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# Self-leadership in remote work

Impacts to the individual and organization

School of Management
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and Business Administration
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**ABSTRACT:**

Maailmassa vallitseva COVID 19-pandemia on mullistanut työkulttuurin. Organisaatioiden sekä työntekijöiden on pitänyt sopeutua täydelliseen etätyöaikakauteen. Etätyöaikakauden aiheuttama muutos johtamisessa on vaatinut työntekijöiltä erinomaisia itsensä johtamisen taitoja. Tutkimus käsittelee koronapandemiasta aiheutuneen etätyöaikakauden aiheuttaneita muutoksia työympäristössä ja sen erilaisia vaikutuksia yksilöön sekä organisaatioon. Tutkimus syventyy itsensä johtamisen taitoihin etätyössä. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää ja löytää etätyöaikakauden vaikutukset yksilöön ja organisaatioon, sekä selvittää itsensä johtamisen vaikutuksia etätyössä menestymiseen. Tutkimus pyrkii myös tuottamaan vastauksia avuksi tulevaisuuden työkulttuuriin, jonka on ennustettu muuttuvan enemmän etätyöpainotteiseksi koronapandemian seurauksena.

Tutkimuksen tukena käytetty kirjallisuus pohjautuu aikaisempiin teorioihin sekä tutkimuksiin etätyöstä ja itsensä johtamisesta. Tutkimus on toteutettu laadullisena haastattelututkimuksena. Pro Gradu-tutkielma toteutettiin osana Vaasan Yliopiston LEADIS- etätyötutkimusta, jossa haastateltiin yhteensä noin 1000 työntekijää Suomessa. Työntekijät olivat kuudesta eri konsernista. Pro Gradu- tutkielmaan haastateltiin 10 asiantuntijaroolissa olevaa työntekijää, jotka tekivät pääsääntöisesti etätyötä. Tämä tutkimus keskittyy analysoimaan näiden haastattelujen tuloksia tarkemmin. Tulokset on analysoitu abduktiivisesti, eli hyödyntäen aikaisempia teorioita deduktiivisesti sekä aineistosta päättelemällä induktiiviseen tapaan.

Tutkimuksen löydökset vahvistavat kirjallisuuden aikaisempia tuloksia siitä, että etätyö sekä itsenä johtamisen taidot tuottavat monia etuja yksilölle sekä organisaatiolle. Tulokset kuitenkin nostavat esiin itsensä johtamisen tärkeyden etätyöympäristössä. Tulokset vahvistavat aikaisempia kirjallisuuden löydöksiä itsensä johtamisen ja etätyön aiheuttamista hyödyistä, mutta käsittelee myös haasteita. Lisäksi tutkimus esittää vastauksia vähemmin tutkittuihin aiheisiin, kuten itsensä johtamisen yhteydestä yritykseen sitoutuvuuteen. Tutkimuksen tulokset tukevat myös itseohjautuvuusteorian kehittämää mallia ihmisen perustarpeista ja niiden täyttymisen johdosta syntyvästä sisäisestä motivaatiosta. Itseohjautuvuusmallin osallisuus itsensä johtamisen onnistumisessa etätyöympäristössä on tämän tutkimuksen perusteella olemassa.

**KEYWORDS:** self-leadership, remote work, self-determination, self-determination theory, self-awareness

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## Abbreviations

| | |
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| ICT | Information and communication technology |
| SDT | Self-Determination Theory |

# 1 Introduction

Even though the world has globally been adopting remote work already before COVID-19, due to the corona pandemic, remote work has seen extraordinary growth (Evangelakos, 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021; Leonardi, 2020). Employees have experienced a rapid shift to working remotely full-time. Microsoft reports, that in their study conducted between January 2020 and March 2020, the use of Teams meetings, calling and conferences grew 500 per cent. (Microsoft, 2020) Another commonly used video conferencing service, Zoom, experienced a 67 percent growth in March 2020 (Leonardi, 2020).

Approximately a million Finns have estimated to shift to the remote work with short or nonexistent notice (Haapakoski et al., 2020). As such, remote work has all of a sudden become the norm for many employees in organizations (Evangelakos, 2020). The popularity of remote work among the majority of the employees can be argued by multiple studies (Raines-Loring, 2020; State of Remote Work, 2019; State of Remote Work, 2021).

Remote work has found to result in multiple beneficial challenges in the past literature, such as increased productivity and efficiency (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Koehne et al., 2012; Martela et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011), reduced absenteeism and turnover (Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Henderson, 2020), increased engagement (Henderson, 2020; Mullen, 2017; Raines-Loring, 2020) and job satisfaction (Koehne, et al., 2012).

Regardless of the popularity of remote work, future research should investigate further the influences on the employee (Perry et al., 2018). Especially nowadays, when the remote work era has become a permanent condition due to COVID-19, and it might have varying influences for employees. Moreover, in remote work, the role of supervisors changes when they have less possibilities in supervising their subordinates from a

distance (Avolio et al., 2000; Vilkman, 2016). Therefore, the concept of self-leadership, where an individual leads oneself, has become remarkably important for individuals and organizations.

Management research has historically focused on leaders influencing followers or leadership concerning managers. However, past thirty years researchers have increasingly concentrated on the concept of self-leadership. Findings on personal self-leadership have so far noted to be extremely positive. However, it is suggested that future research should investigate further, whether more self-leadership is always better or is there a possibility to a growth of problems due to increased internal control. (Stewart et al., 2011)

Additionally, little is known related to the relationship between self-leadership and organizational commitment at the individual level. Commonly, employees with a high level of self-leadership, are expected to be motivated by internal rather than external factors. Therefore, it seems possible that employees with a high level of self-leadership could in fact be less committed to organizations. Moreover, they might be more sensitive to quit, if their standards are not shared within the organization. This provides a new research gap, as findings concerning employee commitment would be interesting. (Stewart et al., 2011)

The aim of this thesis is to understand the experienced change caused by a permanent remote work environment and its impacts on the individual and the organization in the context of remote work employees of Finnish companies. Also, this thesis examines the influence of self-leadership on the performance of the individual and the organization. Lastly, the aim is to recognize the existence of self-leadership in remote work environment and how does self-leadership skills benefit the organization in the remote work environment. This is done by first, examining the concept of remote work and its outcomes from earlier studies.

This is followed by examination of the concept of self-leadership, self-leadership strategies and, findings from the earlier studies of self-leadership in work environment. This thesis seeks to find, whether more self-leadership is always better or can it harm an organization if there is too much internal control. Moreover, this thesis also aims to investigate, if increased self-leadership reduces commitment in an organization.

Lastly, related to the concept of self-leadership, this thesis examines the concept of self-determination. Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory developed by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci. According to SDT, humans have three basic needs; need for autonomy, relatedness and competence. The idea behind the theory is, that when these needs are satisfied, an individual is able to perform and lead oneself independently and productively. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) The concept of self-determination theory is presented and, its relatedness to self-leading individuals and experiences on succeeding in remote work is examined.

## 1.1 Research problem

Based on the aim of the study, it has three research questions which are defined as follows:

1. *How is a long-term remote work era experienced from an employee perspective?*
2. *How do individuals lead themselves in remote work?*
3. *How does self-leadership skills benefit an individual and organization in a remote work environment?*

## 1.2 Definitions of key concepts

Key concepts in this thesis are self-leadership, remote work and self-determination.

- **Remote work** is defined by Messenger and Ghosheh (2010, p. 2) as follows:
  *"A more common name for business services provided at a distance using information and communication technologies (ICTs)."*

- **Self-leadership** is defined by Manz (1986, p. 589) as follows:
  *"A comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating"*.

- **Self-determination** is defined by Savaspuro (2019, p. 25) as follows:
  "*The ability of a human to perform without an outsider's guidance and control, the ability to lead oneself*".

## 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six main chapters. The first chapter of the thesis is an introduction chapter, which consists of the justification of the study, research problem, definitions of key concepts, and structure of the thesis.

The following two chapters review the relevant literature. The literature review is divided into two different chapters. The first part reviews the concept of remote work and the second part covers the concept of self-leadership and self-determination theo-

ry. Earlier findings from remote work and self-leadership are discussed in the end of subchapters.

After the literature review, the fourth methodology chapter outlines the methodological choices of the study. It includes research philosophy and approach, research design, and research methods. This chapter also introduces sampling, data collection, and data analysis. At the end of the methodology chapter, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed.

The fifth chapter of the thesis presents the findings of the empirical study. Results of the interviews are introduced according to the research questions: "*How is a long-term remote work era experienced from an employee perspective?*", *"How do individuals lead themselves in remote work?"* and, "*How does self-leadership skills benefit an individual and organization in a remote work environment?".* Empirical findings are presented and compared with the literature review and the research question.

Finally, the sixth chapter concludes the study by discussing the main findings of the study and then, discussing the study's theoretical contribution and managerial implications. Lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed and future research suggestions are provided.

# 2 Remote work

As introduced in the first chapter, due to the COVID-19, remote work has seen extraordinary growth and has become a norm for multiple organizations (Evangelakos, 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021; Leonardi, 2020; Wynter, 2020). Also, the perceptions of the employees working from home needs to be considered, as the adaptation to the new norm might cause different challenges (Perry, 2018). This chapter focuses on the concept of remote work and the findings from earlier studies. At first, the term remote work is explained and different definitions are compared. Then, earlier findings from the outcomes of remote work are presented.

## 2.1 Definition of remote work

The Finnish labor code does not have a separate own legislation neither it has a common definition for remote work. Concerning remote work, there is a general agreement which has been agreed with EY. Based on this general agreement, parties in labour market have shared a common guidance concerning remote work. (Salli, 2012)

Definition for remote work in the general agreement of EY's is as follows:

> *"Remote work is a way of organizing and/or perform work according to contract of employment/in the employment relationship by using the information technology in a way, where the work, which could also be done in the premises of the employer, will mainly be done outside of those premises"* (Salli, 2012, p. 95).

Accordingly, Messenger and Ghosheh (2010, p. 2) explain remote work as "*a more common name for business services provided at a distance using information and communication technologies (ICTs).*"

Consequently, remote work signifies to a work that is done elsewhere from the normal place where the work is used to be performed (Salli, 2012). Generally, remote work is perceived to be performed at home. However, ICT has made it possible to perform work elsewhere in a desired environment. (Koehne et al., 2012). Precisely, remote work is the work, which is performed in an alternative premise instead of the employer's premise (Mulki et al., 2009).

As remote work is done commonly at home and, at times where usually one would be conducting activities with family or other free time activities, the balance between work and personal life needs to be balanced. When the work was done physically at the office, the rhythm for business days was commonly easier to create and manage. Thus, even though remote work creates possibility to be flexible and organize one's days more independently, it also creates challenges for those who are not that skilled in organizing the work day individually from home. (Koehne et al., 2012)

Therefore, parties of remote work, need to pay close attention to the working time. In remote work, the employee commonly have the possibility to decide the working hours themselves. The employer doesn't necessarily oversee the working hours, as long as the work is performed. This is, however, largely dependent on the character of the work. Some work require performing in an exact time also in remote work environment. Usually in these situations, the employer has defined clear working hours for the employee. (Salli, 2012)

If the work is performed entirely remotely and the working hours can be defined by the employee themselves to some extent at least, clear working hours needs to be discussed to avoid overtime (Salli, 2012). In remote work, the management of the work

day rhythm can be challenging (Koehne et al., 2012). Limoncelli (2020) suggests, to absorb a specific pattern of communicating clearly the working hours and one's availability hours to the others in the same organization. According to him, learning to utilize the technology for indicating ones availability is crucial. Setting one's status from "present" to "busy" or to "do not disturb" is a clear indication for the employee and for the others. This has proven to result to a better management of the rhythm in remote work environment, as the social indications are not similarly present as they were in the office environment.

## 2.2 Outcomes of remote work

Remote work has been a norm for multiple organizations for many years, and it has found to result in many beneficial features (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005; Ferreira et al., 2021; Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Raines-Loring, 2020; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011). As mentioned in the introduction, the popularity of remote work among the majority of the employees can be argued by multiple studies. Raines-Loring (2020) presents, that 99 percent of employees working remotely would be willing to continue working remotely instead of getting back to the old normal working environments in the offices, at least partly. The results of the study also show, that 95% percent of the respondents working remotely would recommend it to others to try.

Similar findings has been found from the study of State of Remote Work (2019). According to their first study after COVID-19- pandemic, 99% of the respondents would like to continue to work remotely, at least to some extent. Slightly smaller amount, still majority, 95% of their respondents would recommend remote work to others.

Interestingly, in State of Remote Work renewed version of the study (2021), these numbers have partly decreased. However, not remarkably, as they are still strongly

rooting for remote work. 97, 6% percent of their respondents would like to continue to work remotely, at least to some extent. However, the percentage of referees of remote work has increased from 95% to 97%. These findings strongly suggest the popularity of remote work among majority of employees.

Remote work has proven to improve employees' quality of life, in overall (Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Raines-Loring, 2020). Other benefits rise from multiple studies, suggesting that remote work has been resulted to improve employees' efficiency and productivity (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Koehne et al., 2012; Martela et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011). One proposed reason for the increase in the productivity and efficiency has been from Bloomsbury Publishing (2005), who enhances the possibility to work more productively, because remote work environment commonly offers a place for a high level of concentration and uninterrupted peace, especially if a task requires strict focus. Also Henderson (2020) argues, that the possibility to choose a quiet and less destructive place to do the work, will result to more efficient completion of tasks.

Furthermore, remote work benefits employers by resulting to reduced absenteeism and turnover (Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Henderson, 2020). Yet, as Mullen (2017) argues, there is a connection between remote work and an increased employee engagement, which should be utilized. Also Raines-Loring (2020) have experienced the benefits of an active engagement between employees and managers. The amount of flexibility, the organization is able to provide for its employees, might determine the level of turnover and engagement. Employees do value flexibility and freedom and in return, they are willing to work more efficiently and to be more engaged to the organization. (Henderson, 2020) Consequently, higher moral levels have been recognized to result among remote workers (Ferreira et al., 2021).

Additionally, the need for traveling decreases. By that, global connectivity and meeting international colleagues gets easier. (Haapakoski, et al., 2020) Also, time and money

are saved because of the decreased amount of commutes and business travels (Ferreira et al., 2021; Global Analytics, 2018; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Henderson, 2020; Mullen, 2017). Furthermore, Henderson (2020) argues, that commuting is one of the main reasons of absenteeism and arriving late to office.

Based on the earlier literature, there are few important aspects to involve in a remote work environment to success in it. First, literature enhances the importance of trust (Avolio et al., 2000; Fadla, 2014; Lyons, 2016; Parse, 1997; Society for Human Resource Management, 2012; Vilkman, 2016; Wynter, 2020). According to Fadla (2014), trust is a vital part in minimizing any turmoil that the organization might experience in its life cycle. Especially nowadays at the time of COVID-19, trust between the supervisor and the employee is crucial (Wynter, 2020).

Furthermore, the literature enhances the importance of sense of community (Lyons, 2016; Mullen, 2017; Vilkman, 2016). People have an innate need to experience fellowship and be a part of a community. Communality suffers as people meet each other's less frequently. Lack of communality and working remotely can lead the employees to feel isolated. (Lyons, 2016; Mullen, 2017; Vilkman, 2016). Moreover, the moral of the employees as well as the level of commitment to the organization decreases (Vilkman, 2016).

Lastly, the importance of interaction (Ferreira et al., 2021; Koehne et al., 2012; Lyons, 2016; Mullen, 2017) and, maintaining a motivation for employees is enhanced (Society for Human resource Management, 2012). It is challenging to a supervisor to estimate the level of stress and the amount of work the employees are experiencing and performing. This can easily lead to false decisions concerning the division of work which can decrease the productivity in the long run. (Vilkman, 2016)

Beside productivity, work performance, motivation and satisfaction levels can decrease, if the employee is unable to adapt to the remote work environment and the

changed way of interaction (Koehne, et al., 2012). It is the company's responsibility to observe the well-being, capabilities and performance of every employee (Ferreira et al., 2021). Furthermore, employees may experience challenges in advancing in the company, due to remote work and less interaction (Mullen, 2017). Thus, an open and continuous interaction is extremely important (Vilkman, 2016; Butler, 2020).

Along with continuous interaction, also the importance of knowledge transfer needs to be considered (Vilkman, 2016; Wynter, 2020). Especially in remote work, the casual communication and knowledge share will mostly default (Vilkman, 2016; Koehne et al., 2012). There is often a demand to share more knowledge and communicate more. On the other hand, parties in an organization are already drowning on information. The challenge is to learn to share knowledge wiser, as the occasional meetings in the office environment are no longer available. (Vilkman, 2016; Wynter, 2020)

The following chapter will present the concept of self-leadership. The definitions and origin of self-leadership will be presented. Following, the strategies of self-leadership are explained and then, the concept of self-determination and the theory of self-determination by Deci & Ryan (2000) is presented and analyzed. Lastly, the outcomes from earlier studies are reviewed and compared.

# 3 Self-leadership in remote work

As according to the introduction, this study examines the impacts of self-leadership in remote work. The importance of self-leadership skills in an employee has grown to be more crucial than ever before. To an employee, who is performing work remotely, self-leadership skills are one of the most important features to have. Part of the challenge of leading transfers from the supervisor to the employee, whose then needs to consider how to work and what kind of demands to set oneself, how to follow the progress of the work and how to fulfill the goals. (Vilkman, 2016)

This chapter focuses on the concept of self-leadership and the findings from earlier studies. At first, the term self-leadership is explained and different definitions are compared. Then, the term self-determination is explained. Following, the review of self-determination theory. Lastly, earlier findings from the outcomes of self-leadership in work-related context are presented.

## 3.1 Defining self-leadership

A broad range of studies have been done to understand leadership in its entirety (Stewart et al., 2011). However, a new perspective was introduced already in 1980 by Manz and Sims (Manz, 1986). The original definition for self-leadership by Manz (1986, p. 589) is as follows: "*a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating*". More recently, Neck and Manz (2010, p. 4) define self-leadership as "*the process of influencing oneself*."

The original approach focused on the concept of how people manage and lead themselves (Manz & Sims, 1980). Furthermore, in his early studies, Manz (1986) recognized

that although behavior may often be supported by external forces such as the employees' supervisor, actions of the employee are eventually driven by internal rather than external forces. Where self-leadership is more driven by internal forces, it can still be influenced from external forces to some extent, as well. For example, in a way where a leader develops intrinsic reward opportunities. However, the core of self-leadership is in the intrinsic motivation. (Stewart et al., 2011)

Figure 1 presents the framework for the process of self-leadership in action. First, an individual observes the situation and then, compares the situation to the standards. Next, an individual acts to reduce the discrepancy from the standards. Thus, finally leading to have an impact on the situation. (Manz, 1986)

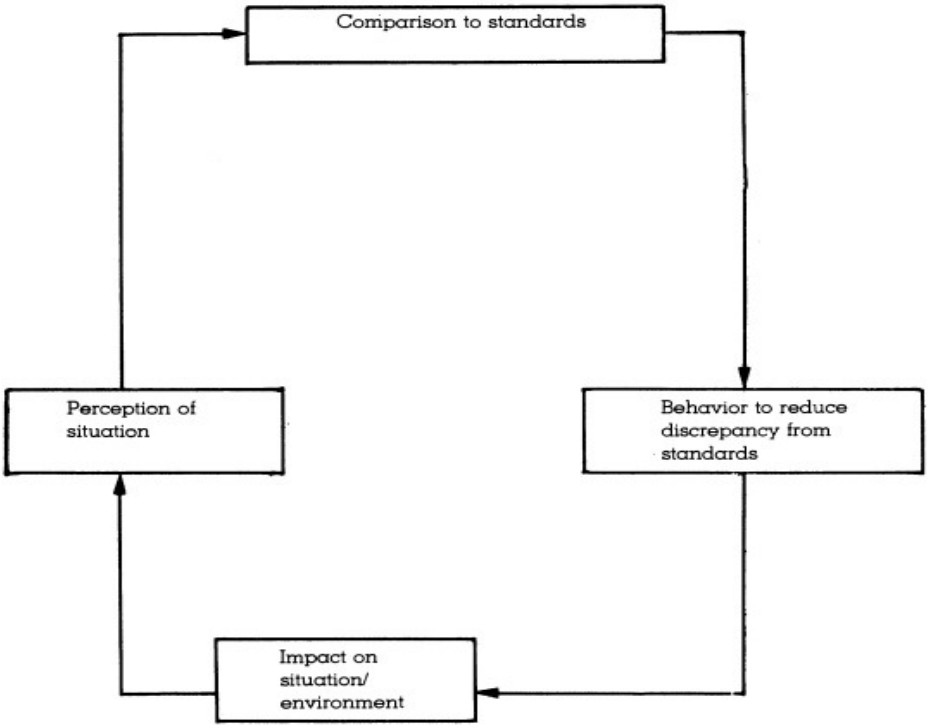


**Figure 1.** Framework for the process of self-leadership in action (Adapted from Manz C. C., 1986).

## 3.1 Internal and external forces effecting the origin of self-leadership

An individual can be motivated by two different ways; internally or externally. Externally motivated person performs to achieve a specific external reward, such as money, for example. (Martela, et al., 2015) External motivation commonly occurs in a situation, where psychological need-satisfaction is absent (Chen et al., 2019). In contrast, internally motivated person performs in consequence of an intrinsic excitement and desire to perform (Martela et al., 2015). Deci & Ryan (2000, p. 70), define intrinsic motivation as "*the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn*".

However, it is relevant to understand that internal and external forces can sometimes be merged when both internal and external standards occur in a same situation. The most important thing is to understand how an individual experiences the situation or his or hers work. The relevance and importance is to pursue to increase the amount of moments of intrinsic motivation. (Martela et al., 2015)

Studies show, that intrinsically motivated employees are more creative and more committed to their work. There is evidence also on the effect on the productivity. Employees with excitement and intrinsic motivation, accomplish more which in turn shows in the profit of the organization, as well. (Martela et al., 2015)

## 3.2 Self-leadership strategies

Self-leadership is a function, where an individual has control over own behavior and thinking by utilizing different behavioral and cognitive strategies. Self-leadership comprises of specific cognitive and behavioral strategies created to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of an individual. (Neck & Houghton, 2006) Commonly, there are

three primary categories of natural reward strategies, behavior-focused strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies (Prussia et al., 1998). The primary intention of self-leadership strategies is to improve one's perception of own efficiency, which increases the probability to experience an improved performance (Houghton et al., 2003).

The purpose of natural reward strategies is to establish feelings of self-determination and competence. As a result, the birth of task-related performance-enhancing behaviors will be supported and an individual is able to form enjoyable aspects into activities. (Neck & Houghton, 2006) Furthermore, the tasks become naturally rewarding (Norris, 2008). Natural reward strategies have an impact on increasing the individual's self-determination, intrinsic motivation and feelings of competence (Neck & Houghton, 2006).

The focus of behavioral strategies is to facilitate behavior management through self-observation, self-reward, self-goal setting, self-cueing and, self-punishment. Self-observation serves the purpose of increasing an individual's awareness of why and when one undertakes in specific behaviors. (Neck & Houghton, 2006) Also Fadla (2014), supports the importance for self-awareness. According to him, self-awareness is one of the most crucial characters a self-leading individual should have. When an individual can accurately understand one's own performance levels and behavior, they can more successfully set behavior-altering goals for themselves (Manz, 1986). According to Locke and Latham (1991), setting specific and challenging goals is highly beneficial, as the process of setting goals, remarkably increases an individual's performance levels. (Locke & Latham, 1991)

Self-rewards can be intangible or something more concrete. Intangible self-reward refers for example "mentally congratulating oneself for an important accomplishment" (Neck & Houghton, 2006, p. 271). A concrete self-reward may in contrast be for example an exceptional holiday after completing a challenging project. Finally, the role of

self-punishment is to reshape undesirable behaviors. Failures or mistakes should be examined introspectively and be positively framed. As a result, self-correcting feedback will reshape the undesirable behaviors. (Neck & Houghton, 2006)

Lastly, the strategy of constructive thought pattern, assists the individual to manage his or her own behavior by enabling the management of own cognitive processes (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). It includes positive self-talk and mental imaginary. The aim is to recognize and replace dysfunctional assumptions and beliefs, as well as replace any destructive self-talk. In this way, the mental imagery and positive internal dialogues are maintained. (Neck & Houghton, 2006) Also Fadla (2014) argues, that evaluating and reviewing difficult experiences is highly beneficial. If an individual is able to conduct the strategy of constructive thought patterns, difficult experiences can be shifted to positive learning and highly beneficial growth opportunities.

## 3.3 Defining self-determination

Another concept concerning the ability to lead oneself is self-determination, which is defined as the ability of a human to perform without an outsider's guidance and control. In a concept of self-direction, employees themselves, as well as their desire to perform well, is trusted. Lavish control is unnecessary. Thus, the starting point is the strong autonomy and freedom to make remarkable decisions with own discretion. (Savaspuro, 2019)

The foundation for the self-determination evolves from the self-determination theory (SDT) invented by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2002). According to SDT humans have specific basic needs, which when fulfilled, have an effect on the intrinsic motivation. People start to experience motivation themselves, when they receive positive reinforcement from the following areas: their own capability, their voluntariness and their belonging to the community. When these areas are fulfilled, motivation evolves

naturally and an individual performs with responsibility, determination and excitement. (Savaspuro, 2019)

### 3.3.1 Self-determination theory (SDT)

In the classical view of an individual's development, people are assumed to have an active tendency towards psychological integration and growth. With an inborn strive to elaborate and exercise their interests, people tend naturally to find new viewpoints, to seek challenges, and to internalize and convert practices. Individuals actualize their human potential, by expressing their propensities and talents, and extending their capacities. Within this classical view, active individual growth is reinforced by a tendency toward organization, synthesis, or a comparative integrity of both personality and knowledge. (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

Despite its popularity and longevity, the classical view also have critics. Operant behaviorists, for example, assume there is no inherent direction to development. Their view is that personality and behavioral regulation are a function of current contingencies and reinforcement of histories. For behaviorists, any appearance of an inner organization to personality is attributable to the fact that individuals encounter systematic and organized relevant contingencies in their environment. Rather than in the classical view, any of these inner appearances are attributable to a presumed integrative tendency. Among classical view and behaviorist view, the field of psychology has multiple different views on issues of inherent tendencies toward psychological growth. (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

Accordingly, self-determination theory (SDT) was invented to provide a solution of the discrepant viewpoints characterized. SDT recognizes that there is evidence in favor of individual tendencies toward active development and engagement. Nevertheless, it

also recognizes the indication of fragmentation and conditioned responses. (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

As such, SDT embraces “the assumption that all individuals have natural, innate, and constructive tendencies to develop an ever more elaborated and unified sense of self” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 5). Accordingly, people attempt to actualize their capacities, sensibilities and potentialities. On the other hand, SDT also assumes that there are specifiable and clear social-contextual factors supporting these inborn tendencies.

Thus, SDT is a dialectical view which concerns the interaction between an integrating and active individual as well as social-contextual factors that either hinder or nurture the organism’s active nature. According to this perspective, social environments can be either enabling and facilitate the integration and growth of propensities endowed by human psyche, or they can forestall, fragment, and disrupt these processes. Latter results in inner experiences and behaviors that represent the darker side of humanity. Overall, personality and psychological growth must be viewed as a powerful potential that requires distal and proximal conditions of nurture. (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

### 3.3.2 Competency, autonomy and communality

In the literatures, there have been numerous approaches to describing environments that support versus thwart healthy or effective functioning. SDT has sorted these descriptions in terms of the concept of fundamental or basic psychological needs. The theory presents three such needs, which contribute the basis for categorizing appearances of the environment. These needs are as follows: the needs for competence, communality, and autonomy (see Figure 2). (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

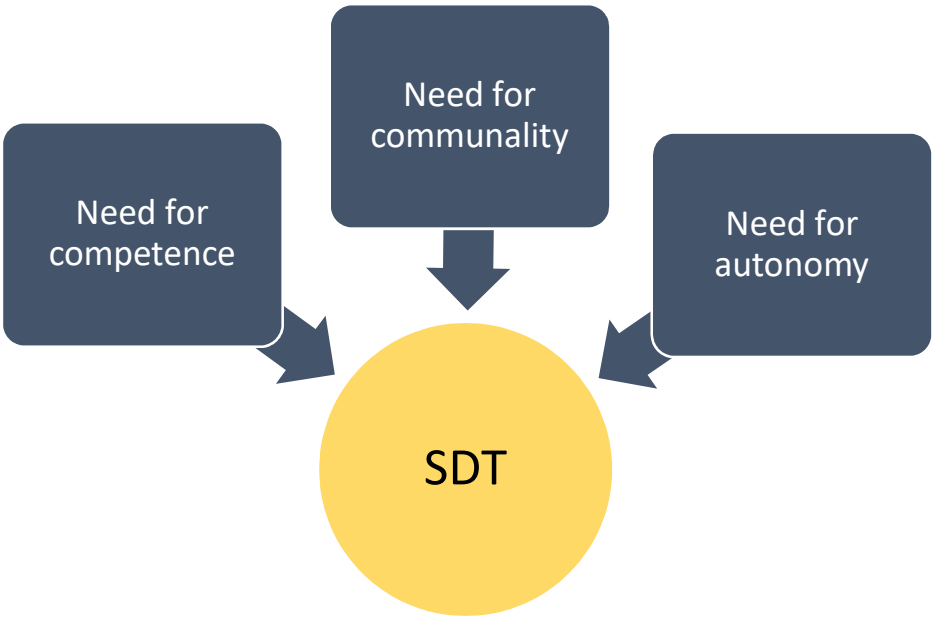


**Figure 2.** The basic needs of SDT.

The first basic need, **the competency**, refers to the possibility to utilize an individual's knowhow and receive challenging tasks to perform well. The competency includes the possibility to learn and develop and to experience success. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) An individual need to experience the feeling of being competent and efficient. When feeling competent, an individual believes to be able to perform tasks successfully. When an individual is competent and satisfied on the accomplishments, one also feels satisfaction which in turn reinforces the efficiency. (Martela et al., 2015)

The opposite of competency is the not-knowing and thus, frustration. On the other hand, learning and developing are part of the competency, because learning new things reinforces the feeling of self-development. Therefore, as long as an individual is experiencing learning to some extent and recognizes self-development, the coincidental experiences of not-knowing are not too harmful. (Martela et al., 2015)

The second psychological basic need, **the autonomy**, refers to the possibility to perform tasks which are interested to oneself and to independently decide the method of

performing the tasks (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy also refers to an individual's experience on the level of self-determination. When the tasks are completed voluntarily, the motivation for completing the tasks evolves from intrinsic motivation, rather than being forced to do tasks. Moreover, an employee has internalized the values and vision of the organization and is able to identify with them. Therefore, an employee follows the commands because of the desire to do so. (Martela et al., 2015)

Papp (2012) also enhances the importance of a shared vision. The purpose of a shared vision in an organization is to foster an environment of engagement and encourage collaboration. Through a shared vision, employees receive a high level of ownership. With that, employees are more likely to be committed to the success and outcome of their organization when they believe the direction is right. A shared vision makes it possible to have a common and clear focused direction. When employees acknowledge that they have the same goal, trust strengthens (Haapakoski et al., 2020).

Finally, the third basic need, **communality**, refers to the experience of being a part of a community, where people are caring and show appreciation towards others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). An employee needs to experience the approval of being allowed to be oneself. A leader needs to offer this experience of approval in his or hers interaction. A leader needs to indicate to the whole community, that in their organization every party is respected as well as they are all cared as individuals. The experience of caring will evolve through common appreciation and functioning team spirit. (Martela et al., 2015)

SDT refers these nutriments as basic psychological needs, which are universal. Thus, these needs are expected to be apparent in all developmental periods and in all cultures. Their core character is stationary, although they may experience different expressions. The concept of psychological needs proposes that a healthy individual continuously strives for competency, communality, and autonomy. Furthermore, humans seek for situations that provide them. (Deci & Ryan, 2002)

Additionally, Martela et al. (2015), have defined fourth need to complete the SDT. They suggest, that the fourth basic need is the need to experience, that an individual can do something good for other individuals through their work and daily tasks. Individuals want to feel that the work they are doing has some positive effects on the life of the people around them. The positive effect can be directed to the colleagues, clients or society. When an individual experiences the feeling of accomplishing something good, it increases the feeling of appreciation to an individual's own life as well. However, all these needs might be challenging for an employee to reach in a remote work environment (Perry et al., 2018).

## 3.4 Outcomes of self-leadership

Consequential research has uncovered positive impacts of self-leadership on work-related outcomes (Manz, 1986; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Park et al., 2016; Stewart et al., 2011). The past results indicate that self-leadership is usually beneficial at the individual level. It has found to be consistently helpful both to the organization and to the individual, if the employees can regulate their own actions. (Stewart et al., 2011)

A high level of self-leadership has been shown to result in multiple beneficial features, such as, more successful careers, higher productivity and efficiency, improved work performance, creativity, organizational commitment and higher level of job satisfaction (Haapakoski et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2015; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011). Furthermore, higher moral levels have also been found among self-leading individuals (Anonymous, 2015; Carrol & Flood, 2010). It has also been recognized, that a higher level of moral commonly correlates with lower rates of organizational turnover and absenteeism (Carrol & Flood, 2010).

Self-leading individuals are also more persevering and better able to improve in comprehensive decision making over a period of time (Fadla, 2014). When given the possibility to make a decision by oneself, an individual's competency will increase with the consequences of either learning from a wrong decision or alternatively receiving reinforcement after achieving to make a right decision (Carrol & Flood, 2010). Overall, self-leading individuals have more positive impact at work and they are generally happier (Mullen, 2017; Stewart et al., 2011).

Moreover, as stated earlier in the literature review, studies show, that intrinsically motivated employees are more creative and more committed to their work (Carrol & Flood, 2010; Martela et al., 2015). Employees with excitement and intrinsic motivation, accomplish more which in turn shows in the profit of the organization, as well (Martela et al., 2015).

Furthermore, future work opportunities and economic growth are born in fields, which requires employees to not only have human relation skills and the attitude to be able to develop continuously, but also to be creative. In these fast developing and dynamic business fields, reactiveness and creativeness are not only success factors. Rather, they are vital conditions, if the goal is to success in the global markets. (Martela et al., 2015)

Neck and Manz (2010) recognized that self-leadership improves creativity in a team level. However, they were unable to identify the link between self-leadership and creativity in an individual level. Regardless, it has been proven that self-leadership has qualities to improve creativity within individuals (Carrol & Flood, 2010; Martela et al., 2015). Neck and Manz (2010) suggest, that mental imaginary should facilitate more diverse contribution. Additionally, creative people tend to think challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. Thus, increasing the persistency, which in turn is necessary for inventing creative new ideas.

Additionally, a high level of self-leadership is also connected to a greater job satisfaction (Neck & Manz, 1996). According to Spector (1997), job satisfaction is defined as follows: "*a person's overall evaluation of his or her job as favorable or unfavorable. It reflects an attitude toward one's job and hence includes affect, cognitions, and behavioral tendencies*."

Moreover, job satisfaction is strongly linked to a work-life balance. Aside of the increased productivity and efficiency, it is highly important to reach a work-life balance, because the lack of it can lead to emotional exhaustion. (Schwingshackl, 2016) Work-life balance is defined as "*a feeling of being in control of your life, being able to exercise choice, and about finding an equilibrium your own needs and those of others, whether at work or at home*" (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005, p. 3).

The level of a healthy balance between work and other life is extremely personally experienced. It is not something tangible or static condition to be identified and kept automatically, when the best level of balance is reached. Instead, it is dynamic and mutable according to different people, different experiences and situations. (Schwingshackl, 2016) Consequently, to reach it, an employee needs to have good organizational skills, and also time management skills and agendas for organize the balance between work and free time (Koehne et al., 2012). Thus, the lack of balance can result in challenges concerning own time management (Guedes-Gondim et al., 2011).

Lastly, if an employee lacks a balance between work and other life, is has proven to harm the productivity of the employee. In contrast, if work and other life are in balance, employees receive higher mobility and flexibility. Then, they are able to make own decisions concerning the use of time and place. This, in turn, has a positive impact on job satisfaction. (Ferreira et al., 2021)

## 3.5 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this thesis. The first part of the theory focuses on the concept of remote work. Existing literature and earlier studies are carefully combined to receive an in-depth understanding on the existing findings on the outcomes of remote work.

Based on the literature, remote work is highly beneficial for organizations and individuals. It has proven to result in increased efficiency, productivity (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Koehne et al., 2012; Martela et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011) and engagement (Henderson, 2020; Mullen, 2017; Raines-Loring, 2020). It has resulted in reduced absenteeism and turnover (Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Henderson, 2020). In addition, financial savings are received due to the reduction in commutes (Global Analytics, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2021; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Henderson, 2020; Mullen, 2017).

The second part of the theory focuses on the concept of self-leadership. Based on the existing literature, the importance of self-leadership has increased remarkably since the shift from traditional office environment to home offices, where the direct observing from the supervisor is absent (Avolio et al., 2000; Vilkman, 2016). The concept of self-leadership is carefully defined by focusing on the definitions of acknowledged authors in the field, Christopher Neck and Charles Manz. The core of self-leadership is explained with the theory of origin of self-leadership, as well as the strategies in practicing self-leadership.

Following, closely related to self-leadership, the theory of self-determination by Edward Deci & Richard M. Ryan, is presented. Self-determination theory is explained to understand its connection to the self-leadership skills and therefore, its connection to the success in remote work environment. According to self-determination theory, hu-

mans have three basic needs, which need to be satisfied to an individual to be able to lead oneself.

Lastly, the literature review is concluded by presenting the existing findings of the outcomes of self-leadership on work-related outcomes. Similarly with the remote work, self-leadership also have resulted to have great amount of positive impact on work-related outcomes (Manz, 1986; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Park et al., 2016; Stewart et al., 2011). These findings are discussed and combined to be able to compare them to the results of this study, after the empirical study has been conducted. Final conclusions on the issues will be presented later in Chapter 5. Findings.

The following chapter will review different methodological choices in the field of business research. Following, the methodological choices of this thesis are presented and rationalized.

# 4 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of the empirical research. First, the research philosophy and approach are explained, and then, the research design is introduced. The section after that includes the study's research methods, covering the sampling method, the data collection technique, and the data analysis procedure. Finally, the reliability and validity of the study are discussed.

The research methodology is examined and analyzed with the research "onion", build by Saunders et al. (2007). They present an multilayered onion (see Figure 3.), where every layer has an important purpose concerning the matters underlying the selection of data collection techniques and analysis procedures.

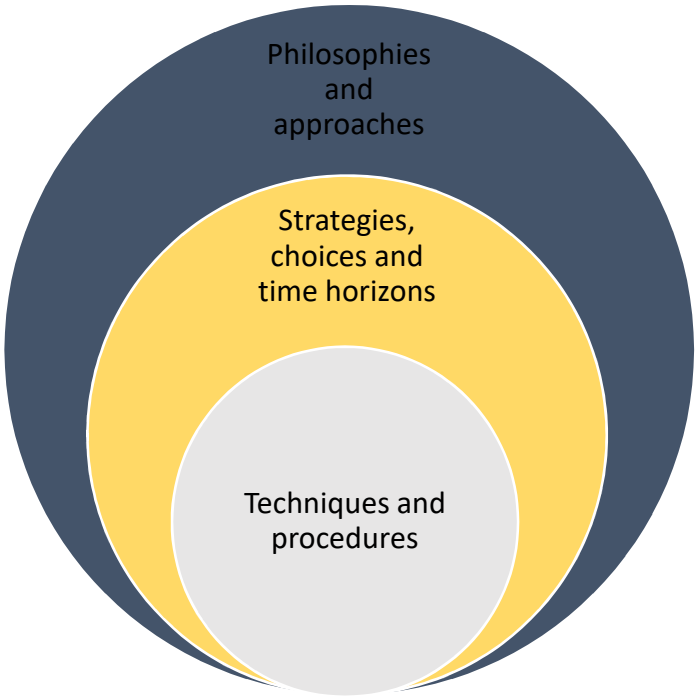


**Figure 3**. The model of research "onion" (Adapted from Saunders et al., 2007).

## 4.1 Research philosophy and approach

The first layer of the onion (see Figure 3.) includes research philosophy and research approach. Research philosophy refers to “the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge”. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 101) There are three main ways to adopt research philosophy: epistemology, ontology and axiology. The selected research philosophy will have an influence on the way the research process is seen by the researcher. Additionally, it helps to determine the overall research design and strategy. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Puusa & Juuti, 2020; Saunders et al., 2007).

Epistemology refers to what is considered to be admissible knowledge in a field of study. It includes three different perspectives: positivism, realism and interpretivism. However, there is no right research philosophy, rather it depends on the answers the researcher aims to receive. (Saunders et al., 2007)

Interpretivist view has been seen to be highly applicable perspective in the field of business and management research, especially in the field of organizational behavior (Saunders et al., 2007). This perspective aims to understand the differences between individuals as social actors, interpreting the social roles of oneself and others (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Saunders et al., 2007). Thus, in this thesis, the interpretivist perspective has been conducted. In contrast, ontology aims to understand the nature of reality and axiology is concerned about judgements about value (Saunders et al., 2007).

Another matter in the first layer of the onion (see Figure 3.) is research approaches (Saunders et al., 2007). There are two differing approaches, which are deductive and inductive approach. In the deductive approach, a theory and hypothesis or multiple hypotheses are developed first. Then, a research strategy is designed to examine the hypotheses made. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Saunders et al., 2007)

Whereas, in the inductive approach, data is collected first. Then, a theory is developed as a result of the data analysis. The inductive approach has shown to owe more to interpretivism. The purpose of the inductive approach is to gain a better understanding on the nature of the problem. (Saunders et al., 2007)

However, Eriksson & Kovalainen (2015, p. 11) present a third type of a research approach, which is a combination of deductive and inductive approach. According to them, abduction refers to "*the process of moving from the everyday descriptions and meanings given by people, to categories and concepts that create the basis of an understanding or an explanation of the phenomenon described*". This thesis used abductive approach by shifting between deductive and inductive approach through the research process.

## 4.2 Research design

First layer of the presented research onion (see Figure 3.) includes research philosophies and research approaches. The following layer covers the research design, which include research choices and time horizons. (Saunders et al., 2007) Research design refers to "the general plan of how you will go about answering your research question(s)" (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 131). Or "how to do things and in what order" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, p. 27)?

One part of research design is the purpose of the research. Literature presents three different classifications which are most commonly used as research purpose. These are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Exploratory research is the strategy of this research. Exploratory research is the most suitable option to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. It aims to broaden and clarify the knowledge concerning the issue examined. (Saunders et al., 2007)

An exploratory research is commonly conducted by searching the literature or interviewing experts or arranging group interviews. In this thesis, the aim is to deeply understand the new standing environment of remote work, as well as the outcomes of it. It also aims to understand the features of self-leadership in this surrounding. Hence, an exploratory purpose exists. (Saunders et al., 2007)

However, this thesis also has an explanatory purpose. Explanatory research founds the causal relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2007). This thesis collects qualitative data on the features recognized in self-leading individuals and how these features effect in remote work environment and vice versa.

Lastly, the time horizon for this thesis is selected. A research can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal study. The latter, examines a change and development over a long period of time. Whereas the first, cross-sectional study examines a particular phenomenon at a particular time. (Saunders et al., 2007) Thus, the time horizon for this thesis is cross-sectional study.

## 4.3 Research method

There are two distinguishing data collection techniques and data analysis procedures in the field of business and management research. These are qualitative and quantitative techniques and procedures. They compose the core of the research onion presented in Figure 3. (Saunders et al., 2007)

These two classifications are distinguished according to the use of numeric or non-numeric data. Numeric data refers to numbers and non-numeric data refers to words. Qualitative research uses or generates non-numeric data, such as interviews or data categorizing. (Saunders et al., 2007; Weathington et al., 2012) Furthermore, qualitative research is interested on the experiences, thoughts and feelings of people (Juuti &

Puusa, 2020). On the contrary, quantitative research uses or generates numerical data, such as questionnaires, graphs or statistics. (Saunders et al., 2007; Weathington et al., 2012)

A researcher can utilize a single qualitative or single quantitative data collection technique to conduct a mono-method study. If the study requires multiple different techniques on either qualitative side or quantitative side, the study is using multi-method technique. Sometimes, it is necessary for the study to utilize some techniques from both qualitative and quantitative methods. In this situation, a mixed method research is conducted. (Saunders et al., 2007; Weathington et al., 2012). In this thesis, the only data collection technique is interviews. Thus, this thesis conducts a mono method qualitative study as methodological choice.

### 4.3.1 Sampling

Data can be collected either from the entire population concerning the research area, or if the size of the entire population is not manageable size, data can be collected by sampling (Saunders et al., 2007). In this thesis, sampling was conducted due to qualitative, in-depth nature of the study, as well as due to the time restrictions in the process of writing a thesis.

By carefully selecting the right sample to represent the whole population, a sample can gather as useful results as a census, meaning everyone in the target group, would provide. Actually, it has been argued that sampling enables the researcher to receive a higher accuracy than by examining the census. (Henry, 1990) This is explained by being able to collect more detailed information as the sample is smaller in size. Other benefits in sampling are time savings by being able to generalize the results as well as quicker enter to the results. (Bickman & Rog, 2008; Saunders et al., 2007)

There are two different sampling techniques, probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Saunders et al., 2007; Statistic Solutions, 2021). Probability sampling includes random sampling to choose participants by enabling every member of the population to participate. In contrast, non-probability sampling does not include any random selection of the participants. Non-probability sampling technique is commonly used within qualitative researches, because it enables to choose participants according to a specific expertise or an in-depth insight of the phenomenon being studied. (Statistic Solutions, 2021)

In this thesis, the requirement for the interviewees was that they were working remotely. Thus, the technique for the sampling for this thesis was non-probability sampling. Only one of the employees had an experience of working remotely full-time even before the pandemic. The rest of the respondents had been used to remote work only casually (see Figure 3).

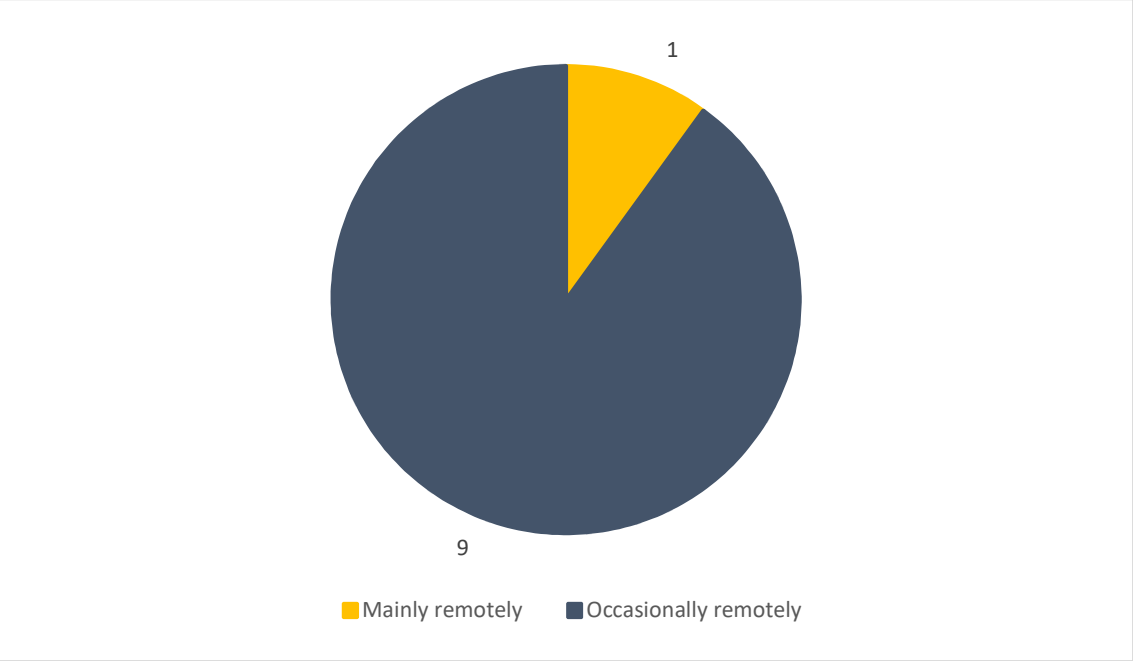


**Figure 4**. Experiences of the interviewees on remote work before COVID-19.

The size of the sample was 10 employees, due to the time restriction. This enabled the interview to receive detailed and informative findings. However, results from such a small sample cannot be fully generalized to the whole population. (Bickman & Rog, 2008; Saunders et al., 2007; Weathington et al., 2012) To receive as generalized findings as possible, the employees were selected from three different companies. Additionally, the interviewees were both females and males, and their age varied from 26 to 50. Furthermore, the time for the interview was flexible to enable the interviewee take as much time she or he needed to give in-depth answers. (Details about the interviews are presented in Table 1)

**Table 1**. Details of the interviewees and the duration of the interviews.

| Interviewee | Age | Gender | Interview duration (min) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 46 | Female | 60 |
| 2 | 30 | Female | 55 |
| 3 | 26 | Male | 57 |
| 4 | 38 | Female | 45 |
| 5 | 50 | Female | 56 |
| 6 | 32 | Female | 44 |
| 7 | 38 | Female | 60 |
| 8 | 37 | Male | 65 |
| 9 | 29 | Female | 49 |
| 10 | 32 | Male | 66 |

### 4.3.2 Data collection

The purpose of the data collection is to assist the researcher to decide how to gather the information from the interviews (Bickman & Rog, 2008). There are multiple classifications for data collection techniques, which do overlap for some extent (Eskola & Su-

oranta, 1998; Saunders et al., 2007). In this thesis, the classifications examined are structured, semi-structured and in-depth interviews.

