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**Development of remote leadership due to the
Covid-19 pandemic**

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ABSTRACT:

Koronapandemia muutti työntekoa tehden etätyöstä uuden pysyvän tavan työskennellä. Samalla koronapandemia pakotti aikanaan työntekijät ja esihenkilöt siirtymään etätöihin nopeasti ja varautumatta. Esihenkilöillä ei välttämättä ollut aikaisempaa etäjohtamiskokemusta ennen pakollisiin etätöihin siirtymistä. Näin ollen, osa esihenkilöistä kohtasi johtamistyössään uuden aikakauden vaatien heiltä kehittymistä ja mukautumista johtajana vastaamaan etäjohtamisen esiin nousseita tarpeita. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten etäjohtaminen on kehittynyt koronapandemian vuoksi. Samalla tutkimuksessa selvitetään, millaisia erityispiirteitä etäjohtamisessa on kansainvälisten etätyötiimien osalta.

Tässä tutkimuksessa etäjohtamista ja etätyötä tarkastellaan pandemiaa edeltävänä aikana, pandemia aikana ja vielä pandemia ajan jälkeen. Teoria käsittelee ja määrittelee yleisesti ymmärretyn etätyön luonteen. Etäjohtamisen osalta teorit keskittyvät virtuaalisessa ympäristössä tapahtuviin johtamisteorioihin. Tutkimus on toteutettu laadullisena tutkimuksena ja tutkimuksen haastattelut toteutettiin puolistrukturoituina teemahaastatteluina. Tutkimukseen haastateltiin viittä esihenkilöasemassa toimivaa henkilöä eri aloilta ja maista. Lisäksi osalla valituista esihenkilöistä on kokemusta kansainvälisten virtuaalitiimien johtamisesta.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat että, etäjohtaminen on vaatinut kehittymistä ja uudistumista vastatakseen pandemia aikana esiin ilmenneisiin etäjohtamisen haasteisiin. Lisäksi nykyinen pandemian jälkeinen aika on haastanut etäjohtamista hybridityön osalta. Tutkimustulosten perusteella on identifioitu kommunikointiin, ajanhallintaan, joustavuuteen sekä tiimihengen ylläpitämiseen liittyviä johtamishaasteita. Samalla kansainvälisten virtuaalitiimien johtamisessa on identifioitu kulttuurierojen tunnistaminen sekä kulttuurierojen tasapainottaminen tiimin työnteon toimivuuden kannalta suotuisalla tavalla.

Lopuksi tutkimuksen tulokset korostavat etäjohtamisen keskiössä olevan psykologisen turvallisuuden, luottamuksen, joustavuuden, vastavuoroisuuden sekä tiimin yhteishengen ylläpidon merkityksen. Etäjohtajilta vaaditaan kykyä löytää sopiva tasapaino pandemian jälkeisessä hybridityössä, jotta he voivat vastata esiin nousseisiin haasteisiin ja selviytyä niistä.

KEYWORDS: Remote leadership, Covid-19 pandemic, international remote team, development of remote leadership

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1 Introduction

One of the ways of working that has come to the center of discussions, especially during the Covid- 19 pandemic, has been remote work. It has emerged to become one of the most popular ways to work and has experienced great development alongside with information technology systems. The latest advances of technology, especially in information technology have made it possible to work nearly anywhere with similar productivity as working in the office. The autonomy and flexibility of remote work has increased the practicality and productivity of remote working. (Ozimek, 2020)

The primary philosophy behind remote work is to bring the workplace to the employees' homes (de Abreu e Silva & Melo, 2018). Remote work is positively related to work self-determination variables, for example, adaptability and control, transferability of assignments and the availability of communication between organization and employee via information communication technologies (ICTs). Telecommunications systems are predicted to aid in the enlargement of the global network economy and the extensive increase of organizations across sectors and businesses in the next few years (Vakilian & Edrisi, 2020).

That said, in 2020 thousands of companies faced sudden challenges due to the compulsory transit to remote work. The unexpected change decreased communication between superiors and subordinates, as well as the engagement of employees, and challenged employees to maintain set deadlines. Thus, this inevitable event made many companies recognize how the in-person managerial or leadership styles did not suit the purpose in remote work. (Butler, 2022, p. 3) Remote work has been constantly growing for years, but during the Covid-19 pandemic, it encountered especially rapid growth. (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). As the global pandemic situation increased levels of remote working worldwide, it has also sparked debate over the long-term effects of remote work. Ozimek (2020) states that the observed benefits of remote work are: increased organizational

awareness towards remote work, and companies being more likely to increase their offerings for remote hiring.

In the literature, it is comprehensively addressed that remote work has generally been a voluntary choice for organizations and employees. Nowadays, remote work, telecommuting or working from home by using telecommunications systems, is receiving increasing attention, but has also been seen as a subject of interest before the Covid-19 pandemic. Some organizations have adapted to the mentality that with the right setup, employees can work remotely from anywhere. On the other hand, others have been slower to adapt to the concept of remote work. Butler (2022, p.3) states that, while some companies struggled to maintain the same level of performance during mandatory remote work and pandemic time, other companies exceeded their performance levels by *“building unstoppable remote workforces that are unexpectedly more effