TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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SOLUTIONS FOR HYBRID WORK CHALLENGES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ONNINEN AS

Master's thesis

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Supervisor: Kristjan Jasinski, MA

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently

and all works, important standpoints, and data by other authors

have been properly referenced and the same paper

has not been previously presented for grading.

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ABSTRACT

The global spread of the Covid-19 virus led to a pandemic, and this has significantly changed the ways people perform their work. Before pandemic hybrid and remote work options weren't used very widely and thus many companies didn't have any experiences with such work arrangement. In hybrid work arrangement people work some days from home and some at the office while remote work is mostly associated with working from home office. These new ways of working were also new to my employer Onninen. After first hybrid and remote work experience in the spring of 2021 author with the help of HR specialist conducted the survey to map Onninen employees' experiences from that period. As survey results showed, remote and hybrid work arrangement can bring along challenges like blurred boundaries between work and life, in some cases inclusion in web meetings and maintaining social connection with colleagues. As the author wanted to have better insight from these topics, those became the research questions of this thesis. The aim of this paper is to find solutions for the above-mentioned challenges and to compile instructions for Onninen in case it is necessary to send employees to remote or hybrid work Additionally, the author identifies which skills are considered to be important by Onninen employees to be successful in hybrid and remote work.

According to this thesis qualitative study of 13 Onninen employees it can be said that all respondents adapted relatively good with this new working situation. But it also brought out that not all employees aren't ready and willing to perform work in hybrid or remote way. The biggest challenges of the hybrid and remote work model are: blurred lines between work and life, social connection with co-workers, inclusion in web meeting, mental wellbeing and satisfaction and emerging of location based teams. Important skills to be successful in hybrid and remote work environment are good prioritizing and time management skills. For managers would be useful to have basic knowledge from psychology which helps better understand and support team members and colleagues. Similarly important is to have a courage to try new things and make decisions without fear to fail. Failures teaches lessons and so we are developing.

Keywords: Remote and hybrid work, work and life balance, web meeting engagement, social connection, hybrid work skills

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of coronavirus disease (Covid19) led the World Health Organization declare the pandemic on 12 March 2020 (Ciccozzi, Terrinoni, Jiang, Wang, & Bernardini, 2020). At the same date Estonian government declared a state of emergency (Riigi Teataja, 2020). As with other respiratory viruses the coronavirus can spread both direct means by droplets and human-to-human transmission and by indirect contact from the contaminated surfaces (Lofti, Hamblin, & Rezaei, 2020). To avoid fast spared of the virus, Estonian government set rules to minimize people-to-people contacts. Among many other restrictions it meant that people who have the possibility to work from home office should stay home. The state of emergency lasted 9 weeks and it caused a lot of changes in the society compared to the pre-Covid period. One of the changes is how and where people perform their jobs.

In March 2021, the second wave of Covid-19 hit Estonia and the government issued a recommendation on minimizing people-to-people contacts. Based on this, my employer Onninen AS decided to send all project sales workforce to home office and come to the office only when absolutely necessary. Onninen is international technical wholesale company who serves business customers through the network of Express stores, e-shop, and project sales. As project sales is the only part of sales organization who can serve customers remotely, they were sent to work to the home office. That's the reason this study includes only a project sales department. Such working model had not been so widely used in the company before and therefore the effective operation of this model was not certain. Sales managers and other team leads were in daily communication with the employees and closely monitored sales results and customer feedback. Given the complexity of the situation, all processes seemed to run smoothly, and the staff were generally satisfied. Restrictions and remote work lasted until the end of May, and from June all the staff were back in the office.

As the company did not have an exact overview of how working in the home office went, in the board meeting was decided to conduct an employee survey to map it. The aim of the survey was to get feedback on the progress of work during the period of remote work, to get an idea of people's workload, to map possible challenges that need to be eliminated and to get an idea of the work and private life balance.

The survey was conducted by the author and HR specialist and took place on the Microsoft Forms platform. In questionary we used open and 5-point Likert-scale questions.

The purpose of this survey was to gather information from the organization from the hybrid and remote working period. In the process, we wanted to gather information not only about how people performed their work tasks but also to get an idea of their mental and physical well-being during this period. The aim was to identify possible bottlenecks or problems that organization can fix or address. We sent out a survey to 46 people (40 male and 6 female) and received 29 responses. While reviewing responses we detected 3 main topics which lined out from the survey. These three were related work and life balance, employee engagement in web meetings and social connection with colleagues. So, as we wanted to have a better understanding from these topics and how to solve raised challenges these caused, author decided to handle them in current master thesis.

After analysing the results of the survey, which became the research questions of this thesis:

1. How to maintain work and life balance during hybrid and remote work period?
2. How to build up web meetings to have a better employee engagement?
3. How to maintain social connection with colleagues during hybrid work period?

The aim of this paper is to find solutions for the above-mentioned challenges and to compile instructions for Onninen in case it is necessary to send employees to remote or hybrid work. To find proper and scientifically approved ones, author made thorough research and examined scientific articles related to topics. Author wanted to have clear overview of what scholars have discovered during their research, which are their suggestions and recommendations and their predictions for the future. All these knowledges are collected, systemized, and summarized in the next chapter.

To collect information for current study from Onninen employees the author used qualitative research method and for interviews semi-structured approach. All the interviews were transcribed and then coded using content analysis method.

The author would like to express his high appreciation to the colleagues who found time to participate in the interviews and shared their experiences and professional opinions for this master's thesis. A very special gratitude goes to supervisor Kristjan Jasinski, who provided valuable support and guidance through the whole process.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the theoretical foundations of this dissertation, the author points out the main scientific approaches related to the remote work, employee engagement on the web meetings and social connection with colleagues on hybrid working models. To have a comprehensive overview from previously mentioned topics, the author made thorough research and examined scientific articles issued within past 5 years. The collected data is organized and systematized for better readability.

1.1 Hybrid and Remote work

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic hybrid and remote work has been a new way of working for many people around the world. In this subchapter has been provided comprehensive overview from these working ways and positive and negative aspects these have.

1.1.1 History of the Hybrid and Remote work

According to Westfall (1988, p.256), there are theoretical mentions of remote work dating back to 1920, and some practical ideas appear to have emerged during the middle of the 20th century, with the earliest modern studies dating back to 1976. Nilles et. Al., (1976) wrote in their study, much of the earlier research focused on the benefits of remote work around the productivity increase, cost, cost reduction, as well the logistical benefits, e.g., traffic jams in bigger cities. This is understandable since the main benefits of the remote work are these four arguments. In later studies researchers also investigated the emotional and social costs of remote work, which added another factor to consider before making decision to use that working model. The development of technology made possible fast and reliable long-distance communication which enables to use remote working model (Eriksson & Petrosian, 2020). Remote work or telework is a work arrangement in which work is accomplished using information and communication technology outside a default place of work, usually employers' facilities (Eurofound, 2022).

The practice of teleworking has attracted scholar's attentions since the 1970s as described in their study's Alizadeh (2012), Handy & Mokhtarian (1996). As described by Baruch (2001), Hunton & Norman (2010) terms telework, homeworking, telecommuting, and virtual working are often used

interchangeably and refer to the concept of an employee working from a location physically separate from their employer, using methods of telecommunication (Taru et al., 2022).

As described in study "Social Networks in Emerging Work Models" conducted by Sutherland and Janene-Nelson (2020), there are three different work models in use to describe remote working methods. These models are:

- Remote-first – it means that worker form home has a same contribution to workflow as an on-site worker.

- Remote-friendly - it means that company is open to hire remote workers.

- Remote-only - just corresponding workers are in use (Andrzejak & Belz, 2021).

1.1.2 Positive and negative sides of hybrid and remote work

Positive sides of hybrid and remote work are described by Grattons (2021) study, which brings out that people working from home have a chance to making this a source of energy. So, they have a possibility to turn their former commuting time into activities which will boost their physical energy and mental wellbeing. It means that people have more time for sports and hobbies and spend more time with family and friends (Andrzejak & Belz, 2021). Further, Bailey & Kurland (2002); Hesketh & Cooper (2019); Kurkland & Bailey (1999) found in their studies, remote work has its advantages such as flexibility, convenience, autonomy, trust empowerment and increased productivity. It can be maintained and even enhanced because commutes and office distraction are gone. Sure, working from home has its own distractions like kids, pets, spouse etc. and these issues will need to solve somehow. Problem could also be with ability to solve problems quickly when you can't meet the person physically. It can cause some delays. But overall productivity shouldn't be going down and collected evidence support that statement (Tsedal, 2020).

Although benefits which are mentioned in previous subchapter are great and remote working during pandemic went successfully, history shows that remote work has some downsides that may outweigh the positives. The organizational norms that support culture and performance, such as ways of working, rules of behaviour and interaction, help to develop a common culture, generate social cohesiveness, and foster trust, are the source of drawbacks. If you lose sight of them during a substantial change to virtual working arrangements, you risk losing the trust, cohesion, and shared culture that makes remote working and virtual collaboration effective in short run (Alexander et al., 2020).

Culture is the holistic and somewhat mysterious force that directs behaviours and interactions in the workplace. Despite a company's best efforts to capture culture in words, such as stated values or commitments posted on the wall, most employees would recognize these as, at best, rudimentary indicators of a more complex, subtle ethos that pervades everything they do — one that, after a while, becomes largely taken for granted. That's why we often don't notice our company's culture until we leave it — for example, while working closely with a new client or switching firms, positions, or locations, or perhaps when working at our kitchen tables with no physical connection with co-workers (Howard-Grenville, 2020).

Remote working increases the likelihood of creating two corporate cultures, one dominated by onsite workers and management who continue to profit from the positive aspects of co-location and onsite collaboration, while the virtual workforces culture and social cohesion deteriorate. When this happens, remote workers might quickly feel isolated, disenfranchised, and unhappy, as result of accidental behaviour in an organization that filed to develop a consistent model of virtual and in-person work, as well the skills to support it. The sense of belonging, shared purpose, and shared identity that motivates us all to do our best job vanishes. As a result, organization performance suffers (Alexander et al., 2020). Good way to maintain the corporate culture is by calling it out by managers. Aspects of culture are present — though often obscured — in seemingly mundane, day-to-day happenings, like colleagues interacting or making decisions. The beliefs about how we do things as an organization are revealed through people's practices. At times when everyday tasks occur remotely and practices are sometimes hard to observe, it's even more important for leaders and managers to call attention to and acknowledge which aspects of culture are on display and why that matters. A time of changing the ways of working presents an opportunity to remind employees of aspects of an organization's past — founding ideals, stories, and commitments — that have shaped both its culture (how we get work done and think about our work) and are central to its identity (who we are as a company). Building up these core elements of culture can remind employees of an organization's strengths and help them navigate tough times (Howard-Grenville, 2020).

On-site work can cause work-related health problems and so does a remote work. According to Eurostat data about 10 percent of all employees in EU working from home have a work-related health problems. Corresponding number for Estonia is about 6 percent (Eurostat, 2021). As Poulsen & Ipsen found in their study employees health, resilience and well-being when working remotely is essential to sustain operations and ensure performance. Hertel et al., (2005); Stich

(2020) found that remote work can also create a sense of loneliness and feeling of isolation (Kirchner, Ipsen, & Hansen, 2020). Other side effects of remote work may be weaknesses in informal communication, employee identification, and innovation capability. That is why managers and researchers believe the new standard will be more hybrid than remote work (Andrzejak & Belz, 2021).