Structured interviews are commonly used in quantitative research, due to the identical set of questions which are designed to provide quantifiable data. Questions are asked in a same order and exactly as written. Also, the tone of voice needs to be same throughout the interviews to avoid any bias. In contrast, in-depth interviews are informal and the interviewee is given the lead to talk and analyze a certain theme or an issue freely. (Puusa & Juuti, 2020; Saunders et al., 2007)

Semi-structured interviews sets in the middle of structured and in-depth interviews. It allows reasonable amount of flexibility to the interview situation. The interview questions are written, but the order can change according to the requirement of a certain interview. An interviewer is also able to provide some extra questions to clarify a certain issue or, in contrast, modify some questions if they are not relevant in a certain interview. Semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative research. (Puusa & Juuti, 2020; Saunders et al., 2007) This thesis conducts a semi-structured interview technique.

Interviews were conducted in October and November 2020 as face-to-face discussions over video chat. In person face-to-face interviews were out of reach, due to the prevalent situation in the world, where personal contacts were to be avoided because of the COVID-19. Nevertheless, interviews conducted over video chat allowed the interviewer to understand respondents' reactions in a similar way than in person.

### 4.3.3 Data analysis

All the interviews were recorded from the start and analyzed after the interview had taken place. Moreover, notes were taken during the interview and attention was also

given to the tone of voice the interviewees used. Saunders et al. (2007) and Puuti and Juusa (2020) emphasizes the importance of transcribing both notes and recordings to be convinced that data were not lost. Saunders et al. (2007, p. 475) explains transcribing as follows: "*transcribed, that is, reproduced as a written (word-processed) account using the actual words*".

Moreover, Bengtsson (2016) and Puuti and Juusa (2020), emphasizes the need for a detailed transcriptions, to capture also the expressive behavior of the respondents. However, the process of capturing every tone of voice and other expressive behaviors is a challenge. Thus, it is suitable to reach for a transcribing procedure. In this thesis, a transcribing function was utilized to assist in the transcribing process.

The notes were transcribed immediately after the interview. Lastly, the recordings were transcribed. The confidentiality and anonymity was considered by creating an own word-processed file for each participant. Every participant was given a number, so the personal detail was not public in any point. Maintaining the confidentiality of every participant is highly recommended by Saunders (et al., 2007) and Eriksson & Kovalainen (2015), as well.

Lastly, the data was analyzed by categorizing the mass of qualitative data. The data was organized in related parts. In this way, the data can be examined and analyzed uniformly and accurately. The categorization was conducted with a help of grouping themes and using colored highlighting in a place of a remarkable finding. Non-verbal reactions as well as verbal answers were highlighted with different colors to clarify the multiple answers and to organize the different themes the interviews covered. (Saunders et al., 2007)

## 4.4 Trustworthiness of the study

A study to be trustworthy, it needs to have a high level of reliability and validity (Bickman & Rog, 2008). Reliability of the study refers to "*the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings*" (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). Furthermore, reliability is the ability to choose the right methods and approaches to solve the research problem and to conduct the research (Puusa & Juuti, 2020).

Consistency and reliability was ensured by forming the interview questions carefully. The same questions were presented in every interview. Even though, semi-structured interviews allows room for a flexibility according the needs of the interview situation, the basic questions and themes were consistent. Thus, the answers are also consistent and more applicable and comparable with each other's.

However, in the light of reliability, the possibility for biases needs to be considered. The researcher has an own preconception of every issue, as well as personal experiences molding the mindset. Every observation includes schemas and models about what is relevant and how do different personalities conceptualize certain issues. Inevitably, data collection process and the interpretation of the answers is based on the different preconceptions of the nature of the reality. It is crucial for the researcher to critically observe own preconceptions and understand the connection they may have concerning the new observations leading to certain findings (Puusa & Juuti, 2020). Thus, a special consideration was taken into the authors' own perceptions, and their connection to the new observations made from the answers, to minimize the threat of making biases.

Validity of the study refers to "*whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about*" (Saunders et al., 2007, p., 150). Also concerning validity, the researcher needs to take into consideration the possibility of error in the measurement scale or a possibility to bias. However, errors and biases can be minimized by creating and con-

ducting uniform procedures in the phase of a data collection. (Bickman & Rog, 2008; Bengtsson, 2016)

Moreover, the level of validity in a qualitative research can be measured by the wholeness of the phenomenon in the study. The phenomenon should be understood deeply, not only by technical definitions. The aim is to increase the understanding of the phenomenon, clarify it and bring the characters and features of it to the reader. (Puusa & Juuti, 2020)

To increase the validity, the questions in the interview were carefully formed, so the interviewees are able to understand them correctly. Additionally, the questions were sent to the interviewees beforehand to be able to familiarize oneself with them. Lastly, to increase validity, the research process in its' entirety is carefully explained in this thesis. This was done to provide transparency of the research process for the reader. (Puusa & Juuti, 2020)

The following chapter will present the empirical findings of the research. Findings will be presented, discussed and then, compared with the existing literature.

# 5 Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study. Findings are also compared with the observations from the earlier literature. The study examines the experiences of the remote work employees who have been obligated to work remotely due to the corona pandemic. At the time of the interviews, respondents had been working remotely almost a year. Consequently, the study investigates the self-leadership strategies among the respondents. The aim is to understand the benefits and challenges of self-leadership in remote work environment. In addition, the study examines the relationship between self-determination theory and whether it is related to the self-leadership and thus, how it benefits the organization.

Following the research areas, the findings are divided into two sections: experiences of a long-term remote work era and outcomes of self-leadership in remote work. Then, the sections are divided into three subchapters, following the research questions: "*How is a long-term remote work era experienced from an employee perspective?*", *"How do individuals lead themselves in remote work?"* and, "*How does self-leadership skills benefit an individual and organization in a remote work environment?".*

## 5.1 Experiences of a long-term remote work era

### 5.1.1 Benefits of remote work

Broadly, the experiences of the remote work era were positive oriented. Based on the results of the study, the main benefits experienced by the employees, were the following: time and financial savings due to the decreased need for commute, better sleeps

and time savings in the morning due to no need to dress up and, better work-life balance in overall. (See Figure 5).

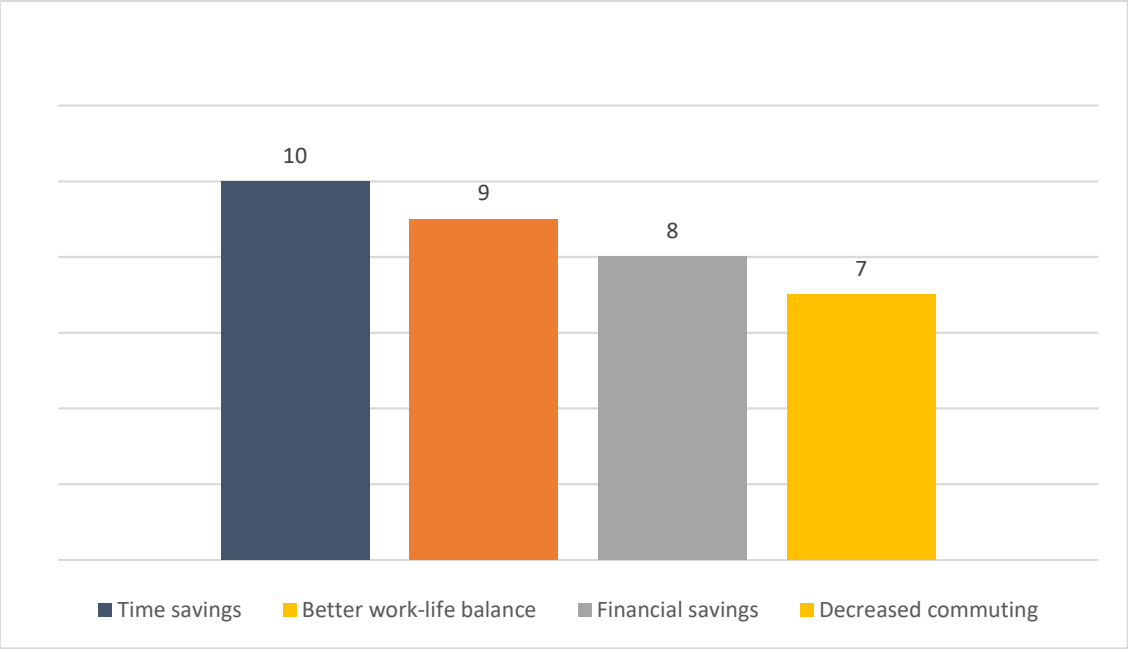


**Figure 5.** The main benefits of remote work for employee.

Majority of the interviewees concluded, that working remotely has had remarkable positive impact on their lives, both in light of overall well-being and concerning the possibility to include their other personal interests better in their lives. These issues were also found to reinforce each other.

Results indicate, that the respondents' work-life balance was better now in times of remote work (See Figure 6). This finding is also supported by the literature, as multiple authors suggests, that remote work improves employees' quality of life (Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Raines-Loring, 2020).

> *You just need to decide not to overthink work. One needs to understand to keep the line between work and other life. I'm much happier now, compared to what I was when I needed to commute to the office. (Interviewee 4)*

> *I've tried to mediate every morning. In the office, it's definitely not possible. Additionally, I'm enjoying all I can by going for a walk to the forest during lunch or other breaks. For me this remote work era has been a huge relief. I have noticed that my daily pulse have settled down and I'm not that stress, as I used to be (time before COVID-19). In overall, I feel much better now. (Interviewee 5)*

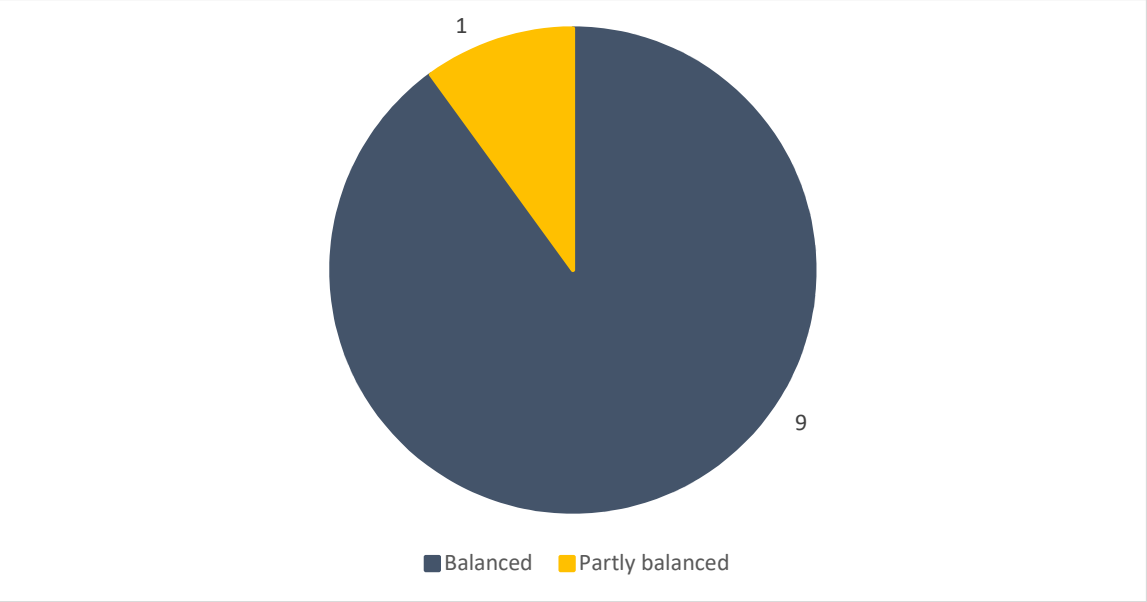


**Figure 6.** The level of work-life balance of the respondents.

Findings from the interviewees also support the earlier findings of the literature, concerning the relationship of work-life balance and job satisfaction. According to Schwingshackl (2016), work-life balance and job satisfaction are strongly linked. Consequently, Ferreira et al. (2021) argues, that if an individual has a good work-life balance, he/she receives higher mobility and flexibility. This in turn, leads an individual to make own decisions concerning the use of time and place, which then, has a positive impact on job satisfaction. This relationship can also be seen in the results of the respondents. Those respondents, who had work and other life in balance, also had higher job satisfaction.

> *I close my computer in the afternoon, when the daily work time is reached. After that, I won't get back to the tasks, even I can see the computer the rest of the day. (Interviewee 1)*

> *Yes, definitely, yes. I am satisfied and I want to stay in this position and company. (Interviewee 1)*

Other benefits of remote work and decreased commutes were related to time savings. Interviewees with a family, experienced time savings to be a major benefit, as they have been given remarkably more time with their family.

> *When I have a quiet moment at work, I can work in a living room simultaneously enjoying the company of my child and wife. These moments combine my work and family. (Interviewee 10)*

Interviewees without a family experienced positive impacts in means of better opportunities to socialize and include hobbies and time for own interest even after a working day.

> *I can go to the gym in the morning, as I don't need to dress up for work. Thus, releasing more free time from the afternoon. I also sleep better as it's easier to schedule, which is especially meaningful for me. (Interviewee 2)*

> *My hobby is in a field of music, so I play in a band. We usually start our practice at 5pm and I used to hurry to get there in time. Now I have more time to transfer and do other things before our practice starts. (Interviewee 4)*

In addition to the time savings, decreased commuting found to result in financial savings. Multiple respondents have calculated remarkable financial savings due to the decreased commuting. Financial savings has been reported to be a benefit, in earlier studies of remote work as well (Global Analytics, 2018; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Mullen, 2017). Thus, results of this study support this argument.

> *I save two hours per day thanks to remote work and the decreased need for commute. Also, I'm making financial savings due to not commuting. (Interviewee 2)*

Remote work was also found to result in beneficial outcomes from the organizational perspective. The results indicate that some of the respondents were even able to concentrate better at home (See Figure 7). This argument is also supported by the literature. According to Bloomsbury Publishing (2005) working remotely increases the possibility to work more productively, especially if a task requires a high level of concentration and uninterrupted peace. Henderson (2020) supports this argument by reporting that remote work enhances the possibility to choose a quiet and less destructive place to do the work. Multiple respondents experienced that they were more productive and efficient when working remotely (See Figure 7).

> *I require peace and possibility to concentrate on my work. Remote work has given that to me. (Interviewee 3)*
>
> *It's easier to focus, when I don't have all my colleagues around me asking for an advice or just casually chatting. When all the contacts come from one channel, they are easier to manage. (Interviewee 3)*

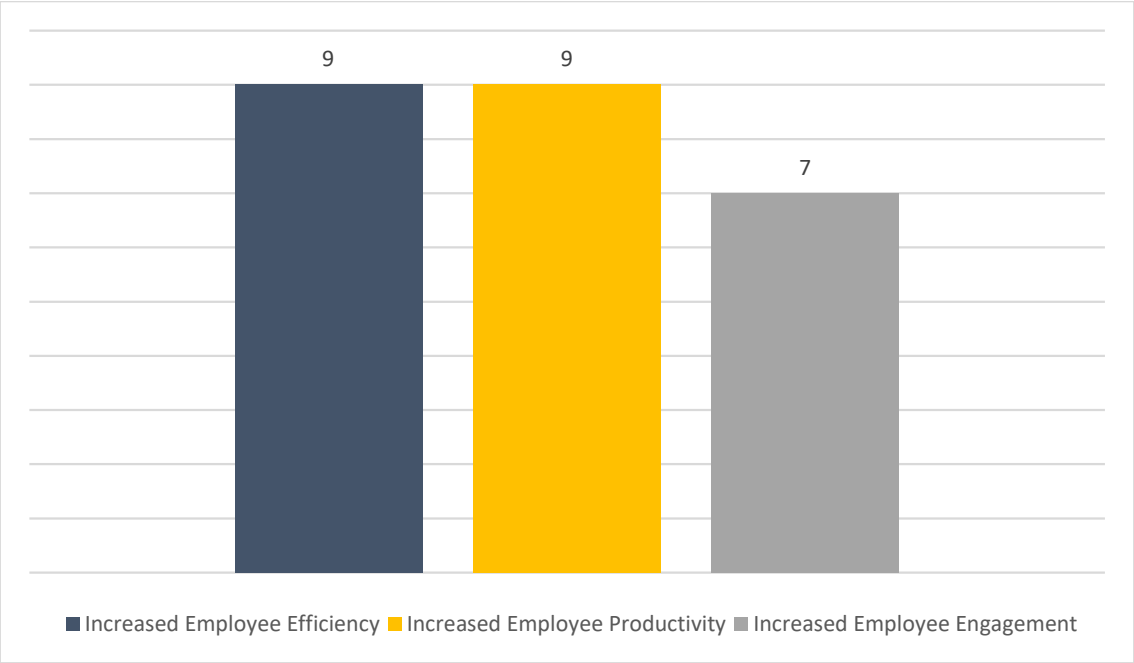


**Figure 7.** The main benefits of remote work for organization.

Additionally, literature argues that remote work results to reduced absenteeism and turnover (Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Henderson, 2020). Related to reduced

absenteeism and turnover, the relation between remote work and employee engagement has been found to be positive (Mullen, 2017; Raines-Loring, 2020). The connection between increased employee engagement and remote work was also found to exist in the present study.

> *When COVID-19 started, remote work was scary. It was hard to focus on anything. However, when I got used to it, I would not change this anymore. It is so cool, that I can do whatever I want in my lunch break. And as our company has handled so well all the organization of remote work and communication concerning it, this definitely has increased my engagement. (Interviewee 1)*

> *I like that I can do my work without direct observation, as the situation was at the office environment. The possibility to self-decide my working habits and places, do engage me. (Interviewee 6)*

These results from this study indicate that remote work has remarkable positive impact on employees and for organization. However, the present study revealed also challenges concerning remote work. They will be presented in the next subchapter.

### 5.1.2 Challenges of remote work

Regardless of the multiple benefits remote work includes, the transition to the remote work has also caused some challenges among the employees. Based on the results of the study, the main challenges in remote work are the following: maintaining a team interaction and thus, lack of communality and decreased knowledge transfer. Also, challenges in time management and, creating a rhythm in one's work day was recognized (See Figure 8).

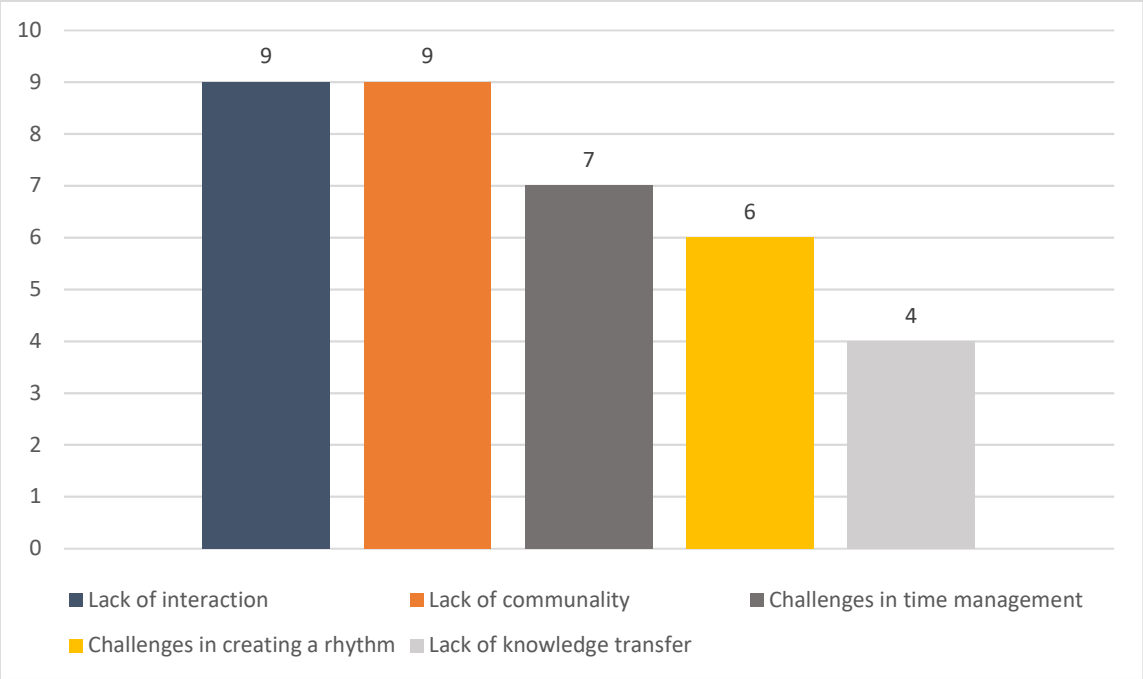


**Figure 8**. The main challenges of remote work.

Multiple respondents experienced challenging to maintain a team interaction, which when absent, leads to the lack of communality. That was found to be the most remarkable disadvantage. Majority of the respondents enjoyed the benefits of remote work, however those benefits suffered from the lack of communality. Respondents had noticed a remarkable decrease in the communality, compared to the time before the pandemic, when work was done daily in the office. The importance of communality has been recognized in multiple studies in literature. Lack of it and working remotely has resulted on employees feeling isolated. (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Lyons, 2016; Mullen, 2017; Vilkman, 2016) This disadvantage of isolation could already be recognized in the answers of the respondents.

> *The negative side of remote work is being isolated from your colleagues. (Interviewee 8)*

> *Lack of communality due to reduced interaction and meeting of my colleagues, have harmed my motivation. (Interviewee 7)*

> *Positive side of remote work is to be able to participate on educations on-line. However, I used to see my old and current colleagues on those educations all the time. That is something I really miss. Additionally, I miss the laugh and discussion also in the office environment. (Interviewee 5)*

In addition to the communality, interaction has a vital role in transferring knowledge across the organization. Thus, the respondents experienced challenging to receive and forward knowledge and information in overall. Literature has emphasized the importance of interaction and knowledge transfer, as these activities have seen to reduce due to the nature of remote work (Koehne et al., 2012; Vilkman 2016; Wynter, 2020). There's no occasional meetings at the office, which have supported these activities prior the pandemic (Wynter 2020).

> *Occasional knowledge sharing has stopped, as you rarely see your colleagues' now days. (Interviewee 1)*

> *It's difficult to manage all the contact requests, as messages are coming from many different channels all the time. (Interviewee 5)*

Remote work was also experienced challenging in means of use of time and creating a rhythm in to the remote work day. As stated in the literature, if the work is performed entirely remotely and the working hours can be defined by the employee themselves to some extent at least, clear working hours needs to be discussed to avoid overtime (Salli, 2012). Multiple respondents experienced that is more challenging to stay in the set time frame and stop working in the afternoon, when the work is done at home.

> *On the other hand, it's harder to schedule the days. Now when the work is done mainly from home, I easily work later, for example. Then I also stay up later and the restitution is more challenging. (Interviewee 7)*

> *Even I can close my computer, I can't close the pressure that someone is waiting to get a reply from me or someone is waiting me to do a specific task. I know that they don't wait the reply today but when working remotely instead of office, the work day is harder to leave. (Interviewee 3)*

> *I sometimes work longer, because I think that as I'm anyway already home, I can do couple more things to lighten the work load. (Interviewee 10)*

In addition, one of the respondents experienced occasional challenges in managing her work-life balance (See Figure 6). However, she recognized that the reason for it was in her own time management challenges.

> *I think it is just up to me. I need to learn to say no to some acute tasks and hence, leaving enough time to manage the tasks planned to specific time frame. (Interviewee 5)*

This finding supports the existing literature on the importance of time management. To reach a healthy balance between work and other life, an employee needs to have time management skills and agendas for organizing the balance (Koehne et al., 2012). In turn, healthy balance increases the job satisfaction, which then, leads to higher productivity (Ferreira et al., 2012; Koehne et al., 2012; Schwingshackl, 2016).

These results are alarming, as time management challenges were found in multiple interviewees. Estimating the right amount of work for each employee can be challenging, when observing the work is done distantly. However, if the employees continue to work overtime, it can result to decrease the productivity. (Vilkman, 2016) Because of this, trust and open communication between the employee and the employer is crucial.

To conclude, based on the study, remote work has multiple beneficial outcomes but involves also challenges. However, the success in remote work is strongly linked also to the skills in self-leadership. The next subchapter will outline the results of the study concerning the recognized self-leadership strategies and then, examining the observed outcomes of self-leadership.

## 5.2 Self-leadership in remote work

### 5.2.1 Self-leadership strategies

The study aimed to examine how the respondents of the study lead themselves. According to the literature, there are three primary strategies for self-leadership; natural reward strategies, behavior-focused strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies (Houghton et al., 2003; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Prussia et al., 1998). Based on the interviews, majority of the respondents found to use behavioral strategy in leading oneself.

The purpose of behavioral-focused strategy is to assist the individual to facilitate behavior management through self-observation, self-reward, self-goal setting, and self-punishment. First, self-observation serves the purpose of increasing an individual's awareness of why and when one undertakes in specific behaviors. (Neck & Houghton, 2006) This was seen in the interviews, as respondents brought up issues concerning the importance of understanding the own job description and goals. The importance of understanding these areas was experienced remarkably crucial.

> *I always first need to understand the whole picture. I need to know in which I can impact, by doing a specific tasks. And in contrast, if I don't do something, in which does that impact. I need to understand what are my long-term goals, to be able to fraction them to a smaller pragmatic pieces. (Interviewee 3)*
>
> *You need to understand, what is your stake in the whole picture? Could it be possible to fulfil without you? (Interviewee 4)*

This strengthens the earlier suggestions from the literature, which argues that self-awareness is one of the most crucial character of a self-leading individual (Fadla, 2014; Neck & Houghton, 2006). When an individual can accurately understand one's own

performance levels and behavior, they can more successfully set behavior-altering goals for themselves (Manz, 1986).

As stated in the literature, setting specific and challenging goals is highly beneficial. The process of setting goals, remarkably increases an individual's performance levels. (Locke & Latham, 1991) Interviews indicate that respondents who had possibility to impact on their goals determination, experienced the goals more personal and thus, more motivating.

> *I can impact on my goals within our organization. The goals are discussed with my supervisor and decided cooperatively. Then, I also know that they are important and thus, these set goals also feel motivating to me. (Interviewee 1)*
>
> *We are annually asked to decide three own goals, which we aim to achieve. These goals always correlate with the goals of an organization. Thus, yes, the goals are personally important to me, in that sense. (Interviewee 2)*

Furthermore, the motivation for doing these tasks can evolve either intrinsically or externally. Self-leading individuals are commonly more driven by internal standards. However, external standards can also effect on the self-leading individual. (Manz, 1986; Stewart et al., 2011) Based on the interviews, intrinsic motivation is strongly present in the self-leading respondents.

> *I have always been the person, who is always up to new challenges. I have a desire to learn new things. (Interviewee 10)*
>
> *My motivation is the work itself. My biggest fear is that this work would just end. Then, I would lack the motivation. At this moment, I don't require any external motivation. (Interviewee 3)*
>
> *I learn new things every day. I get excited of y work every day. (Interviewee 2)*

Behavioral-focused strategies also include self-punishments, which role is to reshape undesirable behaviors, by introspectively examining the possible failures (Neck &

Houghton, 2006). Based on the interviews, self-leading individuals do aim for self-correcting feed-back.

> *If I do failure, I will bring forth the situation and discuss with my supervisor and think, why the mistake happened and how it can be prevented in the future. In our organization, failures are seen as a possibility to learn more, instead of seeing them as a crucial mistakes. (Interviewee 2)*
>
> *In a place of a failure, I do handle it through a perspective of understanding and learning. There's no need to get furious for one mistake. (Interviewee 3)*

This kind of processing is also a part of the strategy of constructive thought patterns, which includes positive self-talk and metal imaginary. Internal positive self-talk was found in majority of the respondents.

> *I will tell myself to stop accusing myself. I need to let the thing go, because I did my best regardless of the end result. (Interviewee 2)*

According to Neck & Houghton (2006), the aim of constructive thought pattern strategy is to recognize and replace dysfunctional assumptions and beliefs, as well as replace any destructive self-talk. Evaluating and reviewing failures is highly beneficial and provides beneficial growth opportunities (Fadla, 2014). However, regardless of the plentiful findings on the positive self-talk among the respondents, few of them also recognized destructive self-talk.

> *I will accuse myself for doing a mistake. But these feelings are not permanent. Instead, I will process them quite quickly. (Interviewee 1)*
>
> *If I do experience failure, it will have an impact on my motivation, as I feel that I'm useless. But then I always reach out to my supervisor, to discuss it. (Interviewee 7)*

Interestingly, the latter interviewee was the only respondents who admit to have struggles in self-leadership skills. This finding suggest, that also self-leading individuals can experience destructive self-talk, but the importance is in managing it. This finding

also suggest, that the latter interviewee, with less self-leading skills, experienced the most challenges on shifting the failures to a positive growth opportunities. This is a harmful pattern which should be aimed to shift to a more constructive direction.

Lastly, multiple respondents brought up the importance of tasks anticipation and time management skills. Some of the respondents used a certain software from the employer, to organize the tasks and schedule them. If there was not any available software, respondents used calendar to organize the tasks. Regardless, all the respondents emphasized the importance of the calendar or similar software to schedule the tasks given.

> *We have this software, where you can mark the tasks to be done and the tasks which are already done. It helps to organize the work load and prioritize certain tasks if needed. In addition to it, calendar, pen and paper, simply. (Interviewee 1)*

> *I use electronic notes and calendar, to schedule my tasks and work days. (Interviewee 5)*

Thus, results indicate that the cycle of self-leadership begins on understanding the own role in the organization and the requested goals. Then, not only managing the tasks but also to be able to anticipate the tasks and therefore, being able to execute even better time management, assisting to organize the schedule for oneself to fulfill the goals and tasks given. This is also found in the literature, in the process of self-leadership by Manz (1986) (See Figure 1). According to the process, an individual observes the situation and then, compares the situation to the standards. Next, an individual acts to reduce the discrepancy from the standards. Thus, finally leading to have an impact on the situation. (Manz, 1986)

### 5.2.2 Benefits of self-leadership in remote work

As discussed, literature has recognized self-leadership to result in multiple beneficial features. Self-leadership skills have proven to have even more remarkable impact nowadays, in remote work environment. The present study shows that majority of the employees who were most satisfied with remote work, found to be highly self-motivated and self-disciplined. This subchapter will explain the results more closely. One major finding was the relation between self-leadership and SDT. These results will be discussed first.

According to SDT, when the basic needs of capability, voluntariness and communality are fulfilled, individual performs with responsibility, determination and excitement. Thus, this enables motivation to evolve naturally. (Savaspuro, 2019)

Management of communality is a challenge in remote work environment. However, it is one of the most crucial element in motivating employees. Communality refers to the experience of being part of a community, where people are caring and show appreciation towards other (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Findings from the interviews support the theory in a way that the disadvantage of lacking communality does harm the motivation of the employees.

> *I got tired on not seeing my colleagues. In a remote work environment, my motivation has decreased since I don't receive the energy from seeing colleagues. (Interviewee 7)*

This area of SDT should receive remarkable amount of attention, as it is one of the basic needs. Furthermore, multiple respondents experienced the lack of communality to be one of the biggest disadvantages in remote work, which was discussed more deeply in subchapter 5.2.

Another character of the SDT is experiencing autonomy. Autonomy refers to the possibility to perform tasks which are interested to oneself and to independently decide the method of performing the tasks. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) Result from the interviews support the importance of autonomy by providing results that show a connection between autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

> *I'm in a marketing team. I can independently choose the material we use in our advertisements. I have been given possibilities to decide. That is really motivating. (Interviewee 1)*
>
> *The fact, that I'm not under monitoring, I'm are trusted, appreciated and I'm given freedom to decide how to complete your job, makes me committed. (Interviewee 4)*

The importance of the third character of SDT, competency, was also supported by the results. Competency refers to the possibility to utilize an individual's knowhow and receive challenging tasks to perform well. The competency includes the possibility to learn and develop and to experience success. (Deci & Ryan, 2000) It has been recognized that by feeling competent, individual feels satisfaction, which in turn reinforces the efficiency (Martela et al., 2015). These suggestions from the literature are supported by the findings of this research, as multiple respondents experienced the feeling of competency to be extremely important character in their work performance. Feeling of competency did not only result on increased productivity and satisfaction, but also it resulted in increased organizational engagement.

> *When I can use my knowledge, I get an experience of being valuable and capable. It helps to energize me during the week and it leads to more productive work when I'm able to use my strengths. (Interviewee 2)*
>
> *It is a great feeling to experience capability. I feel confident and useful. If I would not feel capability, I would quite quickly change a field. (Interviewee 5)*

Thus, based on the results from the interviews, humans' basic needs presented in the SDT has proven to be remarkably valuable and valid in light of successive elements of remote work.

In addition to SDT, the earlier literature argues that self-leadership improves the creativity in employees (Carrol & Flood, 2010; Martela et al., 2015; Neck & Manz, 2010). It is suggested, that mental imaginary should facilitate more diverse contribution and thus, benefits the organization (Neck & Manz, 2010) and is a vital condition for succession in the current markets (Martela et al., 2015). Based on the interviews, multiple respondents used visualization in their daily work life.

> *I have learned from the world of sport, that you need to visualize the succeed performance. I still use it in my daily work life. For example, if I'm presenting something, I will go through it in my mind multiple times to make the presentation better and more professional. (Interviewee 5)*

> *Yes, definitely. I will think things through and practice them in advance. In overall, I do visualize information a lot, also in a concrete way, by utilizing Illustrator- program. (Interviewee 8)*

These findings were consistent across majority of the respondents. Especially interesting finding was from the respondent, who experienced low self-leadership skills. Her supervisor had guided her to start to visualize her work and tasks to be able to lead herself better. This finding also shows that the importance of creativity and visualization has been recognized in the organizational level, at least concerning this certain occurrence.

> *I have discussed with my supervisor about my challenges in leading myself. I have received beneficial guidance towards visualizing my tasks. I have started to color my calendar, for example. I have different color codes, to different tasks and different levels of priority. That has helped me remarkably to manage my own work and to success in it better. (Interviewee 9)*

Furthermore, majority of the respondents described themselves as creative. As discussed in the literature, creative people think challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. This pattern increases the persistency, which in turn assist in creating new ideas. (Neck & Manz, 2010) Persistency is a vital character of self-leadership in a remote work environment, as it assists an individual to be persistent even working alone and when facing a challenging tasks.

> *I always have a lot of useful ideas and the courage to bring them to the knowledge of others. I like to develop things and I always try to make processes work in a best possible way. (Interviewee 4)*

> *I would say my best feature as an employee is my creativeness. That enables me to manage certain tasks and certain clients. It enables me to understand things in a whole different way and think, how to argue things and take them further or develop them. (Interviewee 8)*

Lastly, the research aimed to clarify the possible relationship between self-leadership and organizational commitment. Literature has recognized relationship between self-leadership and employee engagement to some extent (Carrol & Flood, 2010; Stewart et al., 2011; Martela et al., 2015). However, it has been suggested to examine further (Stewart et al., 2011). In this study, majority of the respondents (n=9) experienced that high self-leadership level increases the commitment of an employee to the organization.

> *In my opinion, definitely yes. There is a connection with self-leadership and commitment in organization. From my experience, self-leading individuals are more self-imposed, satisfied and thus, more committed to the employer. Personally, when I feel that I'm trusted, I feel the desire to be more committed. (Interviewee 10)*

> *Absolutely, yes. If you experience your work to be valuable and you enjoy it, you are better at leading yourself and you most likely understand the meaning of your importance. Then you also invest a lot more to your work. (Interviewee 2)*

> *Yes. Most definitely characteristics of self-leadership will increase one's commitment in the organization. (Interviewee 6)*

Remarkably, the study also discovered one opposing argument from one employee, who however, had self-leading characteristics. This was interesting finding, as it supports the argued suspicion from literature that can too much internal control harm the organization (Stewart et al., 2011).

> *I don't think that they correlate. If someone is really self-leading, it might also harm the dynamics of the team. And if the team experiences contradictions because of that, if surely doesn't increase any commitment. At least, one would need to be both self-leading and strong in teamwork skills. Then it could increase the commitment. (Interviewee 8)*

However, majority of the respondents, nine out of ten, experienced that there is a connection between self-leadership and organizational commitment. Thus, this finding supports the findings of literature, suggesting that self-leadership do increase the organizational commitment (Haapakoski et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2015; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011).

Furthermore, results were also found to support the argument of Carrol and Flood (2010), who have suggested that higher level of moral is connected with lower rates of organizational turnover. Respondents who thought that there is relation between self-leadership and organizational commitment, also had a high level of moral.

