**ARCADA**

# Impacts of remote work on international employees and the business work environment, post COVID-19 restrictions

In Finland

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Abstract:
The purpose of this thesis is to find out how international business workers have been affected since the implementation of hybrid and remote work models into their work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it affects those post-restrictions.
Its purpose is to reveal how the relationship between the employer and the employees has been affected and the changes that they had to adapt to in their work environment and daily routines.
The theoretical part of this thesis consists of the theory behind why organizations adapt to change, the theories behind hybrid and remote work models, highlighting their benefits and potential flaws, and lastly, the social exchange theory that highlights the interaction between the employer and employee and the potential rewards and costs of the two parties.
Qualitative methods are applied in this thesis, and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method. Interviews allow the respondents to share their points of view and personal individual experiences with how their workplace reacted to changes and restrictions during the pandemic.
The results showed that there has been an increase in the trust between the employee and employer and that overall well-being at work is being more looked after. The work environments have changed, from minor to quite drastic, but in each case, the employer-provided help in getting settled with the changes that were made. Employees are given more freedom in their scheduling, and some jobs became more accessible to potential new hires, while other jobs might seem less appealing to some since it was realized during the pandemic that not all jobs require workers to travel to various locations to carry out their tasks.
In conclusion, there has been a positive impact on the relationship between the worker and employer, the worker's mental health and well-being, and their work-life balance.

| Keywords: | Hybrid work, well-being, Pandemic, COVID, Remote work, work environment, Employee, Employer |
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**CONTENTS**

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The working environment is composed of all the elements that can affect your productivity at work, which includes when and how you work. A work environment is the setting, physical conditions, and social factors where a person performs their job. Each element has an impact on employee well-being, collaboration, work efficiency, and work motivation.

There are three main sub-categories of work environments according to (Indeed Career Guide. 2022):

**Physical environment** refers to the physical aspect of the workplace, for example, the location, layout of the office, working inside the office or from home, etc.

**Company culture** refers to how the workplace and its employees operate on a day-to-day basis. An example is how staff communicate with each other and different levels of power, the company's goals and values, and the influence of the leader on employees.

**Working conditions** include terms and conditions on which employees are hired and also other initiatives to promote a healthy workplace for employees. The rate of pay contract of employment and length of work week/day is an examples of working conditions.

These three sub-categories come together to create one bigger picture, the working environment. The two categories that this thesis focuses mainly on are the physical environment and the changes it has undergone in recent years and the working conditions and how they have changed from the point of view of experienced employees and the point of view of graduates from the business department. The reason behind focusing on these two categories is the fact that due to recent events of the COVID-19 pandemic, these two factors have changed the most in the work environment.

According to the following article (Sponda. 2022), the work environment is not going to return to what it used to be, "work will be done from many different places in the future". Workers in Finland have adapted very well to remote and hybrid work and avoided its negative effects of it such as isolation and longer working hours. After such a long time of working remotely, Finnish people's "desire to work flexibly has increased", (LL: Työpäiväkokemuksen muotoilua study, 2021). Work became more prominent and normal office work less so. Hybrid work environments were created as a solution that allows both sides to benefit. Hence, the idea behind this thesis came up, to find out exactly how the work environment has changed for international workers in Finland and how ease of access to the internet and information has impacted the changes to the workplace and the results following these changes.

This thesis' goal is to investigate and find out how has the working environment and work requirements changed in recent years. The focus of this research is mainly on recent graduates and internationals that are in the business sector in Finland, that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

From recent events and experience, it is evident that a lot of office work does not have to be done in the office. It can be done elsewhere, from home, another city, or a different country for that matter. Greater technological connectivity eases this process by enabling work to be carried out wherever workers happen to be and whatever the time (Messenger and Gschwind, 2016)

One theory tied to this thesis and the idea of remote work is the social exchange theory written by Redmond (2015). This theory is based on exchanges between two people where costs are traded for rewards. Costs are defined as something that has value to it and rewards are defined as something that is needed. Social exchange theory can be applied to the relationship between the employer and employee when it comes to remote work and remote work environments. This theory implies that both people profit when employees work remotely. The employee profits from a flexible schedule, good work-life balance, the comfort of working from home, no commuting to work, etc. The employer profits in the way of cost-saving. The employer saves money on office supplies, travel compensation, electricity consumption at work, etc. This theory helps us to understand how

the relationship between the employer and employee has changed as a result and what is expected from both sides.

The more applicable theory to this thesis is the organizational adaptation theory. This theory is based on the company's need to adapt to its environment to survive and thrive. Ideally, an organization can adapt or change before the perceived need for change becomes clear (Sarta A,2021). This theory can be applied to our current work environment and the future working environment.

Organizations were forced to have to adapt to the constantly changing COVID-19 pandemic to keep employees working and happy while still following safety guidelines issued by the government. This theory explains how organizations must change their environment, and how that impacts employees and potential future employees.

## 1.2  Problem statement

Many people are torn between working from home and going back to the office to work.

Employers must carefully consider how they want to change and adapt their work environment in the coming years and how that affects the employees. Changing the place of work is not so simple to implement in Finland, as employees are not legally required to work from any other location that the location has been agreed on in the employment agreement (Kemppinen, T., 2022).

An employee cannot be forced by the employer to work remotely unless there is an agreement between the two parties. Therefore, an option for the employer could be to implement a hybrid workplace (a combination of working from home and working from the office).

What other solutions have companies in the business sector implemented? What are their advantages and disadvantages? How has the communication between the levels within the company changed (new digital applications, time schedules, skipping hierarchy to contact the manager directly, etc.)

How has working away from the physical location of the office impacted the work week/ work hours?

The research question this thesis focuses on to answer is, How does remote and hybrid work affect the relationship between the employer and employee, and their work environment?

The rapidly changing work environment raises many questions such as these, and this thesis aims to clarify them and find out what the employees think about being able to have a more flexible work environment.

## 1.3 Aim of the study

The main research aim of this study is to figure out in what way has the working environment changed and the advantages and disadvantages that the changes bring for the employee and employer. Has information and data availability affected the work environment? Is the working environment evolving based on new development and advances in technology and applications?

The research aim is based on internationals in the business sector, in Finland.

The research was carried out using various methods such as qualitative desktop research, semi-structured interviews with recent graduates and employees in new workplaces, and analysis of collected data. The questions for the interview were sent out one day beforehand to each person being interviewed, and then the following day a one-hour-long interview was held with everyone. Everyone got the same questions. Every interview was recorded and transcribed which then was analysed to find a conclusion to each question asked, or the different points of view of the interviewees.

## 1.4  Demarcation

All the people that were interviewed were from an international background, i.e., not from Finland, and are graduates looking for a job or workers that started their career recently (within 1 year) in a new workplace. The reason behind studying international people is that it eliminates the risk of having inaccurate data due to people's bias towards family or other connections they might have in potential workplaces and that personal. Having everyone interviewed come from diverse backgrounds gives a more accurate result of how the work environment has changed and how employee wellbeing has been affected by the pandemic and its restrictions.

There is still a risk that the interviewed people got their job due to having prior connections with someone in the company or that the interviewed people have a bias toward the company as they know someone there, but this minimizes the risk and focuses on a narrower group of individuals which in turn gives us more accurate data to analyse. Also, the research focuses on the average person/employee rather than a CEO, as most large-scale interviews and research are done from the employer's point of view and not the employee's.

The thesis research focuses on two theories: how the business adapted to change (Sarta A, 2021) and how the employee and employer both profit from adopting a new work environment model (Redmond, 2015). These two theories are most applicable for this research. Even though a lot of recent studies focus on COVID-19, this study focuses on the impacts of it post restrictions and regulations. It focuses on how the work environment has already been impacted and changed as a result, how the relations between the employer and employee grew/changed.

Not as much research has been done on the benefits and disadvantages that both parties get as a result and what sort of problems the employer had to deal with when implementing change in the work environment. It focuses on the type of rewards and the value of the rewards for the employer and employee (different rewards have different values associated with them) (Redmond,2015). A reward for an employer might be getting a task handed in earlier than expected, while the reward for the employee here is being able to work from the comfort of their own house, with flexible hours.

## 2 THEORY

This chapter covers the most relevant theories and definitions for this thesis to gain an understanding and information about the subject in question. It provides context about how the theories chosen are related to the thesis topic. It will also define the key concepts in this thesis to supply a guide for the reader.

## 2.1 Business Sector

The reason for focusing solely on internationals in the business sector, rather than any position and all nationalities in the business working sector is that it narrows down the subject enough to carry out proper and more accurate research. Also, more research has been carried out for Finnish nationality workers, and the international workers point of view gives a different aspect of how they have been affected by the restrictions and pandemic as a whole. If the subject is too broad, it is possible to encounter many problems with the research process. 4 main problems can occur when the subject of choice is too broad according to (Libguides, 2022).

The first is finding too many information sources can lead to difficulty with decision-making on what to include, exclude, and what is the most important source for your topic. Narrowing the topic down in this thesis subject to only include business sector positions allows for more concise findings that can be analysed and discussed. The second problem ties in with the first one. If the subject is too broad, the information could be too general and not specific enough to develop a "clear framework" (Libguides, 2022) for the thesis subject. The third problem is the potential lack of parameters or specifications that define the problem statement and research aim of the specific thesis could lead to complicating the analysis and research process for the thesis. Lastly, the fourth problem is the risk of covering too many different concepts and ideas in the thesis that cannot be formed into

one paper. This leads to going off on tangents and trailing off the course of the thesis subject, including unnecessary information that does not help explain the thesis research in any way.

The following text has been adapted from (LibGuides: College Readiness: Broaden or Narrow Topic, 2022):

A topic can also be too narrow; therefore, a balance must be reached between broad and narrow (LibGuides: College Readiness: Broaden or Narrow Topic, 2022). If the topic of the thesis is too narrow, information research could be difficult due to the lack of information on that specific topic.

There are four main problems in a too narrow topic. The first being, having a too specific topic. Generalizing the research to find somewhat more broad topics can help with this issue. If the focus of this thesis was international only in the banking industry, that could have led to problems in finding enough research articles from the past.

The second is that the topic is too new and not enough research has been done to find good, credible sources.

The third issue is that not enough databases are used. Sticking to only one database can lead to a bias in the research and it may make it difficult to find sufficient amounts of sources. Including more databases ensures that different points of view are addressed, and the bias is minimized.

The fourth problem is that the language of the text is too complex for the topic. Too much jargon (specific words used by groups or professions that are difficult for others to understand) is included in the text. Using more simple language or changing the keywords of the search criteria can help to find more sources on the topic of the thesis.

Hence the focus on internationals in Finland, to narrow down the subject enough to be able to carry out concise and specific research that can be analysed and conclusions drawn from, while also not being too specific so that enough information and credible sources can be found on the topic to carry out good research If a much broader demarcation was taken into account, then the method process and analysis of data could have been impacted in negative ways

## 2.2 Remote work

**Remote work** can be defined as working anywhere else other than the workplace mentioned on the work contract. Remote work only applies to work that can be done at the workplace just as well as at home, for example, construction work cannot be remote work Remote work is not a single thing, "it's a way of working. It's a lifestyle. It's a movement. It's the new direction for business", (DUFFY, 2022). For remote work to be effective it needs certain technology provided by the employers such as computers, mobile phones, email accounts, and other technology used for communication and most importantly access to the internet (Viktorovich; Rozentsvaig; Bakhteeva; Soshnikova; & Sherpaev, 2020). It is not as simple as "Taking an existing business, moving everything online, and hoping for the best" (DUFFY, 2022). The whole process and structure of the business must be rethought with this new framework in mind.

Remote working is not a new occurrence. In 2009 over 20% of organizations in Germany gave their employees the option to work from home a couple of days every month. This has changed in recent years due to the development of information and communication technology (Rupietta & Beckmann,2016). It has become a more regular occurrence in organizations that possess the ability to have remote work present in their workplace. It is impossible to avoid the subject of the COVID-19 pandemic when mentioning remote work. In 2020, for many people, remote work became a necessary step to battle the pandemic. (DUFFY, 2022).

## 2.3 Hybrid work

**Hybrid working** or flexible organizations start as a traditional business that has a specific workplace location (location-dependent) and grows to accept remote work to a certain degree over time. (DUFFY, 2022). Most organizations that have taken on remote work within the last two years have a hybrid/flexible approach to work.

Hybrid workplaces have rules and restrictions for remote work. For example, the organization may only allow employees to work three days a week remotely or only allow 50% of the hours in their contract to be done remotely. (Cappelli, 2021)

The two main approaches to hybrid work are the two-tier model approach, where the organization splits its employees into two separate sets and has one set working permanently remote and the other set is working at the workplace location. The second approach allows all or most of the employees to work from home occasionally when they see fit. (Cappelli, 2021).

Cappelli calls the "Two-Tier Hybrid Model" (Cappelli, 2021) the simpler one of the two mentioned because the employer can be almost certain of the consequences. The consequences are, that the permanently remote employees will "become like second-class citizens" (Cappelli, 2021). Cappelli's previous research shows that they will have fewer opportunities for career advancement and the potential to stand out at work, due to having less, face-to-face contact with the supervisors and managers.

Managers of remote employees have more responsibilities than those working at the workplace, such as checking in with remote employees, accessing data that are not available outside the workplace computers, gaining special permissions, etc. In some cases, employees working solely from home are treated more like contractors where negotiations are needed to reach agreements on expectations and deadlines, rather than making changes on the fly.

The second approach that Cappelli mentions is the "Choose-Your-Own Hybrid Model" (Cappelli, 2021). This is the approach that is more favourable to the employees as they get to decide when they want to work from home or at the work location. This approach is harder to implement in terms of administration. Organizations such as PwC, KPMG, and Deloitte have implemented this hybrid model and the results are beneficial to both employees and employers. These organizations have certain days where all employees must come into the office, and some where coming in is optional. PwC UK has used this approach since July 2021 where they end the workweek on Fridays at noon and allow

their employees to work two days per week from home, at whatever timeframe they want (PwC, 2021).

## 2.4  Social exchange theory

This is the first of two theories that the thesis is based around. The social exchange theory by (Redmond, 2015) is based on exchanges between two people where costs are traded for rewards. Redmond gives an example of giving your friend a lift with your car. At first, your friend offers you 5 euros but it is not worth it for you as the petrol will cost more than that. He then offers you 10 euros and lunch, and this seems like a better exchange, so you accept. Your costs in this interaction would be your time spent driving your friend and driving back, and the wear on the car. The reward of course is the money and lunch. For your friend, the reward is the lift to the destination and the cost is the money and lunch. Both parties reached an agreement and benefit from the exchange.

Sociologist George Homans (Homans, 1958) proposed to examine similar interactions of exchange in the field of economic principles revolving around rewards and costs (Redmond, 2015). Homans argued that usually, two parties or more try to receive something of more significant value to them than the cost they need to induce. Value is seen differently from person to person. How this theory applies to this thesis is that the employee has a different view of rewards than their employer. The same can be said about the costs, profit, and fairness of the exchange.

### 2.4.1  Theory elements

The following text is based on Redmond's theory of social exchange theory.

This theory consists of five different elements according to (Redmond, 2015):

**Rewards and value of rewards** – Any reward presented to a person might have a different value to another person. As mentioned in the above example of an exchange between

two people, the monetary reward of 5 euros have a very different meaning to a full-time employee in comparison to a homeless person. Rewards can also fluctuate over time, the value associated with them is not a set value. For example, for a new employee getting a full-time contract and promised hours and wages has huge value for them as it helps improve their finances and stability. Over time, the initial reward associated with the new job will decrease as the employee no longer is in as much need of money or stability. The feeling towards the job might change and so can the value of rewards. The employee might start valuing his/her personal time more, which in turn will decrease the value of rewards associated with the job.

**Social rewards –** Any reward that can only be obtained through interaction with another person. An example is doing something to get respect or approval from another person. Helping out your co-worker with a project might feel rewarding for both of you because each of you has "intrinsic rewards as confirmation of the one's value, respect and acceptance," (Redmond. 2015). Social rewards strictly depend on other people. Social rewards differ from all other rewards in the sense that we cannot really negotiate over them. For example, if your employer says, "if you don't like me, I won't like you", it is not necessarily going to be true. This does not work as a form of negotiation or bartering, stating that you will feel a certain way about something does not truly reflect how you feel.

**Costs –** (Homans, 1961) defines "costs as something of value that is given up, a withdrawal of reward or a punishment." A cost can be anything from money, time, or energy to name a few. People exchange costs for rewards. An employee gives his time, energy, and skill (costs) in order to gain money (reward), respect, and approval (social reward) from his employer or co-workers. The value of costs also varies as rewards do. The value of time for a person varies depending on the request made on their time. If an employer asks his employee to work on Sunday to finish off a project (that was not their project to finish) with a tight deadline, then the employee's cost of sacrificing time fluctuates depending on if they had plans that Sunday made beforehand. If the employee has no plans that day at all then the cost is low, and the reward of working overtime is high. But, if the employee had family time planned for example, then the cost is higher than the reward which means that the exchange is not profitable for the employee.

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**Profit** – This is measured by taking the reward minus the cost (Homans, 1961). The profit grows as the costs decrease and rewards increase. Profits affect how people make their decisions in relationships and communications with others. In general, people look for interactions that profit them the most, something that gives them more value than it costs. Why would a person do something that has no benefit to them? It simply is not worth the resources that they put in for little to no reward. That is why the social exchange theory is so applicable in the business world. There is always some sort of exchange of costs and rewards between employers and employees, where both sides try to reach the highest profit that benefits them the most.

**Equity and distributive justice** – Equity refers to gaining a fair trade based on the cost a person puts in and the reward that the person gets back from it. The more effort or cost that a person puts into something, the more of a reward they expect to gain back. Often exchanges between two parties end with fair trade or equal trade. If an employer is gaining more than an employee in the exchange between them, the exchange is not equitable to both sides. The employee does not feel appreciated and feels that he is not getting enough out of the exchange and his approach to work and the employer could change. Equity is also affected by the assessment of costs and rewards in comparison to the partners' ability to provide them and their "availability of resources" (Mitchell, et al., 2012). The view of equity differs for each person involved in the exchange. Every person has a different perception and bias toward what equity is.

Distributive justice refers to the reward received for an exchange between two parties which is proportionate to the costs that each party invested into the exchange. The more a person invests the greater the return (Homans, 1961). If two employees both work on the same project and one employee puts in 30 hours of work into it and the other only 10, then with distributive justice the employee that puts in more time should get more credit for the project. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in the real world as people remain in unfavourable situations for many different, personal reasons.

The question that this element brings up that is relevant to the thesis is, how many times has an employee found themselves in such a situation where they feel that they are underpaid or underappreciated for the amount of work they put in?

All these elements can be applied to this thesis topic and the interactions between an employer and employee can be thought of in terms of the "Social exchange theory" (Redmond, 2015).

## 2.5 Organizational adaptation theory

The second theory that this thesis research will be based around is the (Sarta A, 2021) theory of organizational adaptation. This theory is relevant for research as most of the changes that have occurred in the past 2 years to the work environment have occurred due to the business's ability to adapt to change and its environment, which in this case was the COVID-19 pandemic. The environment for organizations changed drastically and quickly when lockdowns and restrictions were introduced by the government in most countries to help fight the spread of the virus. Applying this theory to find out how workplaces in Finland have adapted, allows for a better understanding of how that impacts employees and their working environment.

According to (Sarta A,2021), adaptation in business can be defined as "*intentional decision making undertaken by organizational members, leading to observable actions that aim to reduce the distance between an organization and its economic and institutional environments*". Every organization that survived the COVID-19 pandemic has had to adapt in some way to thrive in its environment. The organizations that failed to adapt or reacted late did not do as well as those that made educated decisions about the situation, leading to a much harder environment for them to do well in.

## 2.6 Reasons behind adaptation

The following text has been adapted from (Sarta A, 2021) "Organizational Adaptation".

The "Organizational Adaptation" Theory consists of 3 areas of inquiry:

The first "area of inquiry" that is important to answer for this research is "**why organiza-tions pursue adaptation**" (Sarta A, 2021). The important focus in this "area of inquiry" is looking at adaptation as a decision-making outcome. Resources, behavioral change, and search are themes that often inspire organizations to pursue new opportunities in their environment (Sarta A, 2021). Having these themes in mind, organizations pursue adapta-tion by improving resources and their capabilities through evolutionary processes or through amassed experiences that "promote opportunity recognition and action" (Eggers, 2012). Search initiatives are an important aspect for organizations to pursue to improve adaptation, as they show the organization's willingness to learn which in turn produces better performance (Walter, Lechner, & Kellermanns, 2016). Organizations constantly seek improvements in all aspects of their organization to become more efficient and have the biggest advantage over their competition and the business environment they are in. If an organization can recognize opportunity and act accordingly to get the most out of it, it shows growth and the ability to adapt. The same can be said about a company that can recognize risk and can act accordingly to minimize it.

It is hard for organizations to break routine and old habits to find new approaches but doing so can result in finding new opportunities to get the upper hand over the competi-tion. Improving an organization's cognitive capability allows them to move quickly into new environments and markets in pursuit of new technologies or improvements (Sarta A, 2021). It can improve decision-making and speed up the process of adaptation. Internal factors have as much impact as external factors in the "pursuit of adaptation", but at the end of the line, it is up to the managers and organization owners whether to pursue or implement adaptation. It is vital to recognize the environmental changes that arise as ei-ther opportunities or risks. Communicating between different hierarchies clearly is vital to ensure the correct process of implementing change in the organization (Barr, 1998).

Organizations pursue adaptation to improve their performance in their environment and to be more efficient than their competitors in the environment. Some adaptation is more forced than others, as was the case with the pandemic breakout. The organizations that did not adapt as well as others, simply failed and were forced to stop their business operations. A good way to describe such adaptation could be the "survival of the fittest" (Charles Darwin).

The second "area of inquiry" is, "**what internal factors preclude or enable adaptation**"(Sarta A, 2021). Whether the organization decides to pursue adaptation is based on its ability and willingness to change. Some organizations look at adaptation as an outcome and investigate what can be changed in their performance or what other internal modifications can be made to achieve the outcome desired (adaptation).

From the perspective of resources, dependence survival can be described as "an adaptive response that results from mutual dependence", (Sarta A, 2021). A study by (Xia 2011) outlines that cross-border alliances have greater survival odds when cross-border trading between countries is stronger. The study shows that there is a mutual dependency between the countries, working together benefits both parties and improves adaptability. Since survival can reflect a level of adaptation, it can also "reflect the absence of selection pressure that applies to organizations" (Sarta A, 2021).

There is a link between adaptation and competition. If there is no competition present, then there is no need for the organization to improve above its competitors. Competitiveness drives adaptation forward.

In Sarta's theory, the theme of governance and stakeholder management emphasizes the role of environments in adaptation. Many organizations have to adapt to multiple environments or audiences which can be quite problematic. Sarta refers to this problem as "environmental multiplicity". The deployment or use of appropriate business models in specific environments is of great importance as it is an enabler of adaptation and helps identify potential benefits of alignment for "competitive advantage" (Powell, 1992). Some organizations fail to make internal changes for adaptation and instead deal with "mimetic, coercive, and normative isomorphic pressures" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Proactive organizational behaviour is often influenced by external pressures. For

example, in the context of sustainability initiatives certain organizations follow the "trend" of achieving sustainable development goals just so that they are not worse than their competitors, rather than doing it for the greater good of the planet.

The third and final "area of inquiry" is: **What environmental factors urge adaptation** (Sarta A, 2021). This area plays the biggest part in how the theory relates to the thesis topic. The environment was the one thing that has changed the most in the last 2 years. The environment had the biggest influence as a factor of change and business adaptation from when the pandemic began.

"Competitive and institutional pressures" describe environmental factors that push organizations towards adaptation. Chung and Beamish (2010) bring up the very important topic of the "ineffectiveness of continuous ownership changes" in international joint ventures. Chung and Beamish discuss that such changes create instability and poor performance between partners. It is not easy to adapt to something that is constantly changing and requires more input rather than becoming easier to work with overtime.
When organizations change, they also influence the economic and institutional environments in which they are. These changes add pressure to other organizations within the same environment or field and bring up the idea of organizations and environments influencing one another (Sarta A, 2021).

Major changes to organizations are not always the most appropriate or the necessary decision in adaptive decision making. The changes depend on the environmental dynamics the organization finds itself in at the time of the opportunity appearing. Adaptation can be as simple as going back to practices the organization used to follow (Cattani, 2005). "*Characteristics of organizations and environments must be conjointly considered with specific attention to the environmental conditions that preclude or enable convergence*" (Sarta A, 2021).

Together, all the reasons behind the adaptation, further explain the theory of organizational adaptation and how it affects the thesis topic. These changes and adaptations can be related to the thesis topic and help explain how and why the working environment in the business sector changed in the ways it did.

## 2.7 Theory summary

The social exchange theory (Redmond, 2015) can be applied to this thesis as any interaction between an employee with an employer, is based on a reward and cost aspect. Rewards and costs have different values associated with them depending on who you ask. For an employee, more money is a good reward, but the cost is sacrificing his/her free time as a result. For an employer, the reward could be getting the project or work done within the deadline set out, and the cost would be money he/she has to pay for that to happen.

There is a mutual connection between the two parties and that has to be taken into consideration when changing the working environment. You cannot adapt to a new working environment and not supply your employees with proper equipment and training. Here the costs and sacrifices of free time for the employees are not fair for the reward that the employer expects, which is most probably a more efficient and satisfying workplace. A level of equity must be reached for the trade of costs for rewards to be sustainable in the long run, otherwise, either of the two can feel that the trade is unjust. Both parties want to gain some sort of profit from the rewards, but fair trade is also usually more than enough to keep a good relationship between the two.

This point brings the second theory to light, the theory of organizational adaptation (Sarta A, 2021). This theory can be used to further investigate how organizations have adapted to the working environment in the past 2 years and how it impacts the employee and employer. The cost and reward trades can be used as an example of internal factors that

enable adaptation. The change of environment not only affects the adaptation of a business, but it can also impact the value of rewards perceived by both parties (employer and employee). Remote and hybrid work could be a valuable reward for the employees, but it could be a big cost for the employer in terms of less up-to-date communication. It is easier for the employer to walk past the office and check up on his employees that are in the same area, rather than having to host a meeting or message employees individually. For some it could be a benefit whereas for some it may not be, it all depends on how well the organization has adapted and how much the employees' satisfaction is considered by the employer. Unfair exchanges of rewards and costs can be a reason behind why an organization struggles to adapt and does not thrive in its environment.

This links the two theories together giving a better understanding of the potential problems, changes, and adaptations in the work environment that occurred. It also allows for a further understanding of how that impacts the employees and if some things should be changed more or reverted to how they were.

# 3  METHOD

This chapter will explain how the information was collected and what methods were used. It explains why the collection method is appropriate for the study and how reliable it is and how the data was analysed and discussed.

The reason for choosing qualitative research over quantitative research methods is that it provides a more in-depth understanding of the participant's point of view and perception towards the changes that occurred in the working environment. The qualitative data provided deeper and more specific findings of the participant's own opinions and experiences compared to numerical, qualitative data. Self- reflexivity according to (Sarah J. Tracy., 2020) is a core qualitative concept that needs to be taken into account before carrying out any qualitative research. Self-reflexivity refers to "people's careful consideration of how their past experiences, points of view, and roles impact their interactions and interpretations of any particular interaction or context" (Sarah J. Tracy., 2020). Sarah J. Mentions how every researcher has their own opinion and point of view and rather than denying that "bias" qualitative research acknowledges it and promotes it. The participant's

different backgrounds shape their approach to the questions and give valuable insights into their thoughts and opinions.

## 3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research was the research method that was used to conduct this thesis research. The data was gathered from two sources, primary and secondary. Secondary data was used to collect material for this research, from existing literature and qualitative desktop research. Many different local and international digital sources were used in this thesis to gather secondary data. The primary data was gathered through qualitative research which was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews.

Qualitative research can capture characteristics of the real world in it and allows us to make sense of "patterns of meaning" (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research is about meaning rather than numbers as mentioned before. Qualitative research doesn't provide just one answer, it provides multiple points of view which is why it's important to have a large enough sample size that represents the population while conducting the data collection to have enough coverage of results so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn. Context is very important in qualitative research as it reflects on the person providing the answers which is why it is important to have a diverse sample to diversify the person's different subjectivities they might have and how that can impact the findings.

## 3.2 Research approach

The respondents were selected based on their career position, nationality, and experience. Every one of the interviewees came from a different country with different opinions and points of view to try and figure out if any conclusion could have been reached on each of the questions asked. Each respondent has either recently begun working in their field of study or has switched jobs recently (within one year). This demarcation helps to focus the interviews on the changes to the working environment in the recent years when remote work and hybrid work became more common and also reduces the possibility of the "bad" form of bias where the interviewees don't give truthful opinions and answers because they have relationships within the business such as family members or good friends.

Subjectivity is a good thing in qualitative research, but it has to be honest and should not impact the participant's judgment on how he/she answers the questions. Therefore, ensuring that the participants have not been long in the workplace helps reduce the risk of this.

The **sample** consisted of 5 respondents within the demarcation criteria, one important being that each respondent was from a different nationality. The interviews were held online through Zoom (an online meeting application) in a controlled environment to avoid any unnecessary disruptions. Each interview had a time slot of one hour, but it was flexible depending on the answers provided by the interviewee or other obligations. Some interviews ran short were as others ran long, depending on how much the participant had to say. The interview language was English as it is one of the most common languages that most internationals speak. Only two people were present for the entire interview and background questions were asked before the interview began. Before the interview took place, the interviewee was given a form of consent to carry out this research and was informed that the research was done anonymously.

The **interview questions** were created with the theoretical framework of the thesis in mind. The questions were constructed clearly and concisely to ensure that each respondent understands and can answer all the questions. The interview questions were made sure to be different from the research questions. Open-ended questions were the preferred option as these questions provide more personal responses and opinions.

The **interview guide** was split into three themes to explore every possible point of view and perspective of each respondent. The themes were used to help form questions to answer the research questions asked before. The first theme aimed to explain how the physical environment has changed for the interviewees, the second theme was aimed to explain if the working conditions have been impacted at all and if so, how. The third theme was aimed to explain if the rewards and costs between the employer and employee have changed at all (social exchange theory Redmond, 2015). The themes helped to make the interview flow more naturally and make it more like a conversation rather than a formal interview, which helps the respondents to relax and talk about their experiences.

The **interviews** were carried out as specified above, but some extra questions were asked if something came up that seemed important and could be further explained. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary and seemed important. The same questions were asked for each respondent in more or less the same order, depending on if follow-up questions came up.

The **data** collected from each interview was analysed and transcribed manually. The results were made sure to be left unchanged and original. The interviews were recorded to avoid any errors in note-taking, but short notes were also taken throughout the interview. Transcription of interviews was done within 48 hours of interviewing to avoid any data loss due to not remembering some keynotes. During transcribing main points and key findings were highlighted to ease the data analysis later on in the results and discussion chapter.

## 3.3  Validity and reliability

As much attention as possible to the validity and reliability was given to ensure that the data collected and analysed was in line with the subject of the thesis. That is the reason why the subject and theory were explored quite widely, to build enough understanding and applicability to the thesis topic. Only credible sources and references were used to support this study to ensure credible results and conclusions. Every source was checked to ensure that the work was credible and that the author has had experience in what he/she was stating and researching.

To ensure that the respondents are being credible and given true answers and opinions, the interviewer asked for clarification if they understood correctly what the respondent is saying. This way misunderstanding and misinformation were avoided.

Qualitative research is often limited in its scope. When interviews are carried out from a fairly small sample, it is not advised to apply and generalize the findings to a bigger population or different context as it is hard to know how you can apply these findings

(Bryman and Cramer, 2012). Therefore, generalizing the results to larger groups was avoided as it is very speculative and as mentioned before, qualitative research is very subjective.

In the context of this thesis research, reliability also means dependability which means that similar results can be achieved if similar conditions are followed. Validity can be referred to as truthfulness in this thesis.

## 3.4  Analysis of the data

There are multiple different ways to analyse qualitative data, which all depends on the research method chosen, the resources available and the scope of the specific research in question.

Thematic analysis method is used in this thesis to analyse the researched material for recurring themes (Caulfield Jack, 2019). Thematic analysis enables the grouping of contents into different themes (Caulfield Jack, 2019) that re-occur in the data gathered. Categorizing the data helped reveal re-occurring themes and topics from the interviewees responses and also highlighted any differences that were raised.

The interviewees that were chosen for this thesis came from different professional backgrounds and different nationalities, but all had one thing in common. It was that they are all office workers in the business industry and their work does not require them to be present physically at work all of the time. Every person interviewed had either had previous experience with remote work, pre pandemic, or started their career with remote work already included in the work environment.

 The interviewees shared their own experience with remote work and how it affected them, their work environment and their employer. Many different answers were given and each from a different point of view, with personal experiences attached to them. Some

respondents had the point of view working before and post pandemic and some only of how their expectations have changed about their career from when they started studying.

The interviews disclosed multiple things about the interviewee's experiences and thoughts, how different people and companies have different approaches to remote and hybrid work and yet still share a lot of same and similar points which helps with answering the research questions presented previously.

# 4   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and result of the interviews will be presented in this chapter. Each question will be presented and the findings and thought from each respondent. The responses will be grouped into common themes/topics wherever possible, and any different responses will be highlighted.

The interviewed participants will be referred to as respondents 1-5 for the ease of reading and referring to particular interviewees.

Respondent 2 was used as a comparison for the other respondents that did have experience with remote and hybrid work. In order for respondent 2 to maintain his confidentiality at work, it had to be done on site at all times. The interview questions where therefore adjusted to fit his criteria.

**Respondent 1:** Female, new graduate, Junior Sales and Marketing Manager, has experience in the field from previous work internships, Norwegian

**Respondent 2:** Male, new graduate, Marketing and Content Moderator, previous work experience from internships in Business Financing, Vietnamese

**Respondent 3:** Male, Internal Audit Manager, 10+ years of experience in Finance industry, professional qualification: Chartered Accountant (SA), South African

**Respondent 4:** Male, Sales Development, over 1 year of experience in his field, Swedish

**Respondent 5:** Male, Restaurant finance and operations manager, 10+ years of experience in managing the restaurant industry, Scottish

The interviews were carried out between July – September 2022. As stated above, all interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and later transcribed and analysed. The respondents were chosen for their wide variety of backgrounds, nationalities, experiences and career positions. The interviews started with general background questions such as age, profession, nationality, and years of experience in their field. The interview questions then followed.

## 4.1  Theme 1 Physical Environment

Firstly, the respondents were asked either, "Do you think your work environment and/or habits have changed compared to your previous working years?" or if not applicable, "Were your expectations different about your future work environment and habits while studying before/during the pandemic?". Three out of five respondents answered the first question, as they had previous work experience and two out of five answered the second question as they graduated during or right after the tightest restrictions were over in Finland. This question helped shape the following questions in the interview to make it more naturally flowing. All respondents answered yes to either one of the questions.

The following question asked how the physical aspects of the work environment have changed for the respondent. Respondent 1 answered that "*I expected more people to be present at the office at once, but when I started my career, that has not been the case. Sometimes I'm even fully alone at the office. It feels like the whole place has been just left*

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*alone when the pandemic started, and everyone left and stayed at home. Only now, when we're officially in the hybrid model, they are about to start renovating the office to make it feel more homely, but they will reduce the amount of desks and seats to save rent as there are less people at once in the office anyways"*

Respondent 3 stated that, "*There has been a change in the location of me performing my work. My job is traditionally very location driven so I would need to travel to where my auditee is. This could be in a different country, city, or town, but now because we conduct these audits mostly remotely, I work from home for most of the time and then go to office when I need to.*"
Each respondent stated that the physical environment has changed already to an extent or that it is undergoing change currently. Respondent 4 added that "there *was a lot more focus on the hygienic factors, as well as being a lot more conscious of your own health*" and explained how a lot more health and sanitary measures were added to his office to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Staff were asked to only come to the office if it was really urgent and even something as little as a dry throat would stop people from coming to work, which before the pandemic outbreak, this was not something that was seen as an issue.

Respondent 5 added that "I *used to be more hands on and only work from the office or restaurant, but nowadays I actually have the ability to work from home which is not something I thought I'd be able to do when I started this job*". He further explained how when the restrictions where at its tightest, he would not see people he was used to seeing almost every day, and that has made the job feel lonelier for him at the time.

Two out of five respondents stated that they had some minor difficulties with adjusting to a new work environment. The main difficulty was finding a new routine that works for them, as for example respondent 5 used the physical aspect of travelling to work as his motivation to start the day. " *I had to find a new routine and motivate myself to get out of bed because I no longer had the fact that I have to be present at the office on time to motivate me to get my day started during the pandemic restrictions. My workplace was literally 10 metres away from my bed, so it was too easy to wake up just before my start time and log onto the computer and only then slowly start getting my day started*".

The other three respondents stated that they had no difficulties in adjusting to the new work environment or creating new routines, as either their employer themselves helped them through it or that the employer sent out "constant *reminders of channels available for people that may need help for this or any other professional matter" - Respondent 3.*

Respondent 2 had a slightly different take on this topic as his work requires him to be on site, so even during the toughest restrictions, he still had to be present at his office, with all of the health and safety measures taken, to carry out his job. His physical environment or routine didn't change as much as other respondents, but the office layout and health infrastructures did have to change. *"working from home is great, but my job requires confidentiality and that is a harder thing to achieve when everyone is spread out and not in one place."*

The communication between employees and employers has also changed, in some cases it changed a lot. The respondents were asked how the communication and organizational culture has changed and the following are some of the answers. Respondent 3 stated that, *"the personal element now often gets lost when interacting in my work responsibilities. This is one of the elements that I miss but we have managed to find little ways to overcome it, albeit very digitally".* Respondent 1 said that *"Communications are a bit more relaxed and casual now. Instead of sending many official emails and waiting for answers, people can just write quick and casual messages or have a quick call on Teams. This also makes you constantly "available", so there might be a lot of buzz in your inbox. Meetings are nicer however, when you know you are able to fully attend from anywhere and still be recognized and heard."*

Overall, each of the respondents interviewed experienced some changes to their physical work environments, some more than others, but each one has their own point of view on the topic. All of the respondents either received help directly from their employers to settle in with the physical changes or they received guidelines and other parties to contact in case they need help with anything. The respondents that experienced difficulties with the transition to remote and/or hybrid work eventually found the motivation and routine that helps them get through their work responsibilities. In all cases, some adjustments had

to be made, from small things such as better hygiene and personal distance from other staff to bigger changes such as working alone from home and leaving the office behind for a number of weeks, not able to see any of your work colleagues.

All five of the respondents stated they see positive aspects in their new work environments and routine. Four respondents mentioned that it is more flexible and allows for a routine that is more catered to their own individual needs and wants, whereas the fifth respondent, respondent 2 mentioned that even though he's not able to work from home, which is of big benefit to his co-workers, his employer ensures that he gets adequate compensation in terms of events organised by the employer or free refreshments at his office.

Small gestures and larger ones from the employer's perspective can greatly strengthen the bond between the employer and employee, which only has positive outcomes in terms of work quality, efficiency and overall employee wellbeing.

## 4.2  Theme 2 Working Conditions

Following the physical aspects of the work environment, the working conditions will be analysed next. Both of these themes go hand in hand together as one affects the other. The physical aspects of the environment are a part of working conditions.

The respondents were asked if their work conditions were impacted in any way after the COVID restrictions were removed, and if they were how were they impacted. Respondent 3 explained that *"I basically have the time that would have been spent on travel at my disposal to use should I want to spend time doing something of a more personal nature during the day. Therefore, I can theoretically go for a walk midday to clear my head should I need it, but in my case as a new father, it is mostly spent doing something for my family's wellbeing."*

Respondent 1 said that her employer offered more computer equipment to take home for staff that has the hybrid model and wants to work remotely. She added that, *"working*

*hours are changeable more than they were before the pandemic. When working from home it is easier to start your days earlier and keep on working later"*.

Respondent 5 had a similar thought process, with the addition that it is easy to work longer hours without realizing and answering work messages and emails even after your shift is over, since your house is your office now and the distinction between work and home is not as evident.

When asked about motivation, whether it has been affected in any way since the pandemic, four out of five respondents said that in the beginning of the pandemic their motivation decreased but it went up as the restrictions lessened.

Respondent 2 explained that his motivation has indeed increased since the pandemic was lessened and further goes on to explain that he was *"able to do more and I was less restricted by health risks, plus being able to feel like I am growing instead of stagnating within the four walls I trapped myself in during the pandemic"*.

Respondent 3 however stated that their motivation stayed the same during and after the pandemic and its restrictions. *"I have always taken pride in what I do, so where I do it from does not change that."*

Following in the interview, there was a question about how their working hours and workload have been affected by any changes the company brought in. Three out of five respondents said that the changes the company they work for brought in did affect their workload and hours in a positive way. Three out of four respondents, which have the benefit of hybrid work, said that the hours are a lot more flexible and more in their favour of their own time schedules, and that they are more active with the hybrid model. Respondent 3 said that *"my workload has not changed. My working hours in a strict sense also have not changed, but now I may do my required 7.5 hours over a 9-hour span with breaks in between where previously it was done in a continuous fashion."* Respondent 5 agreed with respondent 3 that his workload has not changed, as he has to stay within normal business opening hours to get most of his tasks complete but added that some

tasks do not have a strict time frame to work within, and these tasks he does whenever is most suitable to his personal schedule.

Respondent 2 had a different point of view compared to the other four as he has to be on site in order to carry out his work tasks. He added that the communication is relatively stress free and staying on task is easier for him since his team leader is able to keep an eye on his work and make sure he gets any help he requires. Again, his working hours or workload has not been affected as he does not have the possibility of working remotely in any way.

Then the respondents were asked if working from home/hybrid work has affected their physical and or mental well-being, if applicable. The question was applicable to four out of the five respondents. All four respondents agreed that hybrid/remote work has affected them in some way. Three out of the four said that it was a positive change and allowed for more options being available to them, which made them feel more in control of what they can do. Mentally it allowed them to have their days "off" from work to actually be a day away from the office, and a day of rest, and not needing to "pop" into the office for some minor reason.

Respondent 4 and respondent 1 added two negative comments about the effects of hybrid work on their physical and/or mental health, and that is that *"the lack of office affects the need for the social aspect of being in an office environment and the "strictness" that comes with it, which means there's less of a chance for procrastination".-* Respondent 4, and also, *"I have noted some muscle pain and head aches, probably because of poor working positions at home. At the office we have electric tables and proper chairs, but at home I work a bit too carelessly, basically anywhere that has space".* -Respondent 1.

From these results, we can gather that businesses have made adaptations and changes wherever applicable, in order to survive and thrive in their environment (Sarta A, 2021). In most workplaces nowadays *"potential new hires are also making their decision based on where they are required to work from".* – Respondent 3. This goes to show that the pandemic restrictions, and businesses reaction to these events, have shaped the future of work responsibilities and benefits the company provides for its workers. For some new

hires, hybrid work model will be a requirement to take up a new job and for some it will be a turn off. Therefore, it is important for businesses to enable their hires, wherever possible to let them decide on how they want to work, with a flexible work model allowing for some days at the office and some days away from office.

Allowing your employees work from home whenever they want, gives a sign of trust to them from the employer's side. In the case of some respondents in this interview, they stated that the reason for not being able to work remotely pre pandemic was simply that the employer didn't trust the employees to work from home and produce the same quality of work that they would do if they were present at the office. But being forced by the restrictions of the pandemic to enable workers to work from home, has shown some businesses that change isn't always bad, and employees will not abuse the work from home benefit as much as some employers think they will. These regulations created by the government where eye opening to some businesses and employees, as respondent 2 stated – *"The trust between my employer and their employees has clearly grown as a result of working from home since the employer has to trust his employee to work from home without being monitored to get their job done"*.

The above changes in work conditions fall under the third *"area of inquiry"*, **what environmental factors urge adaptation** (Sarta A, 2021), in the Organizational adaptation theory mentioned in the primary research carried out earlier on. For some respondents the changes the business made where not drastic but still improved the employee's quality of life in a sense, which made them feel more appreciated and be able to carry out their tasks in a more appropriate way. Changing internal factors inside of the business, also help enable and speed up how quickly and well the business is able to adapt (Sarta A, 2021).

## 4.3  Theme 3 Employer - Employee Costs and Rewards

Lastly, we will take a look at the third theme of this result analysis. The second last question that the respondents were asked, is: **Do you think that the employer or employee**

**benefit more from the work environment changes in your company, or do you think its an equal exchange?**

Four out of five respondents had a similar answer that the benefits for both parties are fairly equal. Respondent 4 however, explained that *"I believe depending on the working environment, both benefit differently. In the hospitality industry I believe there are no major changes. For the work I do, I think it can be seen as an equal exchange"*. He further dwelled into the topic and said that *"employees benefit from the flexibility and working from home if they want it, and the employer in turn benefits from potentially lower costs of running a full office. But I can imagine some employees may abuse the privilege and then it may not be an equal exchange."*

During the interview, respondent 3 also had a very interesting point stating that he thinks it's an equal exchange, that employees now are able to work in a manner that suits them more, which leads to them being more motivated and this leads to them helping their employer achieve their goals. *"Financially, I also think employees have now had an opportunity to cut expenses in many areas that I feel they always wanted to, but it came at the expense of the employee wellbeing. I think employee wellbeing is now managed in different, less expensive ways."* – Respondent 3.

From the examples above, it is clear that the costs for an employer and rewards are different than that of the employee. They have completely different points of view, but both depend on each other and work in symbiosis, one party affects the other and vice versa. Allowing the employees to choose their days at office and at home, gives them a reward of having more personal time or at least, a better planned personal schedule. The reward for the employer is that the employee's motivation is affected, and the work done by them is most likely going to be of better quality, and efficiency. Of course, some people will take advantage of it, but it seems that overall, that is the minority, and so far post pandemic restrictions, there has been a lot more positive cost to reward exchanges between the two parties. We can apply the social exchange theory by (Redmond, 2015), that was explained in the theory part of this thesis, to this topic

As respondent 2 said, *"the small benefits here and there in the office do make it more enjoyable to be at work every day"*, which goes to show that the changes and rewards do not have to be anything major, yet they still hold power to motivate people to further improve at their jobs and pursue bigger goals. In some cases, the employer can even revert to previous ways in order to change the work environment for the better (Sarta A, 2021). To add to this, respondent 1 had a very interesting point which was, *"I think that the hybrid model has helped more than caused any trouble. I think it has liberated people from too strict time scheduling, unnecessarily long travel times to and from work, and helped many people with communicating."* This statement brings us closer to answering the research question of this thesis, which was; How does remote and hybrid work affect the relationship between the employer and employee, and their work environment?

Respondent's 3 answer, to the final question, *"is there anything else you would like to add to do with the work environment or workplace in which you work"*, can further bring us to answering the research question, as he mentions, *"I think that I have been very fortunate to work with a team that makes all my workplace interactions pleasant. When you work with people that appreciate you, the difficult times seem less difficult. I do also work for one of the most desired workplaces in the country and with the benefits that are offered in helping you live your life and do work of a great quality; I understand why it is."*

The working environment, including the people in it, whether that is co-workers, the physical aspects of it or the employer, do play an enormous impact on the employee's wellbeing, and these positive comments are a good sign when they are coming from international workers in Finland. It shows great development of the workplaces, and care from the employer's point of view. Workers are treated equally in their workplace, which is not always true when looked at other countries and their management models.

# 5  CONCLUSION

In the light of this research, it is clear that the working environment, habits and employee wellbeing have been impacted to a great extent when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, and also after they have been removed earlier this year (2022) in the business sector. The aim of this thesis research was to answer the research question presented earlier. The researcher carrying out this research, believes that enough data and information has been collected from the theoretical part and empirical research, to gain answers to the research question. This study supplies a different point of view about the current wellbeing of international employees and their work environment in Finland. It also continues the research from previous thesis', about remote work and its impact during the pandemic. It shows how the changes and adaptations the companies made at the start of the pandemic, affect employees after the restrictions were removed and pandemic was over.

The main research question of this thesis was, *"How does remote and hybrid work affect the relationship between the employer and employee, and their work environment?".* With the above theories, data and analysis this question can be answered.

Overall, the relationship has been affected in a very positive way, gathering from the respondents in this research. The employers have given their employee's more freedom in their work schedules and a lot more trust to work without the need of constant supervision of upper management. Enabling employees to work from locations outside the office, allows for the employer to benefit from having a larger talent pool within their employees. It also opens up the job market for many employees, as moving and culture shock are a big factor when it comes to applying for work.

The pandemic did force organizations into adaptation and quick implementation of change, and now we can see the effects of those changes from the respondent's point of view. The mental health of some respondents has been affected, and they were more happy to be able to have a hybrid work model rather than a solely remote one, as respondent 2 stated, *"being able to feel like I am growing instead of stagnating within the four walls I trapped myself in during the pandemic"*, as he was stuck inside the house due to health risks during the worst of the pandemic and that was affecting him negatively.

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All of the respondents stated that the changes to the work environment implemented by their employer were fair and that both parties benefit equally from it in their experience. They feel that they learned a lot from the experience of working during and right after the pandemic, and that their workplaces helped them through tough times or referred them to places that offered help if needed.

During the pandemic, organizations have learned a lot about how to implement changes, and how not to. A balance must be found that benefits both employers and employees otherwise equity will not be achieved between the interactions of the two parties (Redmond, 2015). For some employees that might mean not having to spend over an hour of travel to get to work every day, which allows for more family time which is of great reward to a newly made father such as respondent 3.

Trust has been tested during the pandemic between the employers and employees and as a result, more understanding and trusting work environments have been created, with healthier work-life balance and mutual benefits.

## 5.1  Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study include the fact that the results analysed in this research, are based only on the respondents that were interviewed. This can lead to a varying conclusion since it is based around the respondents opinions and personal experiences. The results vary depending on who you interview as interviews are very personal and no two interviews are the same. But in turn, this does return results with character and experiences to back the answers. One could hold more interviews with more people to have more varying answers, but even with only five respondents, you can gather a lot of data with credibility, and get some powerful insights, from real life experiences, which is something you cannot do if you were to do a survey/questionnaire. It is important to listen to people's opinions but on the other hand it is also good to look at statistics, both are very important in carrying out research and finding information on topics, even though they have very different approaches.

Only focusing on internationals in Finland, gives a better insight of the potential future for international business students in Finland and their potential careers. It was an interesting research to carry out and it was very insightful, as well as being helpful to employers to further improve and develop better work cultures and care for their employee well-being.

## 5.2 Suggestions for further studies

This research was a continuation of previous researches carried out on the impact of remote work on employees pre/during the pandemic. Further studies can be carried out diving into specific sectors or industries to figure out if the opinions of people vary after some time has passed.

More people can always be interviewed and investigated as there is no such thing as too much research. One can always try and improve/update already existing research topics.

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# 6 APPENDICES

## 6.1 APPENDIX 1 – Interview Questions

**1.** Do you think your work environment and/or habits have changed compared to your previous working years?

      **OR**

Were your expectations different about your future work environment and habitswhile studying before/during the pandemic?

2. Have any physical aspects of your work environment changed?
3. Have the working conditions and working hours been impacted in any way?
4. In terms of the organizational culture and communication, has that changed at all?
5. Did you experience any difficulties in adjusting to the new work environment?

      a. Did you have any trouble with creating new routines? If yes, has your employer helped you with the transition

6. Do you see any positive or negative aspects in the new work environment and routines? If yes, what?
7. Has your motivation been impacted in any way since the pandemic, or has it stayed the same?
8. Have the changes in your working environment and habits affected your work hours or workload in any way?
9. Did you notice any changes in your work quality since the pandemic/during the pandemic?
10. Has remote work/hybrid work affected your physical or mental well-being in any way?
11. In your opinion, who do you think benefits more from the work environment changes implemented in your workplace, the employer or employee, or is it an equal exchange?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add or mention to add to this interview?