Study conducted in United Kingdom during lockdown revealed, that 75 percent of employees identified the blurred boundaries between work and life balance, and this was also brought out as one of a key negative aspect of working from home. Parents and especially mothers had difficulties to secure a stable block of time for work during the lockdown because of increased amount of housework and care for children's education. Secondly mentioned key negative aspect was missing interactions with colleagues (Chung et al., 2020).

As previously described in this chapter, remote work has both advantages and disadvantages. But these statements can vary by different countries as revealed in study conducted by Aidla et.al., (2021) in Estonia. In study they compared employee well-being, information flow and relationships with colleagues and managers for people working at home and in the office before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. A nationwide study was carried out among Estonian office workers in autumn 2019 with 2845 respondents and in spring 2020 with 2972 respondents. Study found, that in employee well-being in autumn 2019 at tiredness levels are similar for people working at home and in the office. But in the results from spring 2020 the answers expressed tiredness were doubled comparing the results from 2019. The reason for increased tiredness complains came from people, who worked at home and didn't have a separate room for working and also their own dedicated workstation (Aidla et al., 2021). This statement is supported by study conducted by Blahopoulou et al., (2022), which found that virtual working conditions like separate working space and availability of technical resources are a key point for positive telework outcomes and employee satisfaction. They also found that employees satisfied with telework and its conditions presented higher levels of subjective wellbeing over time. And further, satisfaction with telework had also positive influence on the employee's emotional wellbeing. (Blahopoulou et al., 2022). Further, Aidla et al., (2021) explain that in 2019, the respondents working at home felt similarly informed about what was happening in the company compared to workers in the office. In their study satisfaction with information flow was also surveyed and surprisingly respondents in home office were even more satisfied with information flow compared to people worked in office. Aidla et al., (2021) explain it by the very good level of digitalization in Estonia

and with wide variety of e solutions. In spring 2020 both people at home and in the office were similarly aware what is happening in the company and satisfactions was similar as well with the information flow. Relationships with colleagues and managers got similar answers from home and office workers in 2019 and it remained the same in the spring 2020. So, whether at home or in the office, everyone felt they got along with others similarly. Aidla et al., (2021) explain that people at home make more effort to maintain good relationships with colleagues and vice versa. (Aidla et al., 2021). Blahopoulou et al., (2022) will add to that, during a time of crisis telework has given employees the chance to stay focused and busy with work, and the opportunity to keep in contact with colleagues and supervisors and benefitting from their support. Overall, their results show that satisfactory telework protected the employee's subjective wellbeing. So, in conclusion they say, that if organizations want to maximize employee performance, they should crate satisfactory teleworking conditions and support the employee's subjective wellbeing, especially in times of crisis. (Blahopoulou et al., 2022).

1.1.3 Employees self-efficacy during the Hybrid and Remote work

Employee's ability to cope with daily tasks largely depends on the person's self-efficacy. Since for many employees remote and hybrid work is new experience, the managers supporting role for adopting with new working environment is essential. According to Bandura (1986, p.391) self-efficacy refers to People's judgements of their skills to arrange and execute courses of action required to achieve results. He also described self-efficacy as a person's belief in their own ability to exert performance to complete tasks and achieve goals. This suggests that people with a high sense of efficacy are more confident in their abilities to complete a task. Further, this led to the understanding, that person's confidence is important component to achieve something. Self-efficacy basically tells someone when is worth to try achieve something and when not. If someone doesn't believe that such things are possible to accomplish, it will decrease the desire to try, or they just give up in early phase. A person with strong self-efficacy is more ready to tackle with difficult challenges and in case of failure take these as ability to learn something new. The higher the perceived self-efficacy, which is found to be linked with more tenacity, which in turn helps to achieve a goal, and this will strengthen one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy is serving as connection link on the persons goals, performance and motivation and is found to be dominantly necessary in workplace for the workers. It affects their power and drives motivation depending on the task ahead. Every employee has a different self-efficacy level, and it has direct influence to their work performance (Medel, 2018)

Most important source of self-efficacy is basing on the past experience. This personal experience can increase the mastery of expectations and influences one's perspective his or her abilities. Successful experiences lead to greater feelings of self-efficacy and repeated success can establish strong self-efficacy. And unsuccessfully fulfilled task or challenge can undermine and weaken self-efficacy. Second source of self-efficacy are result of indirect experience. It has collected to seeing somebody to perform an activity and succeed and conclude based on that others will also reach same performance with little improvement found Bandura & Barab (1973). Luneberg (2011) found in his study, that verbal persuasion can also have self-efficacy rising effect. This is accomplished thru the usage of suggestion which will lead person to believe, that he or she is able to perform task successfully. But since this verbal persuasion is not stemming to the ones personal experience it can be a weak inducer of self-efficacy and may be extinguished by the past failures. Last source of self-efficacy is emotional arousal which can be simulated from a demanding and challenging tasks. These could have a beneficial value for self-ability because this affects the perceived self-efficacy in dealing with threatening situation (Bandura, 1977). This means that, the emotions experienced after task completion will influence ones self-efficacy assessment – negative emotions will weaken and positive emotions will improve it (Medel, 2018).

You may boost your employees' self-confidence by rewarding them and providing constructive comments. Allowing employees to work on activities in which they excel while also allowing them to tackle new task difficulties promotes a healthy mix of achievement and personal and professional development (Medel, 2018).

There are several ways to build up the employee's sense of confidence and competence. One is to point out times in the past when they have overcome similar challenges. If possible, share examples of colleagues who overcame the same challenges and assure, that they can do similarly. Build their sense of self-efficacy with progressively more difficult challenges, or by breaking down the current task into manageable bites. Often, employees who lack self-efficacy are convinced that succeeding at a particular task will require more skills and knowledge, time, and energy than they have. Explain that they have the ability to succeed but may have misjudged the effort required and urge them to invest more effort while expressing confidence that additional effort will lead to success. For employees is important to know, that they have employers full support whenever they need it. Support from direct manager is necessary in every working environment but essential during hybrid and remote work, which could be quite new working environment for many employees and which has a lack of face-to-face meetings with colleagues (Clark & Saxberg, 2019).

1.1.4 Future of the Hybrid and Remote work

According to (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021) study remote work is no new phenomenon, although it was never performed on this scale before. As modern technologies were developed, several US publications in 1971 predicted that all US employees would working from home by 1990 stated in their study Craipeau & Marot (1984). Rothwell (1989) wrote in his study, that by 1995 half of all US employees could be working from home. Latest statistics from US is showing that in 2019 about 7 percent of workers were working remotely and corresponding number for 2020 was 35 percent (Saad & Wigert, 2021). In EU 2019 about 6 percent of the workforce worked from home and corresponding number for Estonia was about 7 percent. In 2020 these numbers were 12 percent in EU and 13 percent for Estonia, (Sõstra & Voolens, 2020), (Eurostat, 2022). Listers (2020) predicting in his work that 73 percent of workers will work remotely by 2028 (Srivastava & Muhta, 2021). The exact percentages of remote workers in the future are impossible to predict and it varies a lot by professions and companies. McKinsey has made a survey among 100 executives in different industries and geographies. Study revealed that future of the work will be more hybrid and workforce, whose being on-site is not essential, are expected to be on premises one to four days per week. Almost 2/3 respondents admitted that they don't have detailed plan for future of work or hasn't communicated it to the employees (Alexander, et al., 2021).

Since remote work doesn't affect productivity, many companies are planning new combination of remote and on-site working, a hybrid working model in which some employees are in office while others work from home. The new model promises greater access to talent pool, increased productivity for individuals and small teams, lower costs, more flexibility for individuals and improved employee experiences. When considering implementing hybrid working model in your organization, it's a wise to pay attention to the effect of your choices on organizational norms and culture. Focus on the ties that bind your team together. Pay attention to core aspects of your own leadership and as well all the other leaders and managers in company. Your chance is to create the hybrid virtual model that best suits your organization and let it give birth to a new shared culture for all our employees that gives stability, social cohesion, identity, and belonging, whether your people work remotely on premises or combination of both (Alexander et al., 2020).

Based on the information above is sure, that future of the work will be more hybrid comparing to pre-pandemic period.

1.2. Employee engagement on web meetings

Web meeting means using video conferencing as mean of communication or holding a work meeting (Karl et al., 2021). Media richness theory suggests that video conferences are "richer" compared to e-mails or phone calls, for example in information availability and immediate feedback as stated by Daft et al., (1987), Fulk & Collins-Jarvis (2001), Maruping & Agarwal (2004). Daft et al., (1987) and Wegge (1987) described in their study, that comparing face-to-face meetings web meetings won't offer such "richness" because they offer less nonverbal cues and reduced personal focus (Shoshan & Wehrt, 2021).

When planning a web meeting, bear in mind that if one person is remotely on the meeting, everyone should be. Despite that majority of the people may be in the office during the meeting, using remote channels makes remote participants feel equal footing with people who are in the office (Somers, 2021).

During the start of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 millions of employees moved into remote work arrangements using video conferences extensively. Subsequently, employees started to report feelings of exhaustion caused by web meetings. As Parker (2020) and Wiederhold (2020) describe terms like "Zoom Fatigue" and "Zoom Exhaustion" became well known (Shoshan & Wehrt, 2021).

Zoom fatigue and exhaustion may occur because when we interact with another person through the screen, our brains have to work much harder. We miss many of the other cues we would have during face-to-face conversation like the smell of the room, body language like a posture or some detail in our peripheral vision. This additional information is helping our brains make sense of what is going on. When this extra information is gone, our brains have to work harder to make sense of what is happening. This can sometimes put as at disadvantage. The greater effort it takes to make sense of what going on means we have often take mental shortcuts. This can result in mistakes. Our biases can get worse if the line is glitchy. For example, Schoenenberg et.al. (2014) found in their study, even a one second delay can make us think people on the other end of the line are less friendly. Furter, Jackson et.al., (2000) experiment found that when video quality was low, people were much more cautious in their communication (Spicer, 2020).

As stated by Cao Lee, et al., (2021) long web meetings will cause fatigue and as found by Cao, Yang, et al., (2021) the lack of well-balanced discussions due to limited non-verbal cues (Bleakly,

et al., 2021). Further, poorly run meetings have a tremendously negative impact on team success, innovation, creativity, and on individuals' well-being and stress. In fact, experiencing a poor meeting can even result in meeting recovery syndrome, where employees lose additional time and productivity mentally recovering from a bad meeting (Rogelberg, 2020).

Meeting management is an important feature of meetings in general as suggested by Allen & Rogelberg (2013). This is as well valid for web meetings since it helps to mitigate participants exhaustion.

Hadar Nesher Shosan et al., (2021) suggest in their study following steps to mitigate web meetings exhaustion:

- Create organized and effective meetings
- Have a good time management and reduce a number of participants
- Allow more breaks
- Use the rise hand function for questions
- Prepare, structure, and take notes in advance
- Approach the situation with understanding and patience
- Intervene if unnecessary discussion appears

It may sum up the abovementioned list as manage in a more moderating and coordinating manner. From the technical side was suggestion to standardize the technical conditions for home office i.e., internet speed and quality (Shoshan & Wehrt, 2021).

Purdy (2020) provides some useful tips for successful presence on the web meetings. Most important is to be visible for other persons looking at you to create a positive impression. Adjust your camera and lights so that your face is visible, and you are looking at the person whom you are talking. Ensure good lighting, so your face will be clearly seen and avoid strong sources of light behind you. Your screen presence is representing you and you and the background together create an impression. Adjust your camera to the eye level right in front on you and be sure to talk to the camera as if it is the person. Avoid desire to look the computer screen to see the other people as it will be visible for a counterpart as you are looking down and away (Peper et al., 2021).

Virtual meeting has no face-to-face interaction, and this seems to encourage multitasking, as there is no social pressure to pay undivided attention to the presenter. If the purpose of the meeting is simply information sharing, which requires least attention, this may easily lead to multitasking.

