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**EMPLOYEE'S EXPERIENCES OF REMOTE WORK
ROUTINES REGARDING WORK EFFICIENCY AND
EFFECTIVENESS**

Master's thesis

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis/paper independently.
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Abstract

This study is based on remote working. Which aims to determine employees' experience of remote work routines that support remote work efficiency and effectiveness during and after COVID-19. Previous research on this topic has focused on how working from home a highly positive way of working is, and this has been possible due to the newer technologies available. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced organizations worldwide to shift to remote work to mitigate the spread of the virus. In this study, we delve into the factors that impact the efficiency of employees in Estonia's Customer Support IT sector, where remote work has become the norm due to the ongoing pandemic.

The author used a qualitative research approach for this study which was conducted using semi-structured interviews. This approach was taken to gather employees' opinions and experiences to see whether any trends about their efficiency and effectiveness while working remotely emerged. Semi-structured interviews allowed the author to record the interviews, which were transcribed and coded for the author to analyze using a thematic approach.

Conclusions were drawn, outlining remote working routines practice is rare. Although mixed opinions were presented on whether employee efficiency and effectiveness levels were higher when employees work remotely would be affected negatively if the remote working option did not exist. In general, it was evident that many people have a favorable view of remote work and how it can enhance employee motivation and performance, leading to better job efficiency and overall well-being.

Keywords: Job efficiency, effectiveness, Work-life Balance, well-being, Working from Home.

INTRODUCTION

As COVID-19 began spreading, the World Health Organization (WHO) quickly declared it a global emergency, prompting governments worldwide to act. They implemented various measures to slow the virus's spread, including social distancing, travel restrictions, and business closures (Valet, (2022)). The shift to remote work has afforded employees greater autonomy over their work-life balance, empowering them to allocate more cognitive resources to their job responsibilities. While offices were once considered crucial for organizational culture and productivity, the pandemic has allowed researchers and practitioners to learn from this experiment and potentially reshape the future of remote work (Boland and Sanghvi, 2020).

To begin with, nearly three-quarters (74%) of Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) expect to permanently shift a proportion of previously on-site staff to remote working in the aftermath of COVID-19, according to Gartner (2020). Reports of enhanced employee productivity and cost savings for organizations because of fewer fixed overheads (e.g., commercial real estate expenses) are driving the transition (Valet, 2022). The acceptance of remote working is much broader and deeper than a quick reaction to such outcomes, mainly because preliminary research has revealed possible threats to workers' well-being remotely (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Therefore, a systematic procedure based on the understanding of remote working's impact on employee job effectiveness and efficiency is required to be successful in the long term.

Before COVID-19, remote working was an option instead, and those who desired it used a requirement for employees. However, remote work isn't applicable in all pieces of life. For example, construction workers and restaurant and hotel employees cannot work from home because of their job structure. So many other professionals can work in an office space and remotely, too (Kossek and Lautsch 2018). Examples of the domain are customer support and information technology, to name a few. The current research is expected to impact the differences in the frequency of remote work between individuals who worked remotely regularly and those who did so occasionally (Dishman, 2019). The remote working style has brought together additional pressures, such as employment uncertainty due to the economic crisis, health and safety issues, and duties for children/elderly (Bloom et al., 2013, Choudhury et al., 2019).

Corporations frequently regard workers working from home as a more cost-effective and efficient choice because it eliminates the need for transportation and office supplies (Bloom et al., 2013,

Choudhury et al., 2019). This growing emphasis on remote working is helping the workforce, and numerous businesses are discovering the potential benefits of providing this choice to their employees. Remote employees are frequently more engaged than regular office-based workers (Hansen & Brenten, 2021). Organizations may minimize turnover and gain from greater productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction by allowing their workers to work from Home (Hansen & Brenten, 2021).

Neeley (2020) found that remote work negatively affects the ability of employees with creative responsibilities to think creatively. The authors highlighted the importance of team collaboration for creative processes. The pandemic's sudden shift to remote work has left many employees feeling undervalued and alienated from their managers, leading to decreased job performance and effectiveness.

While remote work provides flexibility to employees, it may lead to decreased efficiency and output levels (Neely, 2020). The challenge becomes even more significant when team members are spread out over long distances, requiring more communication. Acknowledging and dealing with the possible adverse effects of remote work on employee productivity is crucial. Technological advances and internet access have made remote work more accessible to people (Neely, 2020). To maximize efficiency and effectiveness while working from home. Establishing disciplined routines, such as fixed working hours, minimizes job wandering and exhaustion. Preparing ahead of time and avoiding multitasking is essential to prevent reduced productivity caused by divided attention Jamison, (2018). Providing a distraction-free workplace and limiting activities that interfere with concentration can also improve the efficiency of remote work.

The problem statement for this research is prompted by the ever-increasing prevalence of remote work, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated challenges in Estonia. With the increasing adoption of remote work, there is a critical need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of employees navigating this transition, focusing on both efficiency and effectiveness in their work routines. The research gap identified in the existing literature highlights a specific need for more comprehensive insights into the experiences of employees engaged in remote work, especially in the context of companies transitioning to remote working in Estonia (Battisti et al., 2022). This study narrows its focus to companies transitioning to remote work in Estonia. The limited scope specifically concentrates on understanding the challenges and opportunities that employees face as they navigate this shift beyond the surface level, enabling a thorough

comprehension of how remote work impacts efficiency and effectiveness in a post-pandemic work environment.

Research Aim: The primary aim of this research is to investigate employees' experiences of remote work routines and their influence on efficiency and effectiveness, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The insights gained from this study are anticipated to contribute significantly to the development of effective remote work routines and policies, specifically tailored for companies transitioning to remote working in Estonia. The goal is to identify challenges, opportunities, and best practices that will empower companies to maintain productivity and support their workforce in the evolving landscape of remote work.

To achieve the aim of this master's thesis, the research questions that were formulated are as follows:

Research questions:

1. How do employees describe the experience of remote work routines?
2. What are the positive and negative aspects of remote work?
3. How do employees assess their work efficiency and effectiveness when working remotely?
4. How does the transition to remote working influence their expectations toward future work?

Before going into the research question, I will explore existing literature on remote working, examining its broader implications for employee efficiency, effectiveness, and well-being.

This thesis will provide an informative study to learn and understand the effect of remote working routines on employees' effectiveness and to develop better strategies to make working from home enjoyable as in the office. Before addressing the research question, I will review the existing literature on remote working in general and its relation to employee efficiency and its impacts on employee wellbeing.

As The COVID-19 crisis is not the first and will not be the last, this thesis will provide an informative study to learn more about the effect of remote work routines on employees' efficiency

and effectiveness during and after the crisis, closer to normal working situation. The study has four parts: literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.

The literature review contains highlighted definitions, relevant conceptual frameworks, prior studies in WFH, job efficiency, and job effectiveness factors. The literature related to this research was extracted from TalTech library databases and Google Scholar ResearchGate databases. The methodology outlined the Research design, approach, sampling technique, data collection method, data analysis, and ethical evaluation.

The results chapter presents a descriptive analysis of how the participants answered the interview questions. The discussion chapter discussed the theoretical explanation of results, including limitations and recommendations for future research.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Remote work

Remote work is recognized as an option that reduces the risk of COVID-19 infection. Gilles (1988) first described the working-from-home concept in 1973, which is also known as "telecommuting" or "telework" (Grant et al., 2019). Over the last four decades, describing working from home in various ways includes remote work, flexible workplace, telework, telecommuting, and electronic working. These words allude to employees' capacity to work in flexible workplaces, particularly at home, by utilizing technology to perform job obligations (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Grant et al., 2019).

Remote work has a long history in Estonia and Europe. Before the pandemic, remote work was already acquiring traction as a more flexible and cost-effective alternative to typical office employment. According to European Parliament research in 2017, 17% of the European Union (EU) workers worked from home regularly, which predicts an increase in the number of people who can work from home in the future (European Parliament, 2017). During the pandemic, the number of people working from home increased dramatically. According to Eurostat, the EU's statistics body, the number of people working from home climbed from 9% in 2019 to over 40% in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021). This abrupt shift was a reaction to the pandemic and the need for social isolation. Still, it also indicated the potential benefits of remote employment, such as improved work-life balance and reduced travel time.

The country's excellent internet infrastructure and high technology adoption aided further the rise of remote work in Estonia. According to an Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications study, Estonia's number of persons working from home climbed by 20% during the pandemic, with over 80% of IT workers working from home. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, 2020).

