I1) were used as suggested by Creswell (2007, 143) for the protection of the participants. Following the categorising and

identification of key words the researcher then looked at the compartmentalized data with a goal of identifying patterns.

3.4 Plan for research quality and ethics

“When collecting data through human interaction it is important to pay close attention to ethical issues” (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, 69)

To ensure ethical research, the researcher has tried to provide anonymity for the participants. All participants are referred to as interviewee number x. No further information is given on a specific interviewee. Other information such as participant distribution based on country, sex, role is on a general level as identification based on given information would be possible. As qualitative research is by nature inductive and holistic it can be difficult to inform the interviewees beforehand about the possible consequences of the research. For this research all participants were notified of the general themes beforehand and explained the purpose of the interview. Participants were selected by asking an insider in the company to identify three (3) managers and five (5) employees to take part in the interview and to sent invitations along with the information of the research. Voluntary participation can be questioned since the invitation to take part came from management without asking for their participation or clearly stating the research to be completely voluntary.

Out of 8 interviews 6 were conducted in English which was neither the participants nor researchers' native language which can have affected the full understanding of firstly questions asked but also secondly interpretation and understanding of the answers which in some instances might not have been grammatically correct and can therefore change the intended meaning. The researcher tried to ask further questions if there was reason to believe that the answer was not fully understood, but some instances only occurred later when transcribing the records. Similarly, when researcher conducted 2 interviews in both participants and researchers' native language this can have created bias.

Semi structured interviewing was used as a data collection method. It can be objected that interviews can be interpreted differently by different researchers therefore not being a scientific method. Interview being semi structured can also lead to different answers based on the flow of

the conversation, tone of the voice and order of the questions. To reduce these errors the researcher prepared the interview structure in advance based on theoretical framework and insight from a occupational safety and health representative. The data was analyzed from detailed transcriptions of the records in an established way of coding. Still a chance for miss interpretations is present and cannot be fully avoided.

After arranging the interviews, there was no other contact with the host organization other than the interviews themselves to ensure avoiding hidden agenda. The researcher was able to work independently and in a neutral way. The results would only be presented to the organization once the research is finished. The researcher tried to stay open to any possible results emerging from the data collection. To ensure this comprehensive study of literature was conducted and based on the literature review the structure of the interview and questions was formed. However as in any qualitative research the researchers own underlying experiences and world views shape the interpretation of the data to some extent.

The validity of this research was tried to attain by extensive research of literature before forming the research questions as well as conducting a preliminary study to gain understanding of the needs of the organization. By doing so the chance of producing relevant data of the phenomenon was higher. However, the number of interviews conducted was 8 which is a fairly small sample to produce valid results if applied to a larger population or a different company as the research was interpretative in nature and fairly specific to one company.

4 Results (Secret)

4.1 Physical well-being

4.2 Social well-being

4.3 Ideas and hopes for improvement

5 Conclusions and discussion (Secret)

5.1 Answers to the research questions

5.2 Theoretical implications

5.3 Practical implications

5.4 Assessment of results and process quality

5.5 Directions for further research

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Information given to the participants before interviewing

Hi, I'm Alisa Savolainen and I am studying International Business at Jyväskylä's University of Applied sciences. I am in the process of writing my thesis on the topic of workplace well-being focusing on the aspect of remote working.

My goal is to be able to answer these following research questions in my thesis

RQ1: How has remote working affected employee's well-being at Schaeffler (Psychological-, Sociological- and Physiological well-being)?

RQ2: How would the employees and managers want their well-being to be supported in remote working conditions?

RQ3: What measures should HRM implement to support workers and managers well-being especially when in remote work settings?

I am asking for 30 minutes of your time to conduct an interview on these topics.

Looking forward to talking to you,

Alisa Savolainen

Appendix 2. Interview structure

Interview structure:

1. Introductions
 - a. Who am I
 - b. Who are you
 - c. Introducing the topic of remote work and wellbeing
2. How has your worklife changed due to remote work
 - a. Workplace set up?
 - b. Breaks?
 - i. Lunch
 - ii. Walking
 - c. Working hours?
 - d. Working with colleagues/ on your own
3. What types of well-being initiatives/ measures does your company have in place? How is team spirit taken care of?
 - a. Well-being questionnaires?
 - b. Check ups with manager or hr
 - c. Leisure activities
4. Is there something you would need more support on?