But if the purpose of the meeting is problem solving, which requires participants full attention, there is less multitasking (Catinella & Esparza, 2021).

Dhawan et al. (2021) noted in their study, that videoconferencing can disadvantage women because they rely more on nonverbal cues, which are less accessible in virtual meetings while men relay more on verbal cues. They also recommend setting clear norms of behaviour, mandatory use of web cameras and features such as hand rise for questions, chat option to encourage participation and encourage silent participants to express their opinion. All these mentioned suggestions are helping to improve the working climate of the team and will also foster good cooperation (Catinella & Esparza, 2021).

Web meetings have many challenges: no option to read body language, video call fatigue, reduced participation of introverted team members and technical issues to name just the main ones. But virtual platforms also provide good set of tools, which gives managers ability do things in meetings that were either unthinkable or very challenging in physical meetings.
Some of these tools are following:

- Polling – useful tool to gather all participants feelings or opinion in raised question and do it publicly or anonymously.
- Breakout Rooms – great tool for brainstorming. Participants will be divided in virtual breakout rooms with certain tasks to solve. Every room has virtual whiteboard for capturing ideas and list proposals. Meeting leader has option to visit rooms, listen, comment, and provide extra information when necessary. Later all the rooms will be closed, and team leaders present their whiteboards to all participants (Frich, 2020).

P.A.Brennen et al. (2020) suggest in their study, that when conducting a web meeting agenda, one should consider a necessity of breaks. If you are planning to have a meeting which will last over 90 minutes, then it's wise to settle time for at least 10-minute break into the agenda. Over the time is more-and-more difficult to keep the focus on the meeting, especially in environment when you see mainly small icons on your screen and your interaction possibilities may be limited. Lack of focus can lead agenda items been missed or incorrectly understood and create potential errors. Short break allows participants to stretch the legs and take some refreshments. After the break people are more energetic and ready to be engaged fully again in the meeting topics (Oeppen et al., 2020).

When starting the meeting, the leader must set clear agenda and format, discuss timing, and ensures that everyone is equally valued suggests S. Saint-Andre (2011). It must be emphasised that only one participant should speak at any time, but all individuals must be allowed to voice their opinion or expertise. The leader should provide clarity from the outset of time constrains and need for brevity as well inclusivity (Oeppen et al., 2020).

Distraction and multitasking are affecting the meeting performance. We are exposed to potential distractions all day. These can be external like messages from other meeting participants, the surrounding environment, phone notifications or internal as our own thoughts. During current Covid-19 pandemic, web meetings has been effective tool to manage workplace conversations and meetings with colleagues. As described by McGarth & Hollingshead (1993, 1994) this meeting channel has advantages as it enables face-to-face communication with saving cost on traveling resulting better utilization of time. While the benefits of web meetings and remote work are obvious, still there are some challenges as highlighted by Sarker et al., (2011), (Shrivastava & Prashad, 2020).

During remote meeting you have limited possibilities to express yourself via body language. So, communication is the key. So better overcommunicate. Write and speak much more than you would in physical meeting. Otherwise, things will be missed (Maynard & Gilson, 2021). Communication in web meetings will require reliance in communication skills of the team that aids in their business conversations and interactions. This means that during meetings one needs to use language skills and use it appropriately. Boule (2008); Goold, Augar & Farmer (2006); Gavidia, Mogollon & Baena (2004) will add, the language competency is a key and necessary skill that supports the team bond together more in virtual environment since there is less face-to-face conversation and there could be in the meeting colleagues from abroad. Factors like cultural barriers, local impact on use of language like vocabulary and phrases can add complexity to team meetings and impact business outcomes. Lucas (2001) describes that the art of communicating in meetings is more complex than general routine conversation and includes many key factors which will impact the outcome of the meeting. These key factors are organizing thoughts, tailoring the message and adapting to the listener, clarifying and handling objections, interruptions, feedback. All these factors become essential during virtual meetings which lacks face-to-face communication. It is recommended to avoid using poor communication practices during virtual meetings, thus suitable techniques and tips are found in Appendix 1, (Shrivastava & Prashad, 2020).

The best meeting leaders appear to share similar mindset, recognizing their role as a steward of others time. Leaders often use stewardship mindset when meeting with customers or stakeholders because they would never want these key individuals to feel the meeting was a waste of time. Stewardship is often disregarded when meeting with own team and peers. When you adopt stewardship mindset, you become deliberate in your meeting decisions from start to finish. Being intentional and making smart meeting choices do not take much time at all, with practice they can take only a minute. These choices span how you set up beforehand, how you manage productivity and presence during the meeting, and how you conclude it (Rogelberg, 2020).

Before we look how to set up successful remote meeting author provide overview about meeting management issues based on study conducted by Karl et.al., (2021). This theme included comments related to characteristics of "bad" meetings and problems with meeting management. Comments related to "bad" meetings included concerns about participants who show up late, lack of an agenda, meetings are too long, too many meetings, back-to-back meetings and participants who multitask (Karl et al., 2021).

Setting up a successful remote meeting takes a little planning and preparing. Firstly consider, whose participation is essential and who's not. Aim is not to over invite. Scholars say that remote meeting decreases in quality as size increases. Second step is set up proper time frame for the meeting. Given our shorter attention spans right now, avoid defaulting an hour-long meeting. Don't hesitate to schedule just 15 or 25 minutes for a meeting because shorter meeting time creates a positive pressure and groups under some level of time pressure actually perform more optimally given increased focus and stimulation. Third step is agenda sharpening. Karl et.al., (2021) suggest considering following: Are you merely disseminating information or is it a meeting wherein inputs of attendees will have bearing on decisions to made? Aim here is to create focus and suggestion is to organize the agenda as a set of questions to be answered rather than a set of topics to be discussed. Once the questions have been answered, you know when to end the meeting and you can easily evaluate if the meeting has been successful. Fourth step is ensuring, that all participants can use a video camera during a meeting. Remote meetings are subject to something called social loafing, a human tendency to reduce effort and motivation when working in a group. Social loafing increases the more anonymous one feels, akin to hiding in crowd, and can increase during remote meeting due to the virtual barrier between team members. Using video, along with inviting as few people as possible, helps counter that sense of anonymity (Rogelberg, 2020).

Organizations can improve remote meetings quality by explaining their employees what the social norms are and expected meeting etiquette. By doing it one sets clear expectations to about how employees should present and/or conduct themselves in remote meetings. Employees should provide with training on ways to improve meeting structure buy utilizing an agenda and establishing ground rules on meeting facilitation like use of the chat feature and rising hand to speak. Managers and team leaders play a key role in reinforcing the importance of this training, as well modelling appropriate meeting structure and behaviours (Karl et al., 2021).

To ensure successful meeting is necessary to manage productivity and presence during meeting. Be sure to start and end on time. Nothing more is killing momentum like a 15-minute delay. Ending meetings late is a tremendous source of stress for individuals, so don't run over. Start the meeting with energy, appreciation, and gratitude. As a meeting leader your mood matters and sets the tone. Establish norms. How can we expect our remote meetings to be effective if we never talk about what makes for a good one and what should avoid? To combat meeting fatigue in longer meetings, it's helpful to set norms about when take a break, stand up and stretch. Actively facilitate. This is very important, that meeting leader must embrace the facilitators' role. Draw in participants to be sure all are contributing, and all voices are heard. And don't let people ramble or go off course, kindly interrupting if necessary and guide the meeting back on the course. Use a tools like Poll app to allow participants to vote and chat room technology to communicate if they want to speak or that they missed something. Utilizing the technological tools at your disposal helps increase involvement and engagement. End meetings positively and gather feedback. With a few minutes left, be sure to clarify takeaways and agreements. Ask for feedback. Send out a quick survey where folks share what is going well or not so well and provide ideas for improvement. Then learn, reflect, and try some new things based on the feedback (Rogelberg, 2020).

Remote meetings quality and productivity could be influenced by participants tendency to multitasking. Multitasking is simultaneous task performance and/or switching between tasks in given time block. According to study conducted by Szumowska & Kruglanski (2021) multitasking is not new and people have been combining and interleaving tasks from times immemorial found Courage et. al., (2015). Yet recently the prevalence of multitasking has reached an unprecedented scale and researchers argue, that it has become the new normal Courage et. al., (2015) and further Buhner et al., (2006), Carrier, Rosen, Cheever, & Lim (2015), Salvucci & Taatgen (2011) add that nowadays people constantly multitask at home, at school, at work. (Szumowska & Kruglanski, 2022).

Shamsi T. Iqbal et al., (2011) wrote in their study, while multitasking during one's own work mostly impacts personal productivity, special consideration of multitasking during meetings is warranted, as this can additionally impact other colleagues and their productivity.

Multitasking during web meetings is ubiquitous, and people tend to engage in more multitasking during web meetings compared face-to-face meetings. This is a result of a shift in work rhythms and the low possibility to get noticed. Web meetings can encourage multitasking because of ease turning off video and audio. This means that there is a lower possibility in web meetings, that somebody will notice to you multitasking. Scholars has discovered that more multitasking happens during scheduled and recurring meetings compared to ad hoc meetings. Ad hoc meetings have a specific focus relevant to a specific attendee, while scheduled and recurring meetings are more likely to involve broader information sharing which does not engage equally each attendee. Tendency to multitasking is more observed in meetings with lower relevance and engagement. People tend to multitask during meetings they find irrelevant or have a lack of interest or engagement in. This may be the reason, why people multitask more in larger group sizes and longer meetings. When the meeting relevance for attendee is low, people just lose their concentration due to high cognitive load under such meetings (Hancheng, et al., 2021).

There could be several reasons why people tend to multitask. One of these is to catch up on other work. This statement is supported with study conducted by Szumowska & Kruglanski (2021) which found that the more active goals people have, the more the more likely they tend to multitask. Due to the increasing number of meetings compared to in-person work experience, employees found to having hard time completing all their work on time. In many cases people frequently multitask during remote meetings as a result of external distractions. It means, that people do not purposely multitask, but their attention gets attracted by external factors. Two main classes external factors are interface design and the home working environment. By moving to online in remote work, people are interacting with digital tools more than they used when co-located at work, and interface design can be the cause of multitasking behaviour, especially various pop-ups, e-mail notifications, teams chats etc. Remotely working from home involves additionally family related distractions which could lead to multitasking, e.g., preparing food for children or answering their questions, resolving their disagreements etc. People also multitask during meetings for anxiety relief. For some employees working from home during pandemic is additional source of anxiety. In order to maintaining focus during the meeting they turn to low cognitive non-work activities, e.g., playing game in the phone, doing some physical exercises for shoulders and back etc (Hancheng, et al., 2021).

Multitasking during remote meetings is primally divided by work related and non-work related tasks. Work related tasks includes mainly communication with co-workers, e.g., answering e-mails, responding chat messages, writing personal reminders, but as well checking meeting related scripts or files. Non-work-related tasks includes social media checking, answering to messages and e-mails, eating, doing physical exercises for anxiety relief and wellness, but also some household chores (Hancheng, et al., 2021).

As described in previous sections, multitasking influences one's participation in the meeting and thus is obvious, that this has several consequences. Although multitasking is typically associated with negative outcomes such as decreased task performance, stated by Edward Cutrell et. al., (2000) and Christopher A. Monk et.al., (2002), difficulties in decision making, stated by Sheri Speier et. al., (1999), and negative affect, stated by B.Bailey & J. Konstan (2006), Fred Zijlstra et. al., (1999), study conducted by Hancheng Cao et. al., (2021) found, multitasking during remote meeting leads both positive and negative results. From positive side multitasking is most productive when workers understand when their own and others attention during the meeting is needed. So, some workers use meeting situations which doesn't require their full attention for multitasking but avoid it when full attention is needed. Positive multitasking during remote meetings includes taking notes and searching some topic relevant information from internet, to be discussed later in the meeting. This gives employees positive feeling since they feel that their productivity has been increasing. Negative consequences of multitasking for attendees are decreasing attention and engagement. This means that participants often lose a track of the meeting content, will often lead to mental fatigue, and found to be disrespectful by other participants (Hancheng, et al., 2021).

To minimize risk of multitasking it is wise to avoid remote meeting meetings in the morning. Supporting argument from scholars is that e-mail multitasking actions peak in the morning. They also found that people are more focused in the mid-afternoon. Invite to the meeting participants whose contribution is mandatory and keep them all actively engaged. People who are not contributing actively to the meeting discussion may lose the focus and tend to multitask. As described in previous section, multitasking could also be with positive outcome. So, while composing a meeting agenda one should consider if there could be also option for positive multitasking. As a meeting organizer think about creating personalized meeting agenda so that people are aware of the timing when relevant agenda items come up. Agenda could also consist of

information about topics, which require using of cameras, which means that full attention is needed, whilst cameras off will signal option for multitasking (Hancheng, et al., 2021).

This pandemic has rapidly changed the ways people are conducting meetings. Experience shows, that in many cases web meetings work just nicely and their productivity is found equal with face-to-face meetings. It's also important, that web meetings help save time earlier spent for commuting and traveling and it's also positive for environment by reduced carbon footprint. So, thus is more than sure, that web meetings are here to stay. It doesn't mean that face-to-face meetings are history, but sure is that share of these will be lower comparing to pre-covid period. Scholars predict that the use of virtual meetings will remain high after the end of Covid pandemic as well and only 25 percent of business meetings will take in place in person by 2024 (Karl et al., 2021).

1.3. Maintaining social connection with colleagues during hybrid work period.

Social isolation refers to a lack of informal interactions and face-to-face communication with colleagues and managers (Yogesh K. Dwivedi, 2020). Social support is considered by researchers to be one of the resources that depleted when employees were extensively working remotely and increased their emotional exhaustion levels, stated by Sardeshmukh, Sharma and Golden (2012). Bentley et. al., (2016) add, in contrast, when organizational support was present, employees felt less socially isolated which in turn increased their job satisfaction levels. Similarly, developing and maintaining good relationships was found to be extremely important to remote workers job satisfaction levels Fay & Kline (2012), Golden & Veiga (2008), Staples (2001). Fay and Kline (2011) add, having a colleague, whom individuals may informally communicate was also associated with increased commitment to the organization. Vander Elst et.al., (2017) also found, the cognitive stress complaints individuals experienced were particularly linked to the low social support (Charalampous et al., 2019).

The need-to-belong theory suggests that people are social by nature, and frequent, repeated interactions are essential to fulfilling their need for emotional connections to others and to develop a sense of acceptance, as stated by Baumeister and Leary (1995), Buss (1991), Gainey et al., (1999). Failing to meet this need can lead to negative consequences such as depression, anxiety, and psychological isolation. Baumeister and Leary (1995, p.501) call out the importance of being near others stating "mere proximity is a potent factor in relationship formation, Bartel et al., will

add that remote workers physical isolation greatly limits opportunities for direct contact (Wang et al., 2019).

While remote workers have reported decreasing stress compared to on-site working colleagues, they also mentioned increased loneliness. Increasing irritation and negative emotions, such as worry was also reported. This was a consequence of social isolation and being unable to share problems with colleagues. Remote worker is missing the "watercooler conversations" and face-to-face contacts, thus building up relationship with colleagues can be difficult (Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013). These "watercooler conversations" are actually playing important role in workdays and have a direct impact on performance. Managers should encourage their teammates to keep these conversations continued using digital tools like video calls, messaging, phone calls etc (Tsedal, 2020).

Casual conversation is non-task-oriented talk, where people engage in social talk or phatic communication states Coupland et al (1992) in their study. Coupland (2002) also says that workplace interactions foster social bonds and Riordan & Griffeth (1995) will add, that this contributes on to the increased job satisfaction (Bleakly, et al., 2021). As concluded by R. E. Kraut et al., (1990); Rockmann & Pratt, (2015) before Covid pandemic, these interactions would largely occur in physical environments, where employees are working close to each other. This is confirmed by Rockmann & Pratt,(2015) as they noted in their study, that virtual teams complained about lack of opportunity for social talk. As there are less social talk opportunities, employees are feeling increasing social distance found by Robert & You (2018) and loneliness (Bleakly, et al., 2021).

Like all relationships, work relationships are created and maintained through communication. These relationships are an important part of employees' work and well-being and are meaningful for entire organization. Positive work relationship experiences have been found to increase well-being and coping at work, as stated by Sias (2005), Alegre et al., (2016), as well as organizational commitment, found by Fay & Kline (2011). Relationships with colleagues have also been found to decrease turnover intentions, stated by Nurmi & Hinds (2020), Sias, (2009, p. 76), Regts & Molleman (2013) and have a positive effect on task performance through, for example, humor, stated by Vuorela (2005), trust, found by Alt-schuller & Benbunan-Fich (2010), and friendships, stated by Jehn & Shah (1997), Sias (2009). On the contrary, the lack of possibilities for forming work relationships has been found to lead to feelings of isolation and decrease well-being and

employee satisfaction, stated by Cooper & Kurland (2002), Hislop et al., (2015). Cooper & Kurland (2002), Gajendran & Harrison (2007) found, that the benefits of work relationships are particularly challenging to achieve if the organization or just part of it works remotely (Jamsen et al., 2022).

During remote and virtual work employees are using widely virtual communication options to keep in touch with colleagues. Although virtual communication tools provide opportunities to interact with others, they cannot provide "the human touch" that occurs when two people see each other face-to-face or foster spontaneous, informal interactions between colleagues, as said by Crampton (2001, 2002), Golden and Veiga (2005), Golden et al., (2008), Smith and Rupp (2002). Thus, the interactions that remote workers do have make it difficult to establish interpersonal bonds, describe Kiesler and Cummings (2002), leaving their need for meaningful emotional connections with others unfulfilled. Physical proximity is an important contribution to the development of these emotional connections. On-site employees enjoy both formal and informal exchanges during the workday. Bartel et al., (2012) will add, that spontaneous and informal interactions in particular are helpful in forming emotional connections between colleagues, but such interactions are limited for remote workers due to their physical isolation. Remote workers interactions with colleagues are typically limited to planned events via phone, e-mail, or web meetings. They may be hesitant to initiate informal chats with their colleagues, fearing that they will be perceived as loafing or as having excessive amount of free time to chat. Such reduction in informal interaction lowers the likelihood of successful information exchanges for remote workers and may limit the number of network contacts they can establish and maintain. Thus, the interaction remote workers have may be limited to those colleagues willing and able to connect through ICT channels and as time away from colleagues increases their ability to choose exchange partners declines (Wang et al., 2019).

As a manager of remote team, who wants to keep their team socially connected, consider to cultivating informal interactions. Informal interactions and unplanned encounters foster the unexpected exchange of ideas that are essential to healthy and innovative organization. Informal interactions provide a good starting point for relationships between colleagues in which people collaborate on areas of shared interest, building connections between departments and strengthening social networks and shared trust within company. Informal interactions, which occur quite easily in offices between employees don't happen so easily in virtual environment. Leaders

should find the opportunities to creating them as working with remote and hybrid teams (Alexander et al., 2020).

Relational communication is understood as a phenomenon that encompasses various forms of communication that are related to relationship building and maintenance. Relational communication can be relationship centered and merely fulfil development functions, but it can also be work centered and focused on task-oriented functions because organizational relationships with colleagues also fulfil task functions, such as mentoring and information sharing Sias (2009). Both positive and negative communication processes are part of relational communication because they both have a role in defining the relationship between the concerned parties. Thus, the concept of relational communication can be used to describe, for example, communication expressing support, encouragement, and friendship, but also negative issues, such as conflicts (Hood et al., 2016) or bullying (Forssell, 2016). Research of relational communication at work has focused on issues such as the identity and well-being of employees. For example, social support as a form of relational communication has been found to be important for employees' professional identity and professional learning, stated by Mikkola et al., (2018) and for managing job-related stress or even burnout because supportive relationships help solve work-related problems and discussions with colleagues can mitigate the effects of stressful work, wrote Babin et al., (2012).
Hur et al., (2015) will add, conversely, co-worker incivility has been found to cause emotional exhaustion and reduce job satisfaction (Jamsen et al., 2022).

Relational cohesion theory emphasizes the importance of interaction frequency for organizational commitment, suggesting that frequent and positive interpersonal interactions could lead to stronger emotional relations with colleagues and organizations. As an individual interaction frequency increases, his or her network power, number of connections and capability to choose exchange partners also increase. These positive interactions generate positive emotions, which are associated with emotional and normative commitment to the organization. Wang et.al., (2019) will add, that study they conducted didn't find evidence to relation cohesion theory, which suggest that physical isolation can have negative impact on remote workers ability to maintain meaningful relationships with colleagues. They explain it with wide availability of rich, synchronous communication channels that provide interaction quality comparable to face-to-face meetings, which may help remote workers overcome distance and psychological isolation. They also add, that more introverted employees may prefer to work separately from their colleagues and rather enjoy the situation and not feeling psychologically isolated (Wang et al., 2019).

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Familiarity is a term we all know what it means, and we recognize it when we see it, but when asked, we struggle to define it. Research shows that teams whose members describe themselves as being more familiar with each other have higher levels of trust. Higher levels of familiarity lead to a stronger relationship, knowing what to expect from someone else, better communication and coordination that together, all positively enhance decision making and will improve individual and team performance (Maynard & Gilson, 2021).

Professional familiarity means, that team members know each other's work-related strengths, weaknesses, competencies, and work styles. This knowledge helps share information between team members and provide support to those who need to acquire new skills to solve the tasks and work as a team more successfully. On the Managers view point such teams are rated more highly as they deliver better results and are willing to continue to work together (Maynard & Gilson, 2021).

In comparison, personal familiarity between team members doesn't influence much in information sharing and team performance. It doesn't mean this information is worthless, but study conducted by M. Travis Maynard (2021) didn't detect any pattern between teammates personal familiarity and team results. For some teams it was helping manner and for some not. However, study revealed, that in partly virtual (occasional options for face-to-face meetings) team members personal familiarity don't affect team performance much. As team virtuality increases (i.e., no face-to-face meetings), the importance of personal familiarity between team members is increasing as well. So, results of the study show, that it's not necessary to build personal familiarity in all teams, but for entirely virtual team personal familiarity is most valuable. Researchers suggest, that entirely virtual team should have time to get familiar each other and build personal bonds. This will ensure better cooperation, smoother information sharing and better performance and viability of team. (Maynard & Gilson, 2021).

With the assistance of modern ICT tools, remote workers can work effectively and productively, yet their on-site colleagues might still perceive them as unreliable and loafing during the workday. Marsh and Musson (2008), Golden (2006) and Leonardi et al., (2004) will add, that such perceptions motivate managers and on-site colleagues to compensate remote workers absence with increased communication via ICT tools. To keep their reputation, remote workers feel compelled to stay perpetually connected and available to meet the organizations demand. Leonardi et.al., (2010) will add, remote workers always on connection or at least colleagues' expectations

regarding their availability may leave employee feeling overly controlled, unaccepted, untrusted, and psychologically isolated (Wang et al., 2019).

Increasing usage of remote and virtual working modes sets also new demands to the managers. Since in the remote and virtual working mode face-to-face connections is becoming less frequent, the managers people skills become more important than ever. The best leaders listen and show empathy, devote more time to team management and coaching, trusting instead of over controlling and building up an organizational culture that reaches from offices to the remote workers homes (Heikkinen et al., 2021).

In remote group meeting is challenging to feel the whole team's collective spirit and resolve. This is because one can't see the group reactions clearly when each face is just the thumbnail in the screen. In virtual and remote work mode managers must increasingly detect what motivates or concerns employees who they have not seen face-to-face for a while. For example, we mostly smile at the camera once our video is turned on for a meeting, so it needs more skills and commitment for managers to understand employees beyond what is been deliberately projected. In the remote and hybrid world this observational skill will be essential leadership skill (Heikkinen et al., 2021).

Remote and virtual working modes are nowadays used widely, and web meetings have become an important interaction form to have at least some visual contact with colleagues. This means that managers must take responsibility and keep his or her team cohesion in good level by organizing team meetings which aim is to keep team socially connected. When working in remote environment, meet with your team virtually at least once a week. Frequency of contact with your team cannot go down. Vice-versa, it should probably go up for whole team and its members and meetings shouldn't be only related with work (Tsedal, 2020). There are many ways to organize such meetings and one of them is to just schedule some free time in virtual meeting, which allows participants freely discuss any topic. Other option is organized informal meetings without any agenda like social events, virtual happy hours, coffee breaks or lunches and give everybody option to speak freely in any topic they like to (Alexander et al., 2020). Such activities foster sense of togetherness, camaraderie and understanding and makes remote working relationships much stronger in the long run. The best way to conduct the gathering is with an agenda so that everyone is included, and the format should change every time. Employees who participated in such events

have described, that the opportunity to connect about things in their personal and professional lives has meant a lot to them, both mentally and spiritually (Maurer, 2020).

Some tips to making the most of Virtual Happy Hours:

- Keep it relatively small or appoint moderator so it doesn't get too wide, and agenda would be helpful.
- Stress comfort but keep in mind that participants should be illuminated effectively and keep ambient sound down.
- Enable visual cues on meeting platform which minimizes people talking simultaneously
- Be a good listener (Maurer, 2020).

As a manager of remote workers, one should remember that behind the screen is not just your colleague but above all human being. This refers to getting to know your colleagues in their entire human complexity and building high quality relationship with your team. When meeting with your colleagues only virtually, the human factor can easily get lost. As communication is limited to different ICT channels and team members meet face-to-face rarely, team members can find it hard to fully understand what their colleagues are like outside of work. The reason we should care about our colleagues as human beings is building and remaining trust. Getting to know them individually helps build trust and form productive relationships, which in turn will enable us to cultivate psychological safety as a team.

These three actions can help virtual team members to connect as human beings:

- Demonstrate genuine interest. To fully understand our colleagues, we must first ask the right questions and thereby demonstrate that we are genuinely interested in them as complex human beings. Keep in mind, that just like ourselves, our colleagues have needs and life outside of work, can help us to create a genuine connection.
- Share appropriate personal information. The second way to form connections at work is by intentionally sharing appropriate personal information that we think will help our colleagues makes sense of who we are and why we behave way we do. Sharing personal information can both be work-related information such as strengths and weaknesses and non-work-related information such as hobbies and our living situation. This will encourage others to open up in appropriate way as well.
- Create new experiences together. Valuable insights about each other can be gained by creating new experiences together that create bonding opportunities for team members.

Spending time together enables us to understand why others behave way they do as we start grasping their underlaying mindsets, motivations, and values.

These three key activities can help virtual team members connect as human beings are demonstrating genuine interest in colleagues, openly sharing appropriate work and non-work-related personal information, and finally creating new experiences together (Lechner & Mortlock, 2019).

To summarize up this chapter author can say that future of the work will be more hybrid comparing to the pre covid period. This means that people aren't always working onsite but also using option to work at home. Experiences show that usage this working method doesn't affect companies' productivity but offers lot of flexibility to employees to plan their working days. Of course, as every other working method hybrid method has his own pros and cons which to pay attention. This means that companies and their managers must be aware of the challenges new working model is raising and how to deal with these. To be successful in hybrid work environment manager should be ready to adapt with changing circumstances and know how to lead and communicate with their employees not only face-to-face but also in virtual meetings. Author hopes, that this chapter is providing many useful tips which help to handle successfully hybrid and remote work challenges.

2. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter the methodology of the study will be presented. In the first subchapter the research design will be described, and which possible biases chosen method in study results may cause. In the second subchapter is the sampling procedure introduced and how the sampling size was decided. Finally, the third subchapter is focusing on introducing the data analysis method.

2.1. Research design

Since the purpose of this study is to gather information from the Onninen AS employees from the remote and hybrid working period, author is using a qualitative research method for data collection. Qualitative research is multi-method and takes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject. This implies qualitative researchers look at objects in their natural contexts and try to understand or interpret them in terms of the meanings people assign to them. Case study, personal experience, introspection, life narrative, interview, and observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts are examples of empirical materials used in qualitative research to explore regular and difficult moments and meanings in people's lives (Denzin & Ryan, 2011).

For current study author is using qualitative face-to-face interviews, which according to Kvale (1983, p.174) is defined "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Opdenakker, 2006). To collect data with equal quality from all participants and to ensure, that all questions are answered, semi structured interviews are used. According to Adams et al., (2002), semi structured interviews are often the sole data source for qualitative research and are usually scheduled in advance at designated time and location. They are generally organized around the set of predeterminate open ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. Semi structured interviews are the most broadly used interviewing format for qualitative research and can be conducted either individually or in groups (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Semi-structured interview method has also disadvantage which may influence result. Main limiting factor in that interview method is that interviewer must concentrate much more to the questions to be asked and the answers given. Especially when the interviewer has to formulate questions as a result of the interactive nature of communication. Wengraf (2001, p.194) has

formulated it as "that you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need" (Opdenakker, 2006).

The aim of this study is to identify possible bottlenecks or problems that employees are experienced during remote and hybrid working time and to compile instructions for Onninen in case it is necessary to send employees to remote or hybrid work. After analysing the collected information, the possible problems that need to be solved is identified. Author then offers solutions for these problems based on theoretical basis.

2.2. Sampling procedure and sampling size

When using a sampling procedure, it is possible to generate findings that are representative of the whole group at a lower effort than collecting the data for the whole group (Greener & Martelli, 2018).

To have a broader range of experiences from the Onninen AS, three different occupational positions were included to the interviews. Company has a four different Sales divisions. Therefore, two sales specialists form each division for interviews was nominated by their managers. To have bit wider overview from the divisions, sales managers was also included to interviews. In order to have a view from "top to down" Sales Director as responsible person for all sales divisions was interviewed as well. Author performed interviews with 13 participants, whom 5 is on the managers positions and 8 is on the sales specialist position. All participants worked remotely during lockdown period and can reflect their experience from that period.

Detailed information about participants is available in Appendix No 2. To assure confidentiality of respondents their identity and interviews are not linked together. This means that serial number of interviewee in participants list and number of interview are not corresponding.

2.3. Method and data analysis

In this study the author used semi-structured interviews for collecting the necessary data that helps identify possible problems and bottlenecks employees experienced during remote and hybrid work period. Collected information is analysed using content analysis method, which is one of the most

important research methodologies in the social sciences. It recognizes that society is enacted through speech, texts, and other modes of communication and that understanding social phenomena cannot be achieved without understanding how language functions in the social world. Content analysts investigate social phenomena buy viewing data not as physical events but as communications that are created and disseminated to be seen, read, interpreted, enacted, and reflected upon according the meaning they have for their recipients. Interpreting communications as text in the context of their social uses distinguishes content analysis from other empirical method of inquiry (Krippendorff, 2019).

To collect the information from the Onninen AS employee's, semi-structured interviews were used. The interview is consisted of 17 questions that were divided in three main categories: general work arrangement in company, main challenges, and positive outcomes and needed skillsets for hybrid work. Interviews were conducted on face-to-face meetings and lasted between 16 to 48 minutes.

For interviews author used directing open ended questions to collect information and learn from employees experiences. To compile the questionary, the author used the findings of a survey conducted in Onninen in the summer of 2021. Based on these findings was identified themes from which the author wanted to get a better overview. Based on these topics, clarifying questions were formed and an interview guide was prepared which can be found in Appendix 3. All interviewees were informed about purpose of this survey and the need to record interviews. For transcription of interviews author used fully automatic speech recognition technology developed by the Laboratory of Phonetics and Speech Technology of the Institute of Cybernetics at TUT (Alumäe et al., 2018). All the interviews have been summarized by author and collected in the coding table. Link to the interviews and transcriptions can be found in Appendix 5.

Collected qualitative data is analysed by author using a following four steps described by (Mojtaba et al., 2016):

- Initialization – reading transcriptions, coding, and looking for abstractions
- Constructing – comparing and labelling themes
- Rectification – relating themes to established knowledge
- Finalization – developing the story line

Based on the interview questions, the author analyzed the transcripts of the interviews and gave a brief summary of each answer. The summaries were grouped by identifying their differences and similarities, which were then coded and based on the main codes are given. In the last stage of the work, the author draws conclusions from the research data and connects data with the theory.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter of the thesis shows results of the research that is based on the semi-structured interviews conducted by the author. In the research 13 employees from Onninen AS participated in one-on-one interviews. As this thesis is looking for insights of the remote and hybrid work challenges the questions were asked according to the interview guide, which can be found in Appendix 3. Results of the interviews are presented in coded form, namely Int.1, Int.2, Int.3, etc. Analysis is done with the focus on identifying key elements which are affecting employees and organization during remote and hybrid work period. The following chapter is divided in four subchapters, where chapter 3.1 identifies the general work arrangements in company, chapter 3.2 focuses on main challenges of remote and hybrid work, chapter 3.3 covers the positive outcomes and needed skillsets for hybrid work and chapter 3.4 provides guidelines for Onninen in case of the need to send employees to work remotely. The findings of the research are summarized in Appendix 4.

3.1. General work arrangement in company

For Onninen AS remote and hybrid work arrangement was quite an unknown area before Covid-19 pandemic because almost all employees worked always onsite. If somebody needed to work from home some time it could be allowed by special agreement with the manager and all decisions were made case-by-case.

Current work arrangement in company is onsite work and there isn't any fixed framework for remote or hybrid work. If somebody needs to work from home some time it can be done with manager approval. As revealed in Int.13 there is no plan to set up fixed frames for hybrid work. Based on the internal study conducted in summer 2021 for remote work period, not all employees are ready or willing to work from home. Same conclusion can be drawn based on current study. For example, interviewee No 1 said," Some team members feel lonely when working remotely and need to have a face-to-face communication with colleagues. For them, teleworking is like punishment." Further, interviewee No 8 said "I personally prefer to work in office" and interviewee No 12 added to that "all work tasks are better performed in the office". Interviews also revealed that not all the respondents don't have enough room at home to set up ergonomic workplace and use productivity rising equipment like additional monitor to have a better overview from programs. Couple of respondents complained about insufficient internet quality and speed

which disrupted or slowed their working flow and made impossible usage of web cameras. Since they are living in areas in which internet connection via cable isn't available there aren't any option to improve the speed and reliability of the connection.

So, based on the feedback from survey there isn't indeed need for fixed framework for hybrid work in Onninen and all request related to it will be handled by employee's direct manager.

To have a better overview of productivity during remote work author asked, which tasks are better, and which are worse performed at the home office. In remote environment is good perform a tasks that require concentration and lot of thinking, said more than half of respondents. As revealed in Int.3 at the home office are fewer interferences like clients or colleagues who step in the office, which better allows to concentrate to the work. Good place to work with tasks which need lot of thinking and concentration e.g., reading drawings, compiling tender documents for big projects etc. Furter, interviewees said that there are no difference comparing to the office work and that negotiation and advisory sales are more efficient in face-to-face mode. For negotiation physical meeting is always preferred method as its efficiency is higher compared to remote meeting form. In face-to-face meetings we literally use our five senses to process this interpersonal experience: we hear the other person, we see their body language, and perhaps we even get a whiff of their scent. We process this combined sensory input and, even if it's largely occurring subconsciously, we literally make sense of each other by being near each other's presence. Spending time together enables us to understand why others behave way they do as we start grasping their underlaying mindsets, motivations, and values. Thus, connecting as human beings refers both to the literal and metaphorical meaning the saying "you make a sense to me" (Lechner & Mortlock, 2019). Finally, Int.12 revealed that he prefers to work at the office because "all tasks are better performed in the office".

Worse are performed advisory sales and this statement is well concluded in Int.11 which says that it is much easier to do advisory sales and find out the customer's needs in a face-to-face meeting. People are more open when meeting physically and you can see their gestures and body language. Furter, few interviewees said that creating a sales order was problematic and the insufficient internet quality was the main cause of it. Also was brought out negotiation and brainstorming activities are much more effective face-to-face. These reasons are nicely summarized in Int.1, which says that "since you don't see your conversation partners body language you probably miss 80% information, which is nonverbal and visible for you only during physical meeting. During remote meeting you probably don't have a chance for a Smalltalk, and you focus just to your topic.

So, you don't have chance to get more familiar with counterparty and chance to form a partnership is thus smaller. Int.12 will add to that, all kind of negotiations and brainstorming activities with the team which are much more effective in face-to-face meetings.

In summarizing this subchapter, there are many tasks that are good to perform and tasks that are not so good to perform during remote work. Also, can be concluded, that not all employees aren't willing to work remotely. For some employees can be the limiting reason lack of space to set up a proper working place or insufficient internet quality, for others need to have face-to-face contacts with colleagues. As scholars say, if organizations want to maximize employee performance, they should crate satisfactory teleworking conditions and support the employee's subjective wellbeing, especially in times of crisis. (Blahopoulou et al., 2022).

3.2. Hybrid and remote work challenges

In the early summer of 2021 author with the help of HR specialist conducted survey in among Onninen employees to gather information from the hybrid and remote working period from springtime. While reviewing responses we detected 3 main topics which lined out from the survey, which became the research questions of this thesis. In this subchapter author will cover these three topics and with help of other seven question will receive better insight to the hybrid and remote work period in organization.

During remote and hybrid work period organization encountered three main challenges and first one was related to blurred lines between work and family. As mentioned in interviews, respondents missed exchange of environment between work and home, so they felt like being constantly at work. Interviewee No 11 said, that "you saved a time from commuting and used it for working, so the working days were longer compared to working in office". This is a one of the positive side effects of remote work, that you don't have to spend time for a commuting. But using this extra time for working maybe isn't the best way to spend it. Grattons (2021) study brings out that people working from home have a chance to making this a source of energy. So, they have a possibility to turn their former commuting time into activities which will boost their physical energy and mental wellbeing. It means that people have more time for sports and hobbies and spend more time with family and friends (Andrzejak & Belz, 2021). Further, respondents said, that for them there were no challenges, and everything worked well. Some interviewees mentioned, that they

missed direct contact with co-workers and interviewee No 8 said, that "despite to the fact for him everything worked well during remote work he prefer to work at the office". Main challenge for two respondents was related to the quality of working space – they just don't have enough space to set up ergonomic and comfortable working space. Also was mentioned problems with insufficient internet quality. And finally, interviewee No 7 said, that "I felt separated from colleagues and alone". He missed office work and face-to-face interaction with colleagues.

Work and life balance was one of the research questions of this thesis. Answers to that question were evenly distributed which means, that little bit more than half of respondents said there was a balance and working hours were comparable with working hours at the office. There were many family-related activities during the day and so some work-related activities were therefore delayed until late at night. But overall working hours didn't exceed normal amount. Further, was brought out that it was imbalanced period, which meant that working days were longer compared to the working at the office. These longer working hours were mainly caused by increasing number of web meetings. Since normal working routine was interrupted, lot of e-mail and phone calls were answered after official working hours. Interviewee No 8 said, "I'm an early awakener and will immediately turn on the computer to check for correspondence". From time to time, he went to check and reply to e-mails after the official working hours as well. Also were admitted fuzzy lines between work and life in the beginning of remote work period and thus the working days were longer than usual. At one moment respondent realized that such schedule is not sustainable and certain time limit was set to end working day on time. Author suggests here that team managers should keep close contact with remote workers and keep an eye on their workload. Aim is to be sure that colleagues are not exceeding normal weekly workload. Maybe would be good to have a training for all the employees form the occupational health care specialist to ensure everybody knows dangers blurred work and life boundaries can cause and how to mitigate these risks. Author couldn't cite any specific article to support his suggestion. Author can't cite any specific article to support his suggestion. But while working thru scientific articles for this thesis, such recommendations were remembered.

Social connection with co-workers was the second research question for this thesis. Interviews revealed, that for most respondents there was no change in social connection comparing to the times working at the office. Interviewee No1 noticed, that usually people joined web meetings up to 10 minutes earlier when necessary and this time was used for small talk with colleagues. And some part of social interaction was transferred to the web meetings to compensate lack of face-to-

face meetings. Further, he describes "I felt that my team needed extra option for interactions and thus some additional time for meetings were planned." Interviewee No 6 said, that "I missed the direct contact with a co-workers and to ask for advice from colleague I had to make a call or write an e-mail". Few respondents said that they felt relatively lonely during that period. They all said that communication with colleagues was comparing to the onsite work more constructive and mainly limited with work-related topics. They also acknowledged that they had missed the usual "watercooler conversations" available only in office environment. As studies have found, these conversations are actually playing important role in workdays and have a direct impact on performance. Managers should encourage their teammates to keep these conversations continued using digital tools like video calls, messaging, phone calls etc (Tsedal, 2020).

Employee engagement in web meetings was the third research question. To that question all interviewees responded that overall inclusion was good. Still, there were some comments what could be wise to consider when planning future meetings. Interviewee No 1 commented that "quality of web meetings was sometimes low - people didn't use web cameras and probably weren't actively listening as well". He continues, "If some questions were asked some participants had lost the story line or even didn't respond at all – some probably multitasking or not participating at all". Further, he describes that roughly ¼ of web meetings were just informative, so one doesn't feel excluded from group or left out, but importance of the information was sometimes low. This information could be delivered via e-mail and/or make participation in such meetings optional. Author suggestion would be to make a usage of cameras during web meetings mandatory. When one knows that other participants can see your activities behind computer it has some disciplinary effect, and you won't tend to multitask so easily. Thus, would be all participants better engaged and thus the productivity of meetings is higher. As scholars say, web meetings can encourage multitasking because of ease turning off video and audio. This means that there is a lower possibility in web meetings, that somebody will notice to you multitasking (Hancheng, et al., 2021). If the usage of web cameras is limited by insufficient internet speed, then these cases should be solved by help of direct manager and assistance of local ICT support case-by-case. Further, couple of respondents also noticed that after the meeting had lasted more than an hour, they became to get tired and attention began to scatter, and they could no longer concentrate. Then they started to feel boring and tend to be multitasking. Sometimes there were problems using the web cameras - not everyone had sufficient internet speed at home. Multitasking can be decreasing the meeting productivity and to avoid it author provides here some tips described in Hancheng Cao`s (2021) work. To minimize risk of multitasking is wise to avoid remote meeting meetings in

the morning. Supporting argument from scholars is that e-mail multitasking actions peak in the morning. They also found that people are more focused in the mid-afternoon. Other possibilities to mitigate multitasking risks is to shorten meeting duration and insert breaks. Longer meetings are found to be more associated with multitasking behaviour. People can fully engage limited times, so its suggested shorten the meeting durations if possible or schedule breaks. As a meeting leader encourage active contribution from the appropriate number of attendees. It's wise to consider participation necessity of attendees who are not actively engaged to the meeting. Since these participants don't contribute actively to meeting discussion, they may lose the focus and tend to multitask. So, invite to the meeting participates whose contribution is mandatory and keep them all actively engaged (Hancheng, et al., 2021). Further, interviewees found that web meetings at home office are more productive compared to web meetings at the office. When you have a web meeting in the office you´re available for customers and colleagues who step in the office. Your attention is interrupted and you're not following the meeting at all or do it partly and multitasking to provide help to the visitor. So, author suggestion here would be that when you have a web meeting at the office you will always use meeting room to avoid unwanted interruptions. Interviewee No 4 said, "regular meetings are more productive - a virtual meeting does not so easily lead to a spontaneous discussion and therefore some important details or remarks may be overlooked. At times, there is a feeling that some people are too hesitant to leave a comment or express opinion." Action point here could be, that meeting leader will give everybody option to express their opinion and ask encouraging questions. Interviewee No 5 said, "the advantage of web meeting is that you save a lot of time on travel". "From time to time, however, it is also good to meet colleagues face to face - the experience is still more immediate". He continues, the quality of a web meeting is comparable to a regular meeting. Everyone gives an overview of their work and worries at the meeting, and then handles emails and sales orders to make the most of their time. Interviewee No 6 commented, "that it would be good when in the future most of the meetings will take place online". Hi further explains that web meetings are reducing a need for traveling and thus there is more time for handling a daily work. Physical meetings in another city cause tension because the working days are longer, and the workload is piling up. But of course, it is good to meet colleagues physically from time to time. Interviewee No 8 prefers to have a face-to-face meetings because these are more natural and you are able to see others body language and gestures which one can missed on the web meetings. Interviewee No 10 will add, that "during face-to-face meetings colleagues are bit more opened". Interviewee No 8 suggests avoiding web meetings during peak hours. Interviewee No 12 said that "web meetings have some advantages over physical meetings due to the interactive tools like breakout rooms, polling etc. available in

Teams". He continues "It creates possibility to achieve better inclusion and rise the meeting productivity". Interviewee No 13 pointed out, that it is important to understand the purpose of the meeting and your contribution there - is it to listen passively, take notes to decipher something for yourself or to participate actively.

Communication and cooperation in organization was on good level answered all the respondents. However, there is one comment which could be useful to bear in mind for a future. Interviewee No 1 said, "that comparing to the office work period much more information was provided via web meetings and e-mails". He further explained "Sometimes e-mail communication caused misunderstandings because people are understanding messages differently". "How one understands the message depends on a lot of readers emotional situation and personality type". So, the authors conclusion here would be that know your audience and consider wisely, which information could be delivered via e-mail, which via phone or web meeting and which suits best for face-to-face meeting.

Psychological safety in organization was on the good level as reported by majority of respondents. Just interviewee No 2 said it was on average level. He felt the pressure of the obligation was on, and the responsibility seemed higher than usual. There was no secure office environment and support from colleagues working nearby. Interviewee No 1 commented, that some people needed more support than others and it had provided them. Interviewees No 2 and 13 added, that they had the support of their manager, and they supported their team members. No 2 talked with each team member at least once a day and held 1:1 meetings more often than usual. For interviewee No 10 the remote work experience was initially new and there was a lot of unknowns which caused anxiety. As time went on, he became more accustomed to the new work environment and routine, and tensions eased.

Team spirit was in good level reported almost all respondents. Interviewee No1 said, "that due to the lack of face-to-face team meetings location-based teams started to emerge". He further explains that it came out in comments like "we have always done it like this here". It was worrying development. For interviewee No 4 team spirit was on the average level. He perceived team support bit weaker compared to the office and feeling for him was bit lonesome. On the contrary Interviewee No 10 said, "there were much more web meetings compared the on-site working period and therefore in my opinion team bonds were even strengthened during that time".

Interviewee No 11 said " my colleagues needed more support comparing to the office work and so they had much more and longer phone calls then usually".

Mental wellbeing and satisfaction in organization was mainly on the good level. Most of respondents found that remote work period was calm and they managed it well. As respondent No 3 said "work period in the home office was calmer and more stress-free than in the office". "However, I rather missed the office life and the direct communication it offers". Respondent No 7 will add to that, "initially working at home office was a pleasant change and enjoyable". He further explains, your time could be planned more freely, and extra time was created at the expense of commuting. However, the more time passed, the more I began to miss the office and face-to-face communication with co-workers. On the contrary respondent No 12 missed a bit social interaction with colleagues in the beginning of remote work period. However, not all respondents were satisfied with remote work and thus three respondents evaluated it been tense and one slightly tense period. As describes interviewee No1 "This period was tense for me because I did my best to support my team". He further explains, teleworking made communication between departments more difficult, and this created tensions in the team members, which I was then complained about. He always listened to them and helped to find suitable solutions. That's why the working days were long, and he felt like a psychologist at times. He personally relieved the tensions by moving more in nature. Not all his team members were satisfied with the telework arrangement and demanded the opportunity to work on site. Others are well suited to work from home and would like regular opportunities to work remotely. Therefore, the need for and will to telework should be determined individually before planning telework in a team. Some team members feel lonely when working remotely and need to communicate more with colleagues. For them, teleworking is feeling like a punishment. Respondent No 2 said "since all the family was at home there were a lot of interfering factors that made it difficult to focus on the work". "Therefore, the period was tense". Interviewee No 4 said, "the level of work stress was higher than usual". He further explains, as there were no face-to-face meetings with colleagues and customers, social interaction and small talk were very limited, and tensions could not be relieved. Compared to working in office, there was less reason to get up and take breaks. Thus, the work periods behind the computer became long. Interviewee No 10 described it as slightly tense period and he was at first insecure, and it took time to get used to the new work environment. Over time, I started to get tired of my home office and wanted to go back to the office. In my opinion, a day or two in the home office is good, but it would not be suitable for me as a main working place.

Author suggests bearing in mind some key points when next time planning a longer remote work period:

- not all employees aren't willing to work remotely
- not all employees aren't able to set up a proper working place at home and this causes additional tiredness for employees (Aidla, Kindsiko, Poltimäe, & Hääl, 2021).
- remote work can create a sense of loneliness and feeling of isolation (Kirchner, Ipsen, & Hansen, 2020).
- as manager, increase contacts with your team members, show empathy towards them and be ready to support 24/7 if needed
- remote work has its advantages such as flexibility, convenience, autonomy, trust empowerment and increased productivity Hesketh & Cooper (2019); Kurkland & Bailey (1999) Bailey & Kurland (2002).
- the new working standard will be more hybrid than remote work (Andrzejak & Belz, 2021)

3.3. Positive outcomes and needed skillets for hybrid work

In this subchapter firstly will be covered the positive aspects of hybrid work. Secondly will be discovered, which new skills are acquired or developed during remote work period by respondents and thirdly will be given overview from the needed skillsets, which respondents considered important to be successful in hybrid work arrangement.

Question about the positive sides of the remote work was answered by the majority of interviewees that the main benefit was better opportunity of planning their time. Further they explained, that they had opportunity to focus to their tasks without interruption. As describes interviewee No 1, "biggest gain is that no time is wasted for commuting". "You can better plan your day and prepare for meetings." He continues" when remote work started, I knew, that we have a good people in team, and they are performing well at home offices". "During remote work period I was assured that we have a wonderful and very helpful people in team". "If somebody was needing help, everybody was ready to support and help, so trust level in team is very high." Interviewee No 2 described his experience, during remote work period was good opportunity to better plan your working hours and tasks. Hybrid work arrangement suits well for tasks that require concentration and undisturbed action. For a change, a very good opportunity to leave the office and work remotely. It would be good if there were clear rules and guidelines for organizing remote work

opportunities for employees. Interviewee No 5 described his experience as that there is more time, time flows somehow differently. You can plan your time better - you can take a break in between work tasks and go outside and take some fresh air to straighten up and gather new energy. After such a break, he felt much more productive. The home environment is calming and less stressful than the office. Additional time, which was earlier spent to the commuting, he spent with his family or did some sport. Finally, few respondents didn't find anything positive from remote work period and they described it conclusively business as usual.

Question about new skills acquired or developed during remote work period was mainly responded, that there wasn't any need to develop their skills. However, interviewee No1 said" as some of my team members had stress issues, they turned to me to complain". "I always found time for them and listened and supported as much as I could". "As I do not have an education as a psychologist, I needed to improve myself in this area to provide better support to my colleagues". He further comments, that psychology is one area that could be taught to managers at least at a basic level. This is necessary to be able to support colleagues in difficult times for them and to listen to their concerns. The most important thing is that the person has someone to whom they can tell their worries. Respondent No 10 developed his prioritising and time management skills to be able to perform all the tasks. Respondent No 12 developed his presentation skills to achieve better engaged audience during the web meetings, avoid multitasking and ensure efficient time usage. Interviewee No 13 developed his sales techniques in order to be successful in hybrid sales.

Important skillset question received majority of answers, that most important is adaptivity and self-discipline. This is nicely summarized by interviewee No 7 which says that you must have ability to adapt and work in different environments. Also, important skill is self-discipline so that you're able to maintain the rhythm of work and all the necessary tasks will be performed. Interviewees No 1 and No 13 said, that important skills are independence, courage, and also the courage to make decisions. Don't be afraid of making mistakes because mistakes still happen. It is important to learn from mistakes, so these do not happen again. Interviewee No 10 considers important to have a prioritising and time management skills and No 11 basic knowledge from psychology to better understand and support your colleagues and subordinates. Finally, interviewee No 12 said that important skills are adaptability in order to handle the changing environment and be ready to constantly learn to be a better leader for team. And be ready to show your empathy and talk with your colleagues also non-work topics.

3.4. Solutions and recommendations

In the final section of the analysis the author summarizes the main challenges and solutions of remote work as experienced by Onninen AS employees. Based on collected information and empirical data author offers guidelines for Onninen to follow in case of need to send employees to work remotely. Aim of these guidelines is ensure, that employee is willing to work remotely and has at home proper workspace. Also, what are the possibilities for employer to support employees during remote work period.

Remote work guidelines for Onninen.
1. Ask employees consent for remote work. Not everybody is willing to work remotely.
2. Map the employee's home working conditions:
    - separate room for working
    - ergonomic workplace
    - sufficient internet connection
3. For employee wellbeing:
    - Provide healthy work habits training
    - Setting up work time boundaries
    - Schedule frequent 1:1 meetings
    - Be ready to support 24/7
4. Needed skillset for employees:
    - Ability to adapt and work in different environments
    - Independence
    - Self-discipline
    - Setting priorities
    - Time management
5. Needed skillset for Manager:
    - Basic knowledges from psychology to be ready to support your employees
    - Presentation and audience engagement skills
    - Courage to try new things and make decisions
6. Preserving a team feeling:
    - Frequent face-to-face meetings with all team members. If not possible, virtual team events

- Frequent 1:1 meetings with direct Manager
- Task based teams with representatives from all sales offices.
- Encourage employees informal chat via virtual communication channels

7. Engagement to the web meetings:
   - Agenda as a set of questions
   - Avoid peak hours for meetings
   - Using a web camera is mandatory
   - If meeting duration is longer then 60-90 minutes plan short breaks
   - If one is participating virtually on the meeting everybody should participate virtually. This creates a common ground for all participants.
   - If in office, use a meeting room to avoid interruptions

In conclusion, it can be said that the people in Onninen's sales department are satisfied with teleworking and want to continue using this job opportunity. Here, it is important that the employee and the employer agree on specific rules for working in the home office. There is also an important role for line managers, who must ensure the well-being of employees during this period, keep the team united and ensure that the agreed results are achieved.

CONCLUSION

Outbreak of Covid-19 virus in the beginning of 2020 was forcing many governments to close their countries and companies to send their employees to do the work from home. This all has significantly changed the ways how people are used to work and how managers lead their employees. As stated in the theoretical part of this study, future of work is more hybrid than remote work. It means, that employees will combine office and home working days in suitable schedule for them and company. For managers it means they must adapt to this new working model and learn how to lead employees in changed work environment. Since hybrid working method is new phenomena for many leaders it raises many challenges.

The aim of this study was to identify possible bottlenecks or problems that Onninen employees were experienced during remote and hybrid working period and what challenges it caused. Further, to investigate which skills were acquired or developed during this period and which skills are important in order to be successful in hybrid work. Based on the collected knowledges from empirical sources and from the interviews the author then compiles remote work guidelines for Onninen in case it is necessary to send employees to work remotely.

Based on the research objective the author set following research questions for thesis:

1. How to maintain work and private life balance during hybrid and remote work period?
2. How to build up web meetings to have a better employee engagement?
3. How to maintain social connection with colleagues during hybrid work period?

To start, the author explored latest empirical studies and research materials issued on following topics: hybrid and remote work, employee engagement on web meetings and maintaining social connection during hybrid and remote work period. Based on the theory and discoveries the primary challenges were identified and these became the input for preparing the qualitative research. The author was aiming to get throughout overview about the subject and prepared semi-structured interview. To have a broader range of experiences from the Onninen AS, three different occupational positions were included to the interviews. Author performed interviews with 13 participants, whom 5 is on the managers positions and 8 is on the sales specialist position. Interviews were conducted in face-to-face meetings, during a period of 13th of March to 25 of March 2022. Interviews lasted on average around 31 minutes. Collected answers is analysed by author using a qualitative content analysis method.

What we have learned is that most of the participants in the survey agreed the hybrid work is the model going forward. But we also learned not all employees aren't ready and aren't willing to work from home. Based on collected information there is no need to set fixed frames for hybrid work in Onninen. So, company continues to use model where employee hybrid work option is decided based on necessity by direct manager.

Hybrid work offers option to work partly from home and thus provides some benefits for employees like better planning of the time and ability to focus without interruption to name just few. But it also brings along challenges and problems which needs to be handled to maintain employee's wellbeing and productivity. For Onninen employees was a one of the challenges blurred lines between work and life as reported by almost half of respondents. To mitigate that risk the direct manager should provide support for his or her team members and help to set working time limits and help to arrange workload if necessary. Also, would be good to have a training for all the employees by the occupational health care specialist to ensure everybody knows dangers blurred work and life boundaries can cause and how to mitigate these risks. Lack of social connection with co-workers was a second challenge caused by absence of face-to-face contacts. To mitigate this risk is one option to schedule some extra time for web meetings and use it for informal chat. Managers can also encourage their team members to make their own web meetings or phone calls to have an informal chat with colleagues. Employee engagement to the web meetings was one of main research question of this thesis and to that came unanimous answer overall inclusion was good. However, this paper is providing numerous suggestions which are good to bear in mind and consider if one starts to plan a web meeting. Author here brings out just one which he considers to be most important, and it is that using cameras during web meeting should be mandatory. This gives to all participants good visual overview from each other and disciplines them as they know that all their activities behind cameras are visible for others. This ensures better engagement to the web meeting and reduces participants social loafing and temptations to multitask. Interview also consisted of question about mental wellbeing and satisfaction during remote work and it revealed that for some people this period was a tense one. To relieve and avoid employees' tensions managers comprehensive support is needed. Would be good to increase your contacts with your team members substantially, show empathy towards them and be ready to support 24/7 if needed. Interview also revealed that due to the lack of face-to-face meetings with team members in other cities, location-based teams started to emerge. To avoid such developments is important to have regular face-to-face meetings with whole team. If that's not possible for some reasons, manager should visit all the team members regularly to be in close

contact and provide his or her support if needed. Also, would be good to organize employees work tasks and communication in the way, which binds team members in different locations to one united task-based team. By doing that people in different locations have a more reasons to communicate with each other and so the team cohesion remains good despite absence of face-to-face meetings. To be successful in hybrid work environment is good to have a prioritizing and time management skills. For managers would be useful to have basic knowledge from psychology which helps better understand and support team members and colleagues. Similarly important is to have a courage to try new things and make decisions without fear to fail. Failures teaches lessons and so we are developing.