According to Kurland and Bailyn (1999), there has been a noticeable shift in how employees choose their work locations in recent years. Nowadays, employees have more flexibility in where they choose to work and are not limited to traditional office settings. They have expanded their working environments to include various locations where they feel most comfortable and productive in performing their daily responsibilities. The Estonian Qualifications Authority

presented a study of the COVID-19 influence on future skilled workers' demands between June and November 2020. The study showed a rapid increase in the need for additional employee training, especially in ICT, risk management and analysis, product development, and communication and management skills.

Remote work is advantageous to both companies and employees. The benefits include but are not limited to reduced commuting time, avoidance of office politics, use of less office space, increased motivation, improved gender diversity (e.g., women and careers), healthier workforces with lower absenteeism and turnover, higher talent retention, job satisfaction, and higher productivity (Grant et al. 2019). Studies have revealed evidence for these benefits; for example, McCartney and Evans (2005) discovered that employees saved commute time and the value of journey time in the Greater Dublin Area. According to research, telework can minimize turnover while increasing employee productivity, job engagement, and job performance (Grant et al. 2019).

Remote work has several drawbacks, such as people working from home needing to pay for their energy and internet charges. According to Gajendran and Harrison (2007), workers separated from their co-workers, and supervisors were concerned about productivity losses when working remotely. Furthermore, colleague relationships may be jeopardized (Gajendran and Harrison 2007). Employees may need to be more focused when working remotely with small children or family members (Baruch, 2000). Blurring boundaries between work and family life leads to overwork (Grant et al. 2019). Similarly, in their research on managing work-family limitations, Eddleston and Mulki (2017) observed that remote work is associated with remote employees' incapacity to disengage from work.

1.2 Remote Work Efficiency and Effectiveness

Establishing the measures for work has seen benefits from the reduced labor cost by providing remote work, which has also led to no need to commute to work (Ghanbari. A B, 2017). Due to the low cost of arranging the workplace, work efficiency measures are perceived in financial terms (Beckmann, 2016). In Poland, for example, it has been revealed that only one in five organizations will state their efficiency level when assessing the key performance indicators (KPIs), comparing them to the results attained before the pandemic (Deloitte, 2021).

Remote work has recently witnessed a significant surge, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although remote work offers numerous benefits, such as enhanced flexibility and decreased commuting time, it also brings new hurdles that can affect work efficiency. Communication is one of the most important aspects of remote work effectiveness. When working remotely, it is critical to maintain open lines of communication with co-workers and managers. Video conferencing, instant messaging, and other collaboration technologies can help. It is also vital to schedule regular check-ins and meetings to ensure everyone is on the same page and that any issues or complaints are handled as soon as possible (Lockwood, 2021).

Time management is another essential component in remote work effectiveness. It is easy to become side-tracked or lose concentration without the structure of a regular workplace atmosphere. Developing a routine and establishing clear boundaries between work and personal time is critical to counteract this. Examples are setting fixed work hours, taking frequent breaks, and having a different workplace free of distractions (Chatterjee et al., 2022).

In addition to communication and time management, technology plays an essential part in the effectiveness of remote work. Accessing reliable and secure technology that allows for distant cooperation and communication is critical. Cloud-based storage solutions, project management tools, and video conferencing software are examples of this (Lockwood, 2021).

Finally, when working remotely, it is critical to prioritize self-care. It is easy to grow alienated or experience burnout without the social connection and support of a regular office setting. To effectively counteract this, we must prioritize self-care activities like exercising, meditating, and spending time with our loved ones. Management's ability to effectively engage and motivate their employees and to influence the changes in their work patterns when working remotely can lead to the efficiency of their employees (Lodovici, 2021; Chatterjee et al., 2022). The substantial shift in an organization's culture toward establishing a relationship with management is all based on trust (Pokojski et al., 2022). Employees and companies can both benefit from remote employment. According to a Deloitte study performed in 2021, remote work has increased productivity, enhanced work-life balance, and improved emotional health for workers (Deloitte, 2021). Furthermore, remote work saves employers money on office space and utilities while increasing employee retention and engagement (Lockwood, 2021).

Companies should also provide employees with the tools and assistance they need to succeed in remote work. Such support may include ergonomic workplace furniture, technology, and guidance

on effective remote work practices." Employers should also have clear standards and rules for remote work, such as contact procedures, work hours, and success metrics (Deloitte, 2021). Lastly, keep in mind that online work is not a one-size-fits-all option. Some workers flourish in a remote work atmosphere, while others prefer to work in an office setting. As a result, businesses should provide a flexible work environment that enables workers to choose the work setting that best meets their requirements and preferences. (Deloitte, 2021).

A study on remote working discovered that expanding flexible work arrangements can boost productivity and creativity (Hunter P, 2019). Increased productivity has come from increased online meeting frequency and remote employee monitoring technology (Delfino, 2021). The recorded rise is typically in the tens of percent (Bloom, 2014 & Mustajab, 2020). We can see an increase in better utilization of working time, such as taking shorter breaks and improving job efficiency. Bloom (2014) highlights the positive impact of these changes. Nevertheless, research has shown that more proper support for remote work has finally improved efficiency (Sutarto, 2021).

The increased tendency to oversee and monitor employees may necessitate the employee's permission for such surveillance (Lockwood, 2021). The author showed that employee performance when working remotely was strong but varied by gender and educational level. The study's findings have been validated in practice, notably in the reports of consulting firms. Those who evaluate the employer's point of view indicate that remote work adds to lower company expenses and higher employee performance. Conversely, the latter diminishes when working hours and labor intensity rise (Sutarto, 2021).

Finally, remote work can be highly effective when the right strategies and tools are in place. Prioritizing communication, time management, technology, and self-care may help remote employees maximize their productivity and achieve their goals.

1.3 Impact on Employee's Performance Level and Motivation

The assessment of performance and motivation has been a focal point for researchers and organizations, particularly within the context of remote work. The landscape of organizational

operations has witnessed significant transformation due to the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As organizations adapt to this new normal, exploring the implications of remote work on productivity and job satisfaction becomes imperative in navigating the evolving work environment.

Timsal and Awais (2016) suggest that organizations should actively explore diverse methods to nurture and retain their employees. They emphasize that in the current job market, prospective employees are increasingly attracted to organizations that provide flexibility in the workplace. This desire for workplace flexibility is not solely limited to the physical workspace but extends to encompass a broader spectrum, including flexible working hours, remote work options, and adaptable work arrangements.

Modern job seekers prioritize companies that acknowledge the importance of a healthy work-life balance, acknowledging the diverse needs and preferences of their workforce. James (2016) believes that this emphasis on flexibility has become a pivotal factor in shaping the expectations and decisions of individuals actively seeking employment opportunities in today's dynamic and competitive job market while enabling them to fulfill their work commitments while accommodating personal tasks, while the benefits of working from home are evident, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent drawbacks associated with this approach.

According to Timsal and Awais (2016), not every employee may find remote work suitable, as it demands elevated levels of concentration, dedication, self-motivation, and self-control. James (2016) resonates with this sentiment, emphasizing that working remotely poses numerous challenges, with the foremost hurdle being the difficulty in sustaining motivation over an extended period.

The core struggle lies in maintaining self-discipline and the intrinsic drive to complete tasks without the immediate support or presence of co-located colleagues or management. This isolation from the traditional office setting can impact the collaborative and social aspects of work, potentially leading to a sense of disconnection and challenges in maintaining a cohesive team dynamic. Furthermore, the psychological and emotional impact of these challenges on employee well-being remains unspecified in this context, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of how remote work influences the holistic health and job satisfaction of individuals. As organizations continue to navigate the complexities of remote work, addressing these challenges becomes paramount in fostering an environment that supports both productivity and the overall well-being of employees.

In a comprehensive investigation conducted by Timsal and Awais (2016), the notion that working from home may have adverse effects on organizational performance and subsequently impact the overall organizational culture is brought to the forefront. The study delves into the intricacies of this phenomenon, shedding light on how adopting a remote work style introduces shifts in the cultural climate, potentially leading to increased tension within the organizational framework.

To thoroughly address these challenges, several factors warrant consideration. First and foremost is the adequacy of facilities and equipment available to employees for the seamless execution of their duties. An organization's investment in providing the necessary tools for remote work becomes a critical determinant of the success or hindrance of this work approach.

Additionally, considering health and safety issues is paramount, ensuring that employees working remotely are not only equipped with the tools they need but also operating in a safe and conducive environment.

Equally crucial in this equation is the need for employees to feel supported by their employers. A supportive organizational culture fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among remote workers, contributing significantly to their overall job satisfaction. Recognizing and addressing these multifaceted factors are essential steps in understanding the nuanced interplay between remote work, organizational performance, and employee satisfaction. By doing so, organizations can proactively manage the challenges associated with remote work, fostering an environment conducive to heightened motivation and performance levels among their workforces.

Weatherly and Otter (2011) argue that managers may justifiably refuse employees the option to work flexibly due to valid business reasons. These reasons encompass potential repercussions on customer service satisfaction, the financial implications for the company, and the challenges in delineating and identifying constraints on work levels and quality, thereby complicating organizational management. These factors have the potential to significantly influence employee performance, particularly when they are required to adhere to specific standards. This, in turn, can impact their motivation, especially if they face difficulties in attaining the desired results (Lewis and Humbert 2010).

To elaborate further, the landscape of remote work in Estonia has undergone a transformative shift, as highlighted by the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, remote work was not widely embraced, but it swiftly became the norm for numerous organizations during the outbreak. This trend is likely to persist even beyond the pandemic era. The effects of remote

work on productivity and motivation have proven positive, with a notable increase in job satisfaction reported by many workers. Additionally, a discernible improvement in the overall quality of life has been observed as a direct consequence of the shift to remote work (Lewis and Humbert 2010). The widespread adoption of remote work has ushered in a new era, reshaping the dynamics of work, and offering employees greater flexibility and autonomy in managing their professional and personal lives.

1.4 Emotional and psychological well-being

Numerous organizations worldwide have asked their staff to work from home during the pandemic whenever needed. This abrupt shift in the workplace has had beneficial and destructive repercussions for businesses and employees. Emotional and psychological well-being are essential to an individual's overall quality of life and health. (Kniffin, 2021) Emotional well-being is “the subjective experience of positive feelings such as anxiety, depression, and sadness.” However, psychological well-being is characterized by a positive relationship with others, a positive presence, and psychological functioning such as self-acceptance and purpose in life (Chung H, 2019). Primarily spatial distribution of work, also known as teleworking, is not new in the literature. Previous research suggests that teleworking can be associated with positive mental health and well-being when employees have autonomy, flexibility, and the ability to balance life and work (Kniffin, 2021).

According to Wilson and Greenhill (2004), teleworking enhances employees' flexibility and control in the execution of their tasks. Many studies have shown that homeworking can have positive health outcomes, including reduced stress, burnout, and fatigue and increased happiness and quality of life (Hornung S, 2009). However, some studies have also found negative impacts on general psychological well-being and work-life balance (Palumbo R, 2020). According to (Kniffin, 2021), emotional and psychological well-being are closely connected and can influence one another. Emotional well-being can promote psychological well-being, and psychological well-being can improve emotional well-being.

In other words, when people feel happy, they are more likely to participate in behaviors that promote their psychological well-being, such as goal setting, pursuing social support, and self-

reflection. Also, Chung H (2019) discovered that psychological well-being could serve as a buffer against the negative impacts of stress on emotional well-being. People with higher levels of psychological well-being generally display greater resilience when dealing with worry and are more adept at sustaining positive emotions. Baruch and Holtom, (2020) discovered that teleworking minimizes the interruptions that individuals experience when working from home instead of in the office, reducing stress and increasing overall well-being.

While prior studies highlight various favorable impacts of teleworking on wellness, research also reveals some of the negative consequences of teleworking on employee health and wellbeing. One of the most researched features of teleworking's detrimental impact is social isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019), and workers believe that teleworking diminishes their interaction with their co-workers. Individuals can feel lonely, which may exacerbate depression (Ipsen, 2021). Also, exploration highlights that individuals who work from home have limited relations with their employers and directors and get limited support from them while working from home. Little support and connections with directors may increase anxiety which can affect insecurity about the quality of their work (Waizenegger, 2020).

Similarly, teleworking can also increase stress, wakefulness, fatigue, and anxiety because individuals may find it difficult to dissociate and detach from their work, working longer hours and taking limited breaks (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). These blurred boundaries with working long hours can also affect work-life conflict because individuals may struggle to balance work abilities with their liabilities at Home (Eddleston, Mulki, 2015, Perry et al., 2018). Research further argues that dragged teleworking can promote cerebral torture, where people feel more anxious and depressed over time (Solis, 2016). similar suffering may contribute to a reduced position of work provocation, task performance, and productivity.

Although remote working may have good and bad implications for health and well-being, the pandemic has also had distinct effects on individual physical and mental health and well-being. People may react and respond to the psychological distress caused by the health effects of COVID-19. The desire for solitude, fear of unemployment, and dread of dying or losing loved ones may all negatively influence an individual's well-being. Such impaired well-being might be caused by stress from working long hours, worry, and a lack of support and contact between co-workers and management. On the other hand, the pandemic may mean that people can benefit from working from home.

Working from home may reduce stress while also increasing an individual's productivity. A variety of variables can influence one's emotional and psychological well-being. (Kniffin, 2021) states that personality traits, coping techniques, social support, and living events can impact mental well-being. Similarly, Chung H (2019) observes that self-esteem, self-efficacy, social support, and faith can all help psychological well-being. An individual's emotional and psychological well-being is essential to their health and quality of life. Individuals can support and sustain their emotional and psychological health by knowing the variables that influence these aspects of well-being.

1.5 Managing Organizational Change

Organizational change is how an organization alters its current structure, work practices, tactics, or culture, which may significantly impact the organization (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu et al., 2008). Implementing remote work policies often necessitates changes in an organization's culture, structure, and processes, making change management critical to the study of remote working. Organizations can navigate such changes by adopting effective change management strategies, reducing resistance to change, and helping employees adapt to new remote work methods.

Therefore, incorporating change management techniques can be helpful in effectively implementing and managing remote work policies Wanberg and Banas (2000). Based on the factor that initiates the change and the goal of the change, such change can be planned or unexpected (Malopinsky & Osman, 2006). A clear goal and plan are fundamental concepts for managing organizational transformation. Shaw (2018) emphasizes the significance of developing a distinct vision and strategy that aligns with the company's goals.

Shin (2012) contends that a well-defined vision offers a roadmap for change and helps employees comprehend why the change is necessary. Employees may resist change or need more direction with a distinct goal and plan, which can interfere with the change process. Effective communication is another crucial aspect of managing corporate change.

Communication should be timely, precise, and pertinent to the parties' requirements. Lewis et al., (2006) state that communication should include top-down and bottom-up input and involvement. Encouraging employee responsibility can facilitate a more inclusive transition process, a crucial

element in managing organizational transformation. Additionally, effective leadership plays a critical role during this process by providing guidance, encouragement, and support to employees. According to (Hubbart, 2023), leaders must be adaptable, fluid, and agile to handle change successfully. Leaders must be able to explain their goals and plans, communicate successfully, and deal with opposition. Leaders should also empower workers to be a part of the transformation process, generating a feeling of ownership and dedication, according to Shin (2012). According to Lewis et al., (2006), a structured strategy entails breaking down the change process into manageable stages, finding possible risks, and creating mitigation strategies. Minimizing disruption and successfully managing opposition are aided by emphasizing the significance of tracking and assessing the change process to ensure it is on track and accomplishing its goals Sahay (2018).

Organizational change management is essential for companies to stay competitive and adapt to a shifting company setting. A clear purpose and plan, effective communication, decisive leadership, and a structured approach are essential to managing corporate change. Organizations can successfully manage change and accomplish their goals by applying these concepts. When the analysis of company processes uncovers problems that require urgent improvement, planned change happens. Systematic and controlled change, such as product invention and business structure alteration, enables organizations to improve their performance and efficacy (Stolovitch, 1992).

The primary aim of such an unexpected change is to minimize the negative consequences of the troublesome situation, optimize possible benefits, and turn the situation into an opportunity (Schermerhorn et al., 2003). Organizations adjust, such as downsizing, to enable their operating systems and partners to acclimate to new circumstances (Seeger et al., 2005). However, a lack of sufficient time, planning, adaptability, and communication may create obstacles to such adjustments, posing dangers to organizations (Hubbart, 2023). These unexpected changes, which involve sudden alterations to an organization's core operation system, cause novel events, potentially subjecting stakeholders, especially workers, to ambiguity, threats, or even harm (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). As a result, how workers interpret and react to unanticipated changes is critical to the success of unplanned change implementation (Shin, 2012).

During change, individuals experience a sensemaking process due to surprise, doubt, and confusion. They try to collect information to interpret the meanings of the change, create a

rationale for the change, and determine how to react to it (Weick et al., 2005). Scholars recommended that companies speak with their workers about the need for change, the process of change, and the following effects to surmount opposition, reduce ambiguity, and help employees accept the change (Delfino, 2021). Such communication should be frequent, genuine, and enthusiastic; it should provide relevant information, solicit input, and foster mutual comprehension of change while stressing the importance of change (Hubbart, 2023).

Organizations should implement participatory practices, allowing workers to express their views during change-related decision-making processes rather than one-way, top-down information dissemination (Lewis & Russ, 2012). Such methods make it easier for employees to embrace the change, decrease their view of uncertainty, and boost their satisfaction with their organizations (Lewis et al., 2006). The former requires organizations to provide workers with important but pertinent and essential information that assists employees in understanding the purpose, process, and substance of the change. However, simply disclosing information may overwhelm workers with excessive, irrelevant, or redundant information, leading to additional doubt and misunderstanding (Rawlins, 2008).

As a result, rather than sharing all releasable information with employees, organizations should practice informational transparency, giving both positive and negative but pertinent and required information that can assist workers in making sense of what is going on in the organization. Employees can only successfully make sense of and deal with adverse organizational events, such as unplanned changes caused by crises, if they give enough high-quality information (Kim, 2018). Transparent internal communication practices have been linked to employee confidence in the business (Rawlins, 2008), employee involvement, active communication behaviors in crisis circumstances, and an organization's internal image in the public relations literature.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

Research design comprises three widely recognized approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, each distinguished by its unique objectives (Creswell, 2013). The subsequent discussion illuminates the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, elucidating the rationale behind the method chosen for the present study.

Qualitative research methodology aligns closely with the inductive approach, sharing a common goal of generating essential information for the development of new theories. The implementation of qualitative research is diverse, lacking rigid guidelines, although historical precedents and emerging literature offer guidance for its execution. This methodology involves simultaneous data collection and study creation, emphasizing the nuanced meanings of words to construct rich, contextually embedded data. However, its reliance on a smaller data pool may lead to questions about reliability.

On the other hand, quantitative research follows a deductive approach to test theories. It involves a very organized way of collecting data, and advancements in technology, data systems, and programs have made it more reliable. Quantitative research follows a uniform, static process, focusing on numbers and statistics, typically conducted across a larger participant scale, facilitating comprehensive data analysis.

For this study, the chosen methodology is qualitative research, driven by its strong connection to the selected inductive approach. The author has intentionally embraced the inductive method, involving real-life observations and subsequent generalization of findings within a theoretical framework. Opting for qualitative research aims to foster a profound and extensive understanding of the study's topic before embarking on analysis. While acknowledging potential queries about reliability due to a smaller data pool, this choice prioritizes depth and richness of insights, aligning with the overarching objective of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

2.2 Sampling Technique

The case is established on purposive sampling because the study aims to determine employees' experiences of remote work routines that support remote work efficiency and effectiveness during and after COVID-19. I conducted a qualitative study to interview employees working from home in Estonia. This approach involves selecting study participants based on specific criteria rather than randomly selecting individuals from the general population. The research strategically chose to focus on IT Customer Service Representatives (IT CSRs) due to their inherent relevance to the objectives of the study. Specifically, their tasks align well with remote work, as they often engage in activities that can be performed remotely, offering a pertinent group for examining remote work dynamics. Given their involvement in digital customer interactions, the study aims to explore how IT CSRs navigate and experience remote work, particularly in terms of its impact on customer service quality. Additionally, the specialized skill set of IT CSRs in information technology and customer service positions them uniquely to provide insights into the adaptation of professionals with specific expertise to remote work environments.

The IT industry's distinct characteristics further enhance the study's focus, offering industry-specific insights into the challenges and advantages of remote work within this context. The practical implications of the research extend to informing strategies for optimizing remote work in customer service roles, especially for companies operating in the IT sector or with similar customer service structures. Moreover, the feasibility and accessibility of interviewing IT CSRs were facilitated by their comfort with digital communication methods, aligning seamlessly with the remote nature of the study. In essence, the selection of IT Customer Service Representatives as the research focal point strategically aligns their roles, skills, and industry context with the overarching goal of gaining valuable insights into employees' experiences of remote work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In qualitative research, purposive sampling stands as a purposeful and non-random approach employed to handpick subjects based on specific factors aligned with the study's purpose or objectives. Unlike the randomness associated with traditional sampling methods, purposive sampling empowers researchers to deliberately select individuals possessing the desired traits or experiences relevant to their research, thereby rendering it a valuable tool in qualitative research methodologies. Throughout the research process, I engaged with a total of seventeen (17)

individuals through a combination of email and phone communications, successfully conducting interviews with ten (10) of them.

In summary, purposive sampling emerges as an efficacious qualitative research method due to its capacity to enable researchers to selectively choose participants based on specific factors in harmony with their research objectives. The advantages of purposive sampling encompass the ability to target individuals with in-depth knowledge of the study event, ensuring cost-effectiveness, and optimizing time efficiency (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

2.3 Methods of collecting data

As part of the inductive method, the data collection intends to find out employees' experiences of remote work routines that support remote work efficiency and effectiveness during and after COVID-19. Furthermore, my decision to conduct a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews allows me to use non-standardized questions, making this research more interactive.

Participants for the study were selected by word of mouth and via email. By word of mouth, I knew some employees who work from home, and it was easy to talk to them directly. On the other hand, I had to send an email to other potential participants to see whether they would be interested in participating in the study, a copy of the email issued can be seen in (appendix 2). The email was issued to 11 potential participants, and I got a positive response from 6 of them and 4 more participants accepted to be interviewed out of the 7 potential participants who were told by word of mouth.

Following receipt of the replies, meeting invites were issued to each of the participants for the interviews to be carried out. Immediately upon meeting with each of the participants, the interviewer spoke with the participant to ensure that they were happy for the interviewer to record the interview. Participants were then issued with a consent form (appendix 3) which outlined all the details that they needed to know before the interview was carried out.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, face-to-face, and phone calls, eight (8) of which were via Zoom, one (1) was face-to-face, and one (1) was via telephone call. This method avoids traveling long distances, is also cost-effective, and reduces the potential stress of the interviewees

so they can be comfortable where they choose to be at the interview. The use of semi-structured interviews was motivated by the allowance of the conversation to take different directions and mixing the order of questions depending on the flow of the discussion. The semi-structured interview is designed to make it possible to add follow-up questions that may be important and necessary for further understanding, given the specific respondent and situation. However, all the key questions and themes the author wanted to cover were written beforehand, which was the structured part of the thesis research questions.

The author carried out the interviews, and notes were not taken during the interviews; instead, the author relied on the recordings. At the beginning of the discussions, the author would reinforce the interviewee's ethical considerations to allow the interviewees to make sure they were aware of their rights towards the data collected; as a result, they felt at ease expressing their viewpoints and ideas during the interview. Once the participant was happy enough the interviewer was able to start the interview, whereby each of the interviews started similarly and the interviewer outlined the terms of the study. Once the interview questions had been completed the interviewer ended each of the interviews by thanking the participant and stopping the recording. The interviews were carried out over 1 month and two weeks and all 10 interviews were transcribed during these two weeks.

2.4 Data Analysis

After the completion of each of the interviews, I later transcribed them with the use of whisper Transcription which is a software program for transcription. After transcribing the interviews, I reviewed the transcription line by line to identify obvious transcription errors. Then, I went through the transcription again while listening to the audio recording of each interview. As subtle or obvious errors in transcription were discovered, the errors were corrected. Finally, an accurate transcript was produced, and after going through the transcript again I formed codes based on my research questions.

Coding serves as a fundamental framework for organizing qualitative research data (Williams & Moser, 2019). It's important to emphasize that within qualitative research, no universally accepted terminology transcends methods and traditions. Consequently, terms like analysis or categorizing are synonymous with coding (Levitt et al., 2017). Thus, this study employs the term coding.

The codes utilized in this process corresponded to my primary research questions, shedding more light on my analysis. The coding process was integral to systematically analyzing and categorizing themes within participants' responses. Through the application of coding techniques, the objective was to identify patterns, recurring ideas, and common threads embedded in the data. This approach facilitated a structured method for extracting meaningful insights and organizing the diverse array of participant responses into coherent and identifiable themes. Overall, the coding process aimed to distill the richness of participant answers, providing a comprehensive understanding of the underlying concepts and perspectives expressed in the data.

Moustakas (1994) termed this process as clustering, a method involving the grouping of units into clusters or themes while eliminating overlapping statements. The comparison of codes and themes across each interview played a pivotal role in discerning the point at which participants ceased introducing novel information during the interview process. This approach aligns with the methodology advocated by Levitt (2021), emphasizing that qualitative researchers should consider the conditions and processes associated with the experience and manifestation of the phenomenon under investigation.

Following the principles outlined by Williams and Moser (2019), the coding process served as a robust mechanism for identifying, codifying, and analyzing critical themes. This systematic analysis was integral in achieving the overarching goal of the study by unraveling and comprehending the intricate layers of participant responses. Through a meticulous coding procedure, the research aimed to distill essential insights, ensuring a thorough exploration of the qualitative data and a nuanced understanding of the emergent themes.

2.5 Ethical Evaluation

This qualitative research study on remote work efficiency among IT Customer Service Representatives (IT CSR) in Estonia was conducted using Zoom face-to-face and phone call interviews. The interviews conducted for the study were designed to maintain a neutral approach. Therefore, the IT Customer Service Representatives (IT CSR) were selected irrespective of ethnicity, economic background, gender, or preferences. This study's projected premise is that all employees seek improved incentives, working circumstances, job happiness, and other factors influencing job efficiency.

This study is especially pertinent because many employees are already required to work from home or work hybrid, which may negatively impact their job effectiveness and well-being. The authors of this research had no bias towards any of the employees questioned, and the responses were recorded precisely as the interviewees expressed them. This study aimed to uncover trends in interviewee replies and make a relevant contribution to the field without jeopardizing the study's reliability and validity. It is crucial to highlight that because this study is qualitative, it cannot be replicated using the same frameworks to reach the same results. Nonetheless, the study was deemed legitimate and trustworthy because it stresses employee viewpoints and was performed unbiasedly.

3 RESULTS

This chapter will present an overview of the interviews conducted and provide a summary of the responses provided by the interviewees. The data collected from these interviews will be analyzed to extract relevant themes and patterns from the interviewees' responses. These themes will structure the findings and discussions in subsequent chapters, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the research topic. The chapter will thoroughly examine the interview data, shedding light on the insights and perspectives shared by the participants and contributing to a deeper understanding of the research problem.

Outlined below are the themes that emerged from the study:

During an interview among participants, several themes emerged regarding flexibility, routines, efficiency, effectiveness, freedom, transition, positive aspects, and negative aspects. These themes reflect different perspectives on how people perceive and experience these concepts daily.

Flexibility is commonly perceived as a beneficial characteristic that permits people to adjust to shifting circumstances and cultivate a more receptive mindset. However, some participants also mentioned negative elements of flexibility, such as feeling overwhelmed by too many options or uncertain about what to do. Routines were seen to bring structure and stability to daily life, which can benefit some people. However, others expressed frustration with feeling trapped in their routines or feeling like they are missing out on new experiences. Efficiency and effectiveness are closely related concepts often valued in our fast-paced society. Participants acknowledged the benefits of efficiency and effectiveness, such as getting things done quickly and achieving goals.

However, they also pointed out the negative aspects of prioritizing efficiency over other values, such as creativity or human connection. Freedom is often seen as a positive aspect, allowing individuals to pursue their goals and make meaningful choices. However, some participants also mentioned negative aspects of freedom, such as feeling overwhelmed by too many options or unsure of what to do. Transition is a theme that can evoke both positive and negative aspects. Specific individuals mentioned the potential for enthusiasm and personal development that may arise during periods of change, such as embarking on a fresh career opportunity or relocating to a different place. However, others mentioned the stress and uncertainty accompanying these transitions, such as not knowing the future.

Overall, these themes reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of the human experience. While some aspects of flexibility, routines, efficiency, effectiveness, freedom, and transition are positive, others can be negative or challenging. By acknowledging these different perspectives, individuals can better understand themselves and their world.

3.1 Experience with remote work routines

In the interviews, participants expressed high positivity towards remote work routines. The fact that they could work from the comfort of their own homes and set up their work system in minutes was viewed as a significant advantage. Participant 1 described their morning routines, which involved waking up 30 minutes before work to prepare for the day. For example, Participant 1 stated, “I wake up at most 30 minutes before work to set up my work system and prepare to commence with work by checking emails, meetings, making tea or coffee.” They mentioned checking emails, attending virtual meetings, and making tea or coffee to start their day.

Participant 4 found remote work surprisingly effective. The shift allowed me to offer more personalized service, dedicating focused time to each client. The absence of office-related interruptions improved my response time and quality of assistance. However, I missed the direct collaboration with colleagues for complex client issues.

Interestingly, all participants had unique remote work routines that worked best for them. For some, waking up early and starting work as early as 7:00 am was a joy because it allowed them to finish their work early in the day. Others preferred to begin their work later in the day and work through the evening.

Participant 10 embraced remote work's autonomy. The ability to structure my day around critical tasks enhanced his productivity. Collaborating with the technical team remotely proved seamless through virtual platforms. I also acknowledged challenges in troubleshooting complex issues without direct access to hardware but appreciated the overall adaptability.

Participants also discussed the importance of security and ensuring their work computer systems were secure. They mentioned having a team meeting at the start of their day, which helped them

to stay connected with their colleagues and work as a team. This was particularly important as they were outside of a physical office together. Another routine mentioned by several participants was taking a short break after every hour of work. A five-minute break allowed them to stretch their legs, rest their eyes, and prevent themselves from sitting too long. This was viewed as a healthy practice that helped them maintain focus and productivity throughout the day. Overall, the positivity surrounding remote work routines was evident throughout the interviews. Participants appreciated remote work's flexibility and freedom and found that establishing a routine was crucial to their success. Having a set way, they could stay on track with their work, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and avoid burnout.

Participant 3 shared that remote work brought a mix of challenges and benefits. I appreciated the flexibility but struggled with occasional technical issues that impacted his ability to provide immediate assistance. The absence of direct team interaction sometimes made problem-solving less efficient, yet he found increased focus and reduced workplace distractions.

Participant 6 shared a positive perspective on remote work. I found a balance between managing customer inquiries and enjoying a comfortable home environment. The flexibility allowed me to tailor my schedule around peak customer engagement times. The virtual training sessions and regular team check-ins maintained a sense of connection despite the physical distance.

3.2 Positive and negative aspects of remote work

The discussion results highlight the positive and negative aspects of remote work as perceived by the participants. On the positive side, remote work offers the freedom to plan and manage one's work schedule without restrictions and eliminates the time and money spent on commuting. *Participant 9 also noted that remote work allows for more autonomy in position, as supervisors do not constantly monitor them. Additionally, reduced stress levels and improved concentration can contribute to increased productivity.*

However, the participants also outlined several negative aspects of remote work. *Participant 5 noted needing a proper home office setup, making it difficult to work effectively. I also share my living space with others, which can cause disruptions and noise, leading to decreased productivity.*

Another negative aspect is that conversations could be lost, or it could be challenging to schedule meetings without access to essential office equipment.

Additionally, Participant (1) *noted that the workload could become higher in remote work, as there is no direct supervision, and the lack of oversight can make it challenging to manage one's workload effectively.*

The results suggest that remote work offers several benefits, such as increased autonomy, reduced stress levels, and improved concentration.

For example, Participant 7: *Note that “remote working can be much less stressful because you have much more time to carry out all your tasks without pressure from anyone. Nevertheless, you may have to try and schedule something, or conversations get lost, not having access to basic office equipment”.* Still, it also poses several challenges, such as the need for proper home office setup, difficulties in scheduling, and increased workload. The findings suggest that it is vital for organizations to carefully assess both the benefits and drawbacks of remote work and develop strategies to mitigate the potential adverse effects while maximizing the positive aspects. This includes focusing on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of remote work.

3.3 Remote Work Efficiency and Effectiveness

The participants' responses regarding their efficiency and effectiveness while working remotely varied, with some reporting positive experiences while others said negative ones. According to Participant 2:

I establish a routine and stick to a schedule to ensure that I maintain high levels of efficiency and effectiveness. I create a dedicated workspace to focus solely on work and take breaks when needed to avoid burnout. Additionally, I communicate regularly with my colleagues and managers to stay on track with tasks and deadlines. Overall, remote work can be just as efficient and effective as working in an office setting as long as one maintains discipline and stays focused and organized.