> *I'm really conscientious with high moral. There is no situation where I would take an advantage of being remotely and not doing work-related tasks. I will perform well regardless of the place I'm working. (Interviewee 2)*

> *Absolutely, yes, I do think that self-leadership correlates with organizational commitment. (Interviewee 2)*

To conclude, based on the results of the interview, the benefits of self-leadership are substantial and should be considered in any organization (see Figure 11.). Concerning SDT, employers should offer opportunities and situations to an employee to experience the needs of communality, autonomy and capability. Results of the earlier literature, as

well as results from this study show that by fulfilling these basics needs, individuals do lead themselves better.

**Figure 9.** The main benefits of self-leadership.

Communality and autonomy lead to improvement of the intrinsic motivation levels of employees. Competency has resulted to increased job satisfaction levels, which in turn increases the efficiency. Job satisfaction in turn, increases the engagement levels to the job and to the organization. Overall, these features lead to a better work performance and more productive working patterns.

Concerning other beneficial characters of self-leadership, such as creativity, visualization, level of moral or commitment, employers should create situations where these characters can be evolved or situations where the employees could be encouraged towards these characters, if these characters are not naturally occurred in an employee.

The next chapter will present the conclusion of the study. First, main findings are presented and then, theoretical contribution and managerial implications of the study are

discussed. Following, the limitations of the study are considered and lastly, suggestions for future research are provided.

# 6 Conclusion

This final chapter of this thesis summarizes the main findings of the study. Following that, the theoretical contribution and managerial implication of the study are presented. Then, the limitations of the study are considered and lastly, suggestions for future research are provided.

The aim of this thesis was to understand the experienced change caused by a permanent remote work environment and its impacts on the individual and the organization in the context of remote work employees of Finnish companies. Also, this thesis examined the influence of self-leadership on the performance of the individual and the organization.

Lastly, the aim was to recognize the existence of self-leadership in remote work environment and how does self-leadership skills benefit the organization in the remote work environment. Furthermore, this study investigated the relationship between SDT and self-leadership. This study filled a research gap, because there was not many studies providing results concerning creativity in self-leading individuals neither the relationship between self-leadership and organizational commitment.

## 6.1 Main findings of the study

### 6.1.1 Benefits and challenges of remote work

Literature has recognized multiple beneficial outcomes of remote work (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005; Ferreira et al., 2021; Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Raines-Loring, 2020; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011). Consequently, this study was able to identify the main benefits of re-

mote work from the employee perspective. Based on the results of this study, the main benefits are time savings, financial savings, decreased need for commute and better work-life balance. These benefits are in line with the findings from the literature. This study was also able to recognize the main benefits for the organization. Based on the results, the main benefits are increased employee efficiency and productivity and, increased employee engagement. These results also support the findings from literature (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005; Haapakoski et al., 2020; Henderson, 2020; Koehne et al., 2012; Martela et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Spector, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011)

Challenges of remote work have been recognized in the literature to some extent, as well. One of the main challenges have been argued to be related to the lack of interaction, which then leads to the lack of communality (Lyons, 2016; Mullen, 2017; Vilkman, 2016). The results of this study indicate that the main challenge experienced in remote work were the possibility to experience isolation among remote workers. The risk of experiencing isolation was proven to evolve from the lack of interaction and communality. Thus, the results support the findings from the literature.

Based on the results, another remarkable challenge in remote work is creating a rhythm in to the work day and respondents' time management skills. This is also in line with the literature, as it has been argued that creating a rhythm in a remote work environment can be challenging (Koehne et al., 2012; Limoncelli; 2020). Thus, these aspects should be carefully considered.

Lastly, regardless of the challenges related to the rhythm and time management, the results indicate that majority of the respondents had a good work-life balance. Literature has recognized the importance of time management in organizing a healthy balance between work and other life. Work-life balance results on increased job satisfaction, which in turn leads to higher productivity. (Ferreira et al., 2012; Koehne et al., 2012; Schwingshackl, 2016). This relationship was found among the results and thus, it

indicates that enabling the employees to balance their work and other life, is a remarkable benefit for the organization.

### 6.1.2 Self-leadership strategies

Based on the interviews, majority of the respondents were highly skilled in their own time management. Time management was also recognized to be a highly valuable and desirable feature, among the respondents' colleagues.

Concerning the self-leadership strategies, presented earlier in the literature view (see Chapter 3.2.), majority of the respondents found to use behavioral strategy in leading oneself. The purpose of behavioral-focused strategy is to assist the individual to facilitate behavior management through self-observation, self-reward, self-goal setting, and self-punishment (Neck & Houghton, 2006).

The study resulted, that self-leading individuals do have a high self-awareness and they are able to understand their own tasks and goals. Thus, they are able to set more behavior-altering goals for themselves (Manz, 1986), which in turn is highly beneficial as it increases an individual's performance levels by increasing motivation levels (Locke & Latham, 1991). Furthermore, respondents aimed for self-correcting feed-back, which is included on the self-punishments. These are all pieces of a behavioral-focused strategy.

Also characteristics of a constructive thought pattern strategy was recognized among respondents. Related to self-correcting feed-back, results show that respondents practiced internal positive self-talk. Positive self-talk and mental imaginary are both part of the strategy of a constructive thought pattern (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Positive self-talk, in turn, assist an individual to shift the possible failures to a positive growth opportunities.

### 6.1.3 Benefits of self-leadership in remote work

The study shows that majority of the employees who were most satisfied with remote work, were found to be highly self-motivated and self-disciplined. Thus, it can be suggested, that self-leadership skills do benefit the success and support the increase of the work performance in remote work environment. Based on the interviews, self-leadership skills do benefit the organization in multiple ways, such as increasing employee productivity, persistency and creativity. These findings are in line with the findings from literature (Manz, 1986; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Park et al., 2016; Stewart et al., 2011).

Findings also indicate strongly on the importance of SDT. According to the literature, all the basic needs of SDT, communality, autonomy and capability, have to be fulfilled to an individual to be able to lead oneself (Deci & Ryan, 2002). All three needs were found in self-leading respondents. Consequently, these needs supported the formation of self-leadership, which in turn supports the formation of the benefits, such as employee productivity and efficiency. Thus, the benefits of SDT could also be seen in a relation to self-leadership.

Furthermore, a relationship between self-leadership and organizational commitment was recognized. Majority of the respondents experienced, that there is a connection between self-leadership skills and organizational commitment. This finding was specifically interesting, as the literature had not fully recognized their connection (Stewart et al., 2011).

## 6.2 Theoretical contribution of the study

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the increased understanding of remote work, self-leadership and self-leadership in remote work. Even though there has been multiple studies examining remote work and self-leadership, this research provides even more in-depth understanding on the phenomenon. In addition, it provides information on the influences evolving from a permanent remote work setting, which is new to the literature, as the situation caused by COVID-19 is new.

Earlier literature has stated the beneficial outcomes of remote work, as well as it has stated the benefits of self-leadership. However, this research provides a deeper understanding and new insights on the concept of self-leadership in remote work environment and further emphasizes its importance. Additionally, the findings present the relationship between SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and self-leadership in remote work. The results suggesting that there is a relationship, where SDT does benefit the organization in a concept of self-leadership in remote work, is inevitable. This is new to the literature, and provides valuable insights on organizations shifting or maintaining remote work condition.

## 6.3 Managerial implications of the study

The findings of this study suggest that both self-leadership skills and remote work have benefits for individual and organization. Furthermore, the findings show that self-leadership skills in remote work environment are beneficial in multiple way. Earlier findings and related theories are presented and then, compared to the observations from the interviewees. Suggestions made based on the research, might be useful for organizations to familiarize with, due to the prevalent situation with COVID-19. Moreo-

ver, it is useful to prepare for the future, which most likely will support the continuum of remote work.

Also the findings concerning the challenges risen due to remote work, are beneficial to familiarize with. Therefore, an organization can prepare to minimize the risk of employees experiencing isolation in remote work environment, for example. Also, organizations can pay attention to the importance of work-life balance and to the time management skills of the employees.

## 6.4 Limitations of the study

Like studies commonly, this research has its limitations as well. The limitations of this study are related to the methodological choices. First, due to time restrictions concerning master's thesis, the time horizon of this research is cross-sectional. However, longitudinal research has possibilities to gain even more in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon, due to the possibility to examine the phenomenon for a longer time period.

Another limitation is related to the sampling. As this research was conducted for a specific group of respondents, there are limitations concerning the generalization of the findings. The age distribution varied from 26 to 50, which covers the majority of the people working. However, it does not cover the working population under age of 26, neither does it cover the working population over age of 50.

Furthermore, the research had ten respondents, who were from three different company. Thus, the findings provide results from people, who are from different organizational cultures. However, broader investigation involving even broader sample, would allow better generalization. The next subchapter will provide suggestions for future research.

## 6.5 Suggestions for future research

First, as discussed in subchapter 6.4., the concept of self-leadership in remote work should be examined in other contexts, as well. Future research should be broaden to different fields of business and to the age group outside this study. Also, a longitudinal study could provide more in-depth results from a longer period of time.

This thesis was unable to identify the link between remote work and reduced employee turnover and absenteeism. Even though this relation has been acknowledged in the literature earlier to some extent, due to the small amount of findings, it could be studied further. This would be useful when this study revealed possibility to decreased motivation in remote work environment, which in turn may have an effect on the absenteeism.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1.** Interview questions for employees.

**Background information**

a) Name
b) Year of birth
c) Position
d) Can you tell a bit of your living situation and your family?
    i. Number of people living in the household
    ii. Number of under age children in the household
    iii. Age of the children
e) How often have you worked remotely?
    i. During the corona pandemic
    ii. Before the corona pandemic

**Remote work environment and the remote work culture**

a) Describe your remote work environment?
    i. Physical environment
    ii. Programs
    iii. What else would you need to perform your work the most effective way possible?
b) Have you experienced stress or challenges due to transfer to remote work and digital working environment?
    i. What factors have caused stress?
    ii. What ways have released stress?
    iii. If you have not experienced stress or challenges, what factors have done it so functional?
c) What kind of culture is in your company concerning remote work?

i. What was the attitude before the corona pandemic?
ii. Arranging remote work

**Leadership and e-leadership**

a) How long have you worked with your current supervisor?
   i. How would you describe your relationship before the corona pandemic?
   ii. Has the relationships changed during the era of remote work caused by the corona pandemic? If yes, how?
b) On what kind of things do you need your supervisor?
   i. In remote work environment versus in a traditional setting
c) How would you describe your communication and interaction during the time spend remotely?
   i. What kind of things are better to solve face-to-face?
   ii. What kind of instruments do you use in your interaction?
   iii. Is your interaction formal or informal?
   iv. How often do you communicate?
   v. Is there any changes?
d) Let's thinks about the role of a supervisor and interaction in your team now in the time of remote work.
   i. How does your supervisor function in a team level? (Motivation etc.)
   ii. How does you supervisor support the functioning of the team?
   iii. How has the interaction of the team functioned during the time of remote work? Has it changed?

**Work life balance**

a) Describe your remote work day. How do you start, do you take any breaks and how do you quit the day?

b) If you think about good life, in which aspects of life do you want to prioritize your time and your energy?
c) When do you feel, that your work and your other life is balanced?
d) How has the remote work effect on your possibilities to prioritize things that are important to you?
e) Do you feel that you have a balance with work and other life?
f) What factors have helped or disturbed the balance?

**Self-leadership**

a) If you imagine yourself as a remote worker, how have you managed your own work?
    i. What kind of strategies/ procedures have you used in your own leadership in remote work?
    ii. Have you experienced any changed in your self-leadership before the corona pandemic versus now?
    iii. Do you use visualization or imaginary practices in your self-leadership?
b) How can you effect on the content of your work?
    i. How can you effect on experiencing your work as valuable and meaningful?
    ii. What factors help you to get excited or energized during remote work days?
    iii. Are you able to effect on the level of challenge you experience in your work?
c) How are the goals set?
    i. How do you follow the goals?
    ii. How can you effect on your goals in remote work?
    iii. How do you know, that you have reached the goals?
d) How do you react when you face adversities?
    i. How have you moved on?

ii. What kind of intrinsic speech have you recognized during adversities?

iii. What about now in remote work?

e) Think about your strengths. Can you name 3-5 of those? How do you use them?

i. How do you experience, that these strengths effect in remote work?

ii. What kind of strengths do work particularly well in remote work?

iii. What strength do you think is important in self-leadership? Why?

iv. What kind of an experience is utilizing your own strengths?

**Commitment to the organization**

a) Do you see a connection between self-leadership and commitment to the organization?

b) How do you feel about the argument that self-leading employees would be more committed to organization?