Based on the abovementioned, the author believes that the research questions have been answered and that the thesis' goal has been achieved. Based on this work, we have better overview from the hybrid work and which positive and negative consequences it brings along and how to avoid and mitigate these. We also have better understanding how to create more engaging web meetings and how to maintain social connection with colleagues during hybrid and remote work period.
For further investigation it would be recommended to conduct similar surveys in other Estonian companies to see if they experienced similar challenges during hybrid and remote work period and how did they solve these.

Limitations of this study may come from the semi-structured interview method which may influence quality of collected data. Main limiting factor which can influence results is that you must simultaneously listen the interviewees responses to understand what they want to say and keep an eye on the next question to ask. This can result to unnoticed some subtle clue and thus is missing an important opportunity to dig deeper or specify that topic. Second limitation is coming from fact, that this study is made based by information collected from Onninen employees. Therefore, is not known are the compiled remote work guidelines applicable for other companies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Communication techniques and tips

No.	Communication practice	Description	Technique
1	Brevity in language	Using of crisp sentences in meetings can be very effective ensuring clarity in messages. Crispness in communication is achieved by using short sentences and avoiding redundancy.	Always start by talking about the point one wants to make. Give a reasoning to your point using examples. Finish with a summarizing statement.
2	Clarity in communication	There are several factors that can lead to ambiguous communication. Consider these while speaking in virtual meetings.	Avoid: Redundant sentences Lengthy sentences Biased writing Abstract communication

3	Voice	Plays big role in communication and specially in virtual meetings. Bear in mind, that one's voice reflects one's personality and if used appropriately is a factor which may become a barrier in communication also. It is a good practice to take feedback on the present quality of one's voice from colleagues and managers.	Effective use of voice: Speak with lower voice and weight in it Speak slowly, always Have a pleasant tone and pronounce each word in sentence Use a effective pause Use a stress to pronounce key words Have an assertive style of speaking Use a simple words Understand your audience and adapt to the listeners.
4	Communicating for successful outcome 1.	There is importance on using language in awareness for successful outcome in meetings	For example, one should always check: Which kind of language gets your opinion across most effectively? Which kind of language will get you the best possible results?
5	Communicating for successful outcome 2.	There is importance of using appropriate phrases at different times in virtual meetings as one discusses with team. Showing acceptance of other inputs, acknowledging them for their inputs and approving team members during business discussions through use of phrases is very useful. In next column are some meeting situations where we may use connecting phrases which display acceptance, encouragement, appreciation, and empathy.	Comment on other points Say how important and / or interesting something is Say that something is surprising Encourage other participants Indicate lack of understanding Promise action and state intention
6	Commenting on others points.	When someone has expressed a point of view, make a comment on what has been said, if appropriate.	That's a valid / good point.Correct, I agree.Yes, I understand what you say.You've obviously considered this thoroughly. That was excellent report.

7	Saying how important something.	You can support others or back up your own arguments by emphasizing the importance of point made.	That's vital. It's crucial to the project. This is a key focus / important area. You have made an important point. I value your inputs.
8	Encouraging other participants	If people remain silent and do not give opinions, ask them what they think. Silence can mean agreement or disagreement. You can help to move the meeting forward by taking their names and encouraging others to speak and by giving others positive feedback.	Some examples: Do you agree with this, John? I like your ideas about… You present the case very well Jane, what do you think about this?
9	Indicating lack of understanding	If you or some participants do not understand what someone else has said, use clarifying phrases.	Could you say that again, please? Sorry, I'm not quite sure what you mean by that? Sorry? Can you please elaborate? I request you to clarify this point again.
10	Using question effectively	Questions can help to move meeting forward and help to clarify one understands of other points of view. It is important and worth considering in advance the types of questions you might need to ask to clarify and receive more information. It is also important to encourage discussion by asking open ended questions. The probing technique is very effective strategy to draw more information from others in meetings in an effective way.	Do we all agree that? What do you think of this idea? What are the implications of this for? Could you tell us something about? What are your views on? Can you explain its impact? How can we achieve this?
11	Using question for paraphrasing	Questions can be used to ask for paraphrasing information which is a very powerful technique to conform what was communicated or said in meetings.	So, what you're saying is? Are you saying? Do you mean to say that…? Oaky, so from what I understand you want us to take up…

| 12 | Using question for closing a meeting | Useful questions and phrases to close a meeting discussion. | Is this course of action in consensus?
Have we dealt with all points?
Is that agreed?
Are we at the same page with all action items and deadlines?
Are we good to go?
I would like to know if there are any concerns?
What would you suggest to be done differently that can add more value to our meeting format?
What do you think of this idea? |
| 13 | Promise action and state intention | As one closes meeting discussion, the voice of assurance filled with confidence is a good strategy to bring consensus and assure colleagues of you support with them. | I will take care of this. Do not worry!
We are there to support always.
I assure you of our best services always.
I will be there whenever you need me.
We will get this done.
Definitely, we are one on this.
Absolutely, you have our confidence on this.
That's great to know. We appreciate and support you. |

Source (Shrivastava & Prashad, 2020), compiled by author.

Appendix 2. Table of interview participants

No	Position	Method	Date	Duration
1.	Business Area Manager, Industry and Infra Sales	1 : 1	15.03.2022	29 min
2.	Business Area Manager, Air Conditioning and Ventilation	1 : 1	23.03.2022	21 min
3.	Business Area Manager, Heating and Plumbing	1 : 1	11.03.2022	41 min
4.	Business Area Manager, Electricity	1 : 1	22.03.2022	43 min
5.	Sales Engineer, Electricity	1 : 1	21.03.2022	41 min
6.	Sales Director	1 : 1	25.03.2022	48 min
7.	Key Account Manager, Ventilation	1 : 1	16.03.2022	27 min
8.	Sales Engineer, Industry	1 : 1	16.03.2022	28 min
9.	Key Account Manager, Electricity	1 : 1	16.03.2022	16 min
10	Key Account Manager, Heating and Plumbing	1 : 1	18.03.2022	19 min
11	Sales Engineer, Heating and Plumbing	1 : 1	16.03.2022	18 min
12	Sales Engineer, Industry	1 : 1	18.03.2022	45 min
13	Key Account Manager, Ventilation	1 : 1	21.03.2022	22 min

Appendix 3. Table of interview structure and questions

No	THEMES
	Introduction
	Purpose of the interview and reminder of duration up to 50min
	Ask for permission to record interview
	Ask for permission to use a name of interview and position
	Name and interviews want to be linked to remain anonymity
I	**General work arrangement in company**
1	General work arrangement
2	Does your unit have a fixed framework for hybrid work?
3	Which tasks a better performed remotely?
4	Which tasks a worse performed remotely?
II	**Hybrid and remote work challenges**
5	What were the main challenges during remote working period?
6	How difficult was for you to find balance between work and private life?
7	How much did you feel involved in web meetings?
8	How much did social communication with co-workers change for you?
9	What other challenges have you experienced?
10	Communication?
11	Cooperation?
12	Psychological safety?
13	Team spirit?
14	How you evaluate your own mental wellbeing and satisfaction during remote work?
III	**Positive outcomes and needed skIllsets for hybrid work**
15	What positive aspects have you discovered about the remote work?
16	Which new skills have you acquired or developed in order to preform successfully during remote work?
17	What are the needed skillsets for successful performing during hybrid work?

Appendix 4. Summary of the findings

Main category	Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2	Sub-category 3
General work arrangement in company	No fixed framework, managers decide based on necessity		
Tasks better performe remotely	Tasks which need lot of thinking and concentration	Good place to work with tasks which need lot of thinking and concentration e.g., reading drawings, compiling tender documents for big projects etc	
	Regular daily work, no difference	No difference except advisory sales which is much more efficient in face-to-face meetings	
	All tasks are better performed in the office		

Main category	Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2	Sub-category 3
Remote and hybrid work challenges	Working days were longer compared to the office work. Sometimes was difficult to establish contact with colleagues. Lot of e-mails were answered after official working hours	You saved time on commuting and used it for working. So, working days were longer compared to the office work	You are constantly at the "home office". Since you don't leave at home to go to the office and come back home in the evening is mentally difficult to separate work and home environments
	Everything worked well		
	Lack of space for a comfortable and ergonomic workplace - how to accommodate all the equipment needed to make work comfortable. I just didn't have enough space at home. There were also problems with the quality of the Internet		
	Feeling separated from colleagues and alone		

Main category	Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2	Sub-category 3
Social connection with co-workers	Direct contacts were replaced with phone calls (8)	I noticed that usually people joined web meetings up to 10 minutes earlier when necessary and this time was used for small talk (1)	
	Communication with colleagues was only on work-related topics. I missed a bit of the usual "watercooler conversations" (4)		
Inclusion on web meetings	I noticed that after the meeting had lasted more than an hour, my attention began to distract, and I could no longer concentrate. Then it got boring, and I started multitasking.	It is important to understand the purpose of the meeting and your contribution there - is it to listen passively, take notes to decipher something for yourself or to participate actively.	

Main category	Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2	Sub-category 3
Communication and cooperation	Know your audience and consider wisely, which information could be delivered via e-mail, which via phone or web meeting and which suits best for face-to-face meeting		
Psyhological safety	Psychological safety was on good level, no worries		
Team spirit	The team supported each other and always helped each other when needed.		
Mental wellbeing and satisfaction	The level of work stress was higher than usual		
	There were no problems, and I did very well	Missed a bit social interaction with colleagues	

Main category	Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2	Sub-category 3
Positive outcomes of hybrid work	You can focus and plan your time better. No time wasted for commuting	Suitable for activities that require concentration and undisturbed action.	
	You can plan your time better, and no time wasted for commuting	Freedom in time planning which enable to combine smoothly work and life	
	Everything worked smoothly		
New skills acquired or developed			
	Knowledges in psychology. Prioritizing and time management	Presentation skills and engaging of audience	Development of sales techniques to be successful in hybrid sales
Important skillsets	Ability to adapt between home and work, sense of duty and self-discipline.		
	Independent and decisive. Prioritizing and time management	Basic knowledges from psychology. Adaptability and ready to learn	The courage to try and fail

Appendix 5. Interview recordings, Transcriptions and Coding frame

Link to the Coding frame file:

https://1drv.ms/x/s!Ajg3qoYeQg-wqiRClw67yJ46c51s?e=4aQWc3

Link to the interview audio files:

https://1drv.ms/u/s!Ajg3qoYeQg-wgnOqDtdR3-PKrmEp?e=VROINV

Link to the transcribed interview files:

https://1drv.ms/u/s!Ajg3qoYeQg-wgmnaxOdnd-zj72G_?e=rS13U4

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