This approach helped them to stay focused and avoid burnout while working remotely.

Another participant (7) *reported that remote work had increased my efficiency by reducing distractions and allowing me to focus more deeply on my work. However, they also noted that*

remote work could impact team effectiveness due to difficulty reading body language and nonverbal communication, sometimes leading to miscommunications.

Another participant emphasized the importance of self-discipline and structure in remote work, noting that it is easier to fall into a productive pattern when working in an office environment. However, they also appreciated remote work's flexibility regarding scheduling and working style. On the other hand,

Participant 5 reported that remote work had negatively impacted their efficiency and effectiveness, with difficulty maintaining focus and motivation throughout the day. Communication and collaboration with team members were also challenging, leading to delays in project completion. To overcome these challenges, they established a more structured workday routine, created a dedicated workspace, and used productivity tools to stay on track and focused.

Overall, the responses from the participants indicate that remote work can have both advantages and disadvantages regarding efficiency and effectiveness. Establishing a routine, creating a dedicated workspace, and using productivity tools can help individuals maintain their focus and stay on track while working remotely.

Participant 8 I initiate the day with a strategic planning session, identifying key customer issues and potential advocacy opportunities. They prioritize cases based on urgency and customer impact, ensuring a proactive approach to support. Throughout the day I engage in personalized interactions with clients, addressing concerns and offering tailored solutions. They use virtual collaboration tools to share insights with the team and gather feedback on customer sentiments. I also dedicate time to advocate for customers internally, presenting feedback and suggestions to improve products and services. They actively participate in virtual advocacy forums and contribute to knowledge-sharing sessions to enhance the overall customer support strategy. By the day's accomplishments, ensuring that all customer advocacy initiatives are progressing. They engage in a reflective exercise to identify areas for improvement and set goals for the next day, maintaining a continuous improvement mindset.

However, challenges related to communication and collaboration with team members may impact overall team effectiveness, and it is essential to address these issues proactively to ensure successful remote work experiences. Morning Routine: *Participant 10 I start the day with a virtual team huddle to discuss priorities and share updates. They then dive into responding to customer queries, using dedicated time slots for focused email communication. A clear to-do list for the day is established, ensuring efficient task management.*

Afternoon Efficiency: After addressing morning queries, I engage in collaborative problem-solving with colleagues through video calls. Regular breaks are taken to prevent burnout, and a dedicated lunch break is incorporated to refresh and recharge. They leverage digital tools for tracking case progress and ensuring timely follow-ups. As the workday nears its end, I allocate time for professional development, attending virtual training sessions to stay updated on product knowledge. The day concludes with a virtual wrap-up meeting to discuss accomplishments and plan for the next day.

3.4 Transition to remote work and expectations toward future work

The interview findings reveal that the employees had diverse reactions to their company's transition to remote work and their expectations of future work. Some employees embraced the idea of remote work, considering it a long-awaited shift that had been coming for a long time. They appreciated the flexibility that came with remote work and hoped that it would continue in the future. Participant 3 *initially found the transition to remote work challenging but gradually adapted. I appreciated the flexibility remote work offered, allowing for a better work-life balance. Virtual team meetings became a norm, fostering collaboration and maintaining a sense of connection with colleagues. My expectations for future work would be the hybrid work model, combining both remote and in-office work.*

Others had mixed reactions, where they found remote work to be initially exciting but became bored over time. They also needed more communication and collaboration between colleagues, making working remotely more challenging.

For example, as Participant 3 stated:

I was quite happy because, like I was, I got a collaboration to work from home. Still, after some time, it became so boring, less communication between colleagues, um, despite other communication networks. But at a point, it was, was most stressful done being at the workplace. However, despite these challenges, all ten participants strongly preferred hybrid work, combining remote and office work. They found hybrid work more advantageous, offering the best of both

worlds. Participant 1 mentioned that *hybrid work allowed them to enjoy the flexibility of remote work while still providing them with the social interaction and structure of being in the office.* Moreover, the interview findings suggest that hybrid work benefits employees and employers but not all employees liked the idea.

For example, Participant 9 *The shift allowed me to personalize customer support and explore creative solutions. Despite initial concerns, the virtual environment became conducive to delivering high-quality service. As for my views toward future work, I envision a continued emphasis on remote work, valuing the enhanced focus and productivity it brings. I anticipate further integration of advanced technologies for seamless customer interactions. The expectation is for a future work environment that optimizes the strengths of remote collaboration.*

Employees can enjoy a better work-life balance, leading to enhanced job satisfaction and productivity, while employers can save costs by requiring less office space and other related expenses. However, it's worth noting that hybrid work also presents challenges, especially in communication and collaboration. Participant 7 *I experienced a smooth transition to remote work, utilizing their technical expertise to troubleshoot and resolve issues remotely. Virtual collaboration tools facilitated effective communication with both clients and internal teams. The transition emphasized the adaptability of their engineering skills. In the future, remote work should remain a prominent feature, I expect an increased reliance on virtual collaboration platforms and anticipate opportunities for skill development in emerging technologies, reflecting the dynamic nature of the engineering field.*

In conclusion, the interview findings show that employees had varied reactions to their company's transition to remote work, and most prefer a hybrid work model in the future. Therefore, companies that adopt this model and prioritize communication and collaboration will be well-positioned to succeed in the upcoming years.

Based on the above results, a framework has been developed that provides an overall understanding of remote working routines. This framework focuses on the following four (4) aspects:

1. Experience with remote work routines
2. Positive and negative aspects of remote work

3. Remote work efficiency and effectiveness
4. Transition to remote work and expectations toward future work

The theoretical framework for examining experience with remote work routines, positive and negative aspects of remote work, efficiency, effectiveness, transition to remote work, and expectations toward future work can draw from multiple theories and concepts from different fields. One relevant theoretical framework could be the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which proposes that job demands (i.e., aspects of work that require sustained effort and are associated with physical, psychological, or social costs) and job resources (i.e., parts of work that may help achieve goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth) are significant predictors of work-related outcomes. This framework can be applied to remote work by considering the demands and resources associated with the remote work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Regarding the experience with remote work routines, previous research has shown that individuals' adaptation to new work environments can be influenced by their psychological resilience, motivation, and social support, all of which can be conceptualized as job resources. Thus, studying the resources that enable individuals to adapt to remote work routines can provide insights into how organizations can promote positive outcomes for remote workers.

Examining the positive and negative aspects of remote work can also be informed by the JD-R model, as remote work can be associated with job demands (e.g., isolation, lack of supervision, work-life conflict) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, flexibility, reduced commuting time). Understanding these aspects can provide insights into how organizations can design remote work policies and practices to maximize positive outcomes and mitigate adverse effects.

Additionally, remote work efficiency and effectiveness can be studied through goal-setting theory, which proposes that setting specific, challenging goals can improve performance. In remote work, plans can be related to task completion, communication, and collaboration. They can be influenced by individual and organizational factors such as technology use, leadership style, and team dynamics. Understanding these factors can help organizations design effective remote work policies and practices that support goal achievement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Finally, the transition to remote work and expectations toward future work can be examined through social exchange theory, which proposes that individuals engage in social exchange relationships with their organizations based on perceived benefits and costs. In remote work, employees' perceptions of the benefits and costs can influence their attitudes toward remote work and their future expectations for work arrangements. Understanding these perceptions can help organizations manage employee expectations and promote positive outcomes for remote workers (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

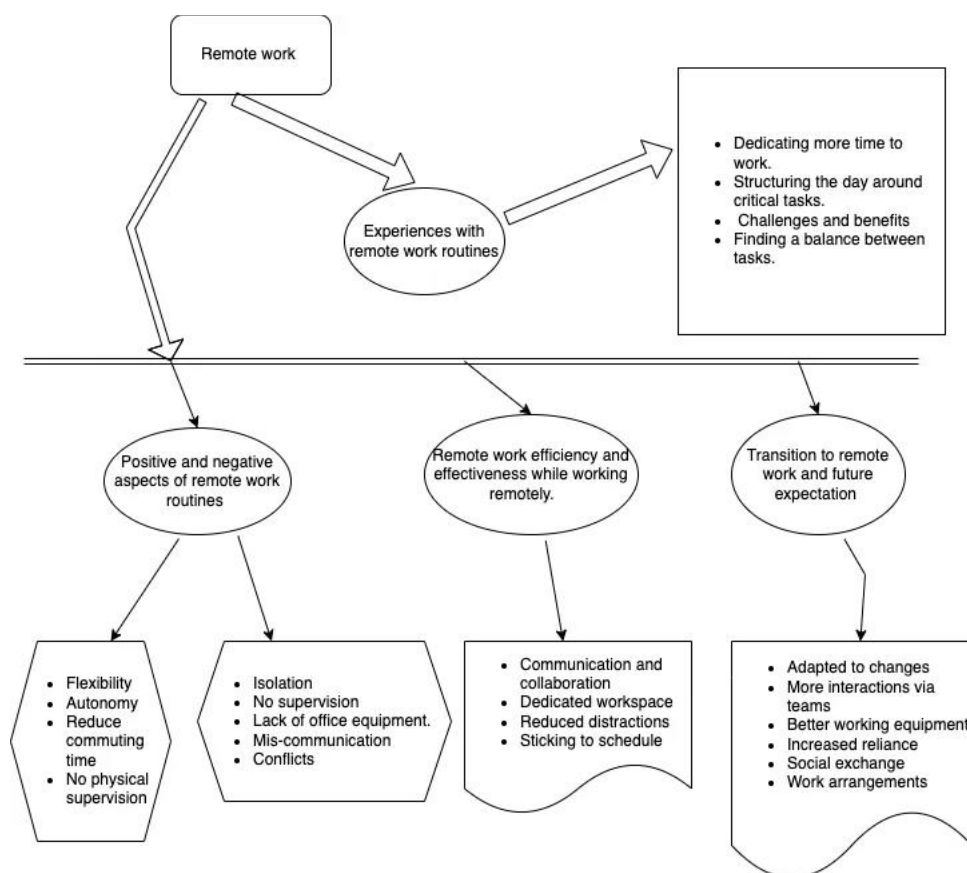


Figure 1. Framework for remote work routines

Overall, the JD-R model, goal-setting theory, and social exchange theory provide helpful theoretical frameworks for examining experience with remote work routines, positive and negative aspects of remote work, remote work efficiency and effectiveness, and the transition to remote work and expectations toward future employment. These frameworks can help researchers and

practitioners understand the complex factors influencing remote work outcomes and design effective policies and practices to support remote work success (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

4 DISCUSSION

In this research study, people's routines when they work from home have proven to be a positive aspect when it comes to their effectiveness and efficiency alternative when working remotely. However, despite optimistic expectations and enthusiasm surrounding it, exclusive remote work might obstruct employee engagement and overall employee experience, potentially leading to burnout. The results validated that working remotely transcended a mere shift in physical location; it also brought about changes in the surrounding environment, necessary resources, organizational expectations, and interactions with colleagues. A lot of elements play a role in shaping the experience of working from home, influencing both positive and negative aspects of this mode of work.

Additional factors influencing employee effectiveness and efficiency encompassed the advantages of flexibility, enhanced work-life balance, supportive physical infrastructure, autonomy in work arrangements, and notable cost and time savings associated with the elimination of the daily commute to and from the office. Despite this study unveiling certain inconsistencies related to potential disruptions experienced at home, it predominantly highlighted a heightened level of productivity when working from home compared to the traditional office setting, albeit not universally applicable. The benefits of remote work extend beyond individual advantages such as improved work-life balance and significant savings in time and costs, extending to organizational benefits, including increased overall productivity, heightened motivation, enhanced psychological resilience, and improved employee retention.

The paradoxical nature of the findings highlighted the inevitable challenges associated with extensive remote work. While a significant number of participants acknowledged an enhanced ability to manage both personal and professional aspects of their lives, the study also illuminated the complexities arising from blurred boundaries between work and family life, leading to difficulties in achieving psychological detachment from work and maintaining a harmonious work-life balance. Participants reported several disadvantages, including the absence of supervision, a lack of essential office equipment, challenges in effective communication, and instances of miscommunication.

The diverse responses showcased the individualized impact of external factors, creating either a conducive or non-conducive work-from-home environment based on unique circumstances. These paradoxical outcomes underscored the imperfections of remote working solutions in isolation, emphasizing the need for supplementary arrangements to address and balance the associated disadvantages.

The results substantiated a leaning towards remote work, but not in an exclusive manner, as in-person interactions retained their significance. Participants expressed a preference for the flexibility of blending remote and office work, advocating for the option to work from home for 1-2 days a week. Interestingly, some participants still favored a fully remote work setup, aiming to capitalize on the advantages offered by both alternatives.

4.1 Recommendations

In this part, I explore potential future study topics for remote employees. A prospective study should focus on additional qualitative research methodologies, such as ethnography, ground theory, case studies, and phenomenological qualitative research, to re-evaluate and broaden the conceptual framework for constructing their research design. Having remote labor during the COVID-19 epidemic aided several businesses in surviving. A future study might investigate the impact of COVID-19 on established companies that were forced to implement a remote working policy. The other qualitative research methodologies might add to the study design and aid in expanding on the remote worker's future. For example, a future researcher may employ the ethnographic research approach, which entails doing an in-depth qualitative analysis of a community with a shared culture.

A future researcher might also use grounded theory to approach the study, which pertains to existing recorded literature ideas that fail to fully explain the observed occurrence Gajendran and Harrison, (2007). A grounded theory technique might assist researchers in conducting natural observations to gain new insights that can create new conceptions of virtual workers' social behavior. With technological advancements, a broad range of collaboration solutions are available

for virtual employees, allowing them to communicate with coworkers and the office as if they were in the same room (Christman, 2022). Companies can provide remote workers with digital communication tools like email, instant messaging, video conferencing, social networking, and collaboration.

These tools can help virtual teams overcome communication and collaboration barriers. Video conferencing software allows face-to-face interactions, screen sharing, and instant messaging. Additionally, project and team collaboration tools can assist in team-building activities, sharing expertise and new information, and increasing virtual team effectiveness. A future researcher could employ case study research to investigate the impact of remote work on workers' interactions with management and productivity levels. One could examine demographic details like race, gender, and nationality to evaluate how workplace diversity affects the competitiveness of organizations in the global market. The emergence of globalization has resulted in a more varied workforce, emphasizing the need to investigate the impacts of demographic elements on diverse commercial sectors.

4.2 Limitation

While this study has provided valuable insights, it is crucial to acknowledge and address certain limitations. Firstly, the research focused predominantly on the employee's viewpoint, not looking into the employer's perspective or considering internal performance metrics and work characteristics from an organizational standpoint. Analyzing the managerial viewpoint could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how employer attributes and work routines influence the efficacy of remote work. Future research endeavors should aim to bridge this gap by exploring the intricate dynamics between employers and employees in the context of remote work.

Secondly, the study faced a challenge with a comparatively small sample size, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The restricted number of participants may have impacted the conclusions' robustness. Expanding the sample size in future studies would enhance the study's statistical power and contribute to a more representative understanding of remote work experiences.

Moreover, it's essential to note that this study was not conducted during the pandemic, which may have implications for the generalizability of the findings to the unique circumstances of that time. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the significant relations, future research could consider conducting similar studies during distinct phases and acknowledging the potential variations in remote work experiences over time.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews present a challenge for researchers as they constrain the interviewer's capacity to help or seek further insights and clarification beyond the predetermined questions. However, a potential drawback arises when participants require support to comprehend a question, as it demands additional effort from the interviewer to refrain from influencing their response while delicately probing or prompting them for a more detailed answer. People with limited access to technology or those working in specific industries that do not permit them to work remotely may be underrepresented in the study, leading to sample bias.

Finally, it should be noted that remote working studies may need more generalizability to all job types or organizations, and the impact of remote work on productivity may vary depending on the extent of collaboration required for the job.

4.3 Future research

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the trend towards remote work, as an increasing number of businesses are adopting the concept of a dispersed workforce. Although remote work offers several benefits, like enhanced flexibility and saved commuting time, dealing with potential obstacles is essential. As remote work becomes more widespread, examining the long-term effects on employee efficiency and effectiveness is necessary. Future research could explore how remote work impacts mental health, job satisfaction, and burnout, among other factors.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is individual differences. Employees have different personalities, work styles, and preferences, which can affect remote work routines' effectiveness. Research could investigate how these individual differences impact remote work productivity and identify strategies to accommodate diverse work styles and preferences. Technology is another crucial aspect of remote work that can facilitate and hinder employee efficiency and effectiveness. Future research could focus on the impact of different technologies on remote work routines and

explore how technology can be leveraged to enhance remote work productivity. Remote work requires various digital solutions, such as video conferencing software, virtual collaboration tools, and other relevant technologies. Ensuring efficient communication and collaboration is vital to achieve successful remote work. Future research could explore the impact of different communication and collaboration tools on remote work routines and effectiveness.

This might involve analyzing how virtual communication tools like email and instant messaging affect the efficiency and effectiveness of remote work. Leadership and management also play a crucial role in remote work success. Future research could investigate the effects of different leadership styles and management strategies on remote work routines and effectiveness. This could include the role of trust, motivation, and performance management in remote work, as well as the importance of clear communication and goal setting. With many organizations adopting hybrid work models, future research could explore the impact of this approach on remote work routines and effectiveness. This could include studies on the optimal balance between remote and in-person work, the effect on team dynamics, and the challenges of managing hybrid teams.

In conclusion, future research on remote work routines and their impact on employee efficiency and effectiveness is essential for organizations to develop effective strategies for supporting remote work and maximizing its benefits while minimizing its challenges. As remote work continues to evolve, it is necessary to understand the factors contributing to its success and identify best practices for managing a distributed workforce.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to shift to remote work, significantly increasing the number of remote workers. This shift has been welcomed by many employees who find remote work productive and appealing. As a result, remote work options have become increasingly popular among workers and companies. However, our study suggests that remote work is not a perfect solution or a nightmare scenario. A balanced approach that includes physical office presence and remote work is necessary for future work arrangements.

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the remote work experiences of customer service workers in the IT sector. Our research aimed to address a gap in the current understanding of remote work, specifically why more IT employees are not working remotely. The findings from our study supported the notion that remote work can improve workers' efficiency and effectiveness during and after the pandemic. However, we also identified challenges that can arise from remote work, including communication and collaboration issues. Based on our research, remote work can offer a range of benefits to both workers and companies. However, providing appropriate organizational and managerial support to remote workers is crucial to ensure they can be productive and efficient. We also recommend that companies strike a balance between physical office presence and remote work to meet the needs of their workers and business objectives. Ultimately, our research highlights the importance of understanding remote workers' experiences and supporting remote work's success.

The findings of our study align with previous research on remote work in several ways, indicating that the benefits and drawbacks of remote work are consistent, even in the current crisis where remote work has been largely involuntary. It may benefit companies to make the necessary investments now rather than later. These investments could include improvements to ergonomics, the implementation of video conferencing tools, and strategies to increase socialization among remote workers. Such investments will not only support employees after the current crisis but also lay the groundwork for better work opportunities in the future. Companies must understand the long-term benefits of remote work and take the necessary steps to support their employees in

remote work settings. By investing in the infrastructure and tools needed for practical remote work, companies can improve their productivity and work towards better employee satisfaction and retention. Therefore, focusing on the investments required for remote work now and in the future is advisable, rather than waiting for the pandemic to pass. The widespread adoption of remote work has successfully resulted in employees adapting to this alternative work mode. They have demonstrated equal or higher efficiency and effectiveness when working from home, and this transition has allowed for increased focus and more efficient meetings. Even companies that have never had a remote work program have been surprised by how well their employees have adapted to working from home.

However, our research has revealed that while employees have adapted well to remote work, they still value the socialization and camaraderie of working in an office setting. Numerous workers have conveyed their longing for social engagement and the feeling of togetherness of working in a physical office. Therefore, hybrid work models have become the preferred option, where employees work from home 1-2 days per week. In this manner, employees can have the advantages of working from their homes and interacting and cooperating with their coworkers in the office. With the change to remote work, it is becoming increasingly vital for businesses to combine it with regular office work to have the best of both worlds. On the one hand, remote work provides employees flexibility, autonomy, and the option to work from home. Conversely, working in a physical office enhances cooperation, interpersonal relationships, and the availability of resources that might not be accessible while working from home.

Managers must be adaptable in their approach to retain the benefits of remote work while reducing its limitations. They must collaborate with each employee to develop a timetable that meets their requirements and preferences. This might imply enabling workers to work from home on some days or times of the week while forcing them to come into the office for meetings or other vital activities. Managers may assist employees in achieving work-life balance by being flexible, which is critical for keeping a happy and healthy staff. When employees feel they have autonomy over their work schedules and can integrate their personal lives with work, they tend to exhibit higher engagement and productivity. Managers must acknowledge the significance of balancing remote and office work to retain the good features. They may design an ideal timetable that serves everyone involved by being flexible and working with staff.

In conclusion, while the transition to remote work has been successful, employees still value the social interaction and collaboration of working in an office setting. Hence, the favored alternative is a working model that combines remote work and on-site work, enabling employees to work from home for a portion of their work time. Striking a balance between remote and office work will be crucial to maintaining the positive aspects of remote work and offsetting the negative. Managers must be flexible and work with each employee to create an optimal schedule that balances remote and office work.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview Questions.

Interview Questions.

1. Have you ever worked remotely?
 - a. How do you feel about working remotely?
 - b. How long have you been working remotely?
 - c. How often do you work from home per week?
2. Have you established a good work routine?
 - a. Describe a typical day working remotely, e.g., in the mornings/evenings.
 - b. What do you think about having a suitable work routine?
3. What were your initial thoughts when your company announced the shift to remote work due to COVID-19? And how is remote working after Covid-19?
4. Can you describe your experience of work, life, or general psychological experiences during the period of working from home?
 - a. What are the positive aspects of working from home or working remotely?
 - b. What are the negative aspects of working from home?
5. Are you less effective, equally effective, or more effective when working from home than in the office?
 - a. Do you have a suitable workspace?
 - b. Are you in regular contact with your lead?
 - c. What is your experience communicating and interacting with colleagues while working remotely?
 - d. What are the tools or media you use for communication?
6. Where do you prefer to work? In the long run, does working from home suit you?

Appendix 2. Email issued to potential participants.

Hi There,

I hope you are well.

I am in the process of finishing my master's in international business dissertation. It would be beneficial if you could take some time to read the following. Hopefully, you would be interested in participating in my study.

The study I am carrying out focuses on Employee's experiences of remote work routines regarding work efficiency and effectiveness for Customer support representatives of IT firms. As part of this study, I plan to carry out interviews. I have attached a copy of the interview questions.

Kindly inform me if you could participate; your involvement would be very beneficial and highly valued. Thank you in advance!

Regards,

Leopold Nkowa

Appendix 3. Consent Form.

Consent Form

The aim of this study

This study aims to determine employees' experiences of remote work routines that support remote work efficiency and effectiveness during and after COVID-19. The author conducted a qualitative study to interview employees working from home in Estonia.

Confidentiality

The participant's information will be confidential and used specifically for the study and intended purpose. Risks of the study

There should be no risks in taking part in this study. However, suppose any issues arise, or the participant feels uncomfortable answering the questions. In that case, they may withdraw from the study at any given time and are not obliged to explain.

Consent

By signing below, I agree to the following:

- Participate in this study.
- Participate voluntarily.
- Permit the interviewer to voice record the interview I understand:
- The reason for this study to be carried out.
- All information I provide will be held strictly confidential.
- Any information I provide will be used in aggregate form
- That I will not be identifiable through any information I provide as part of this study

Signed by participant: Date:

.....

Signed by the researcher: Date:

.....

Contact Details: Leopold Nkowa/leopoldnkowanjampa@yahoo.com

Appendix 4. Breakdown of Data Sample.

	Duration of time working remotely	Reason for working remotely	How many days working from home per week	Job role
Participant 1	Three years	A decision by the company	4 days per week	Customer support and vendor specialist
Participant 2	Over two years	Health reason	Everyday	Customer support associate
Participant 3	Over one year	Flexibility	Everyday	Customer service representative
Participant 4	Two and half years	A decision by the company	3 days per week	Customer support B2B
Participant 5	Six months	Convenience due to travel/distance	Everyday	Customer support in IT
Participant 6	Three years	Two small children, able to take them to school and pick them up again	Everyday	Customer service agent for content analysis

Participant 7	Five years	Flexibility	3 days per week	Customer support engineer.
Participant 8	Two years/three months	Family reasons	3 days per week	Customer advocate
Participant 9	Nine months	Child's commitments	Everyday	Customer service representative
Participant 10	Around four years	Flexibility	4 days per week	Customer support engineer.

Source: by the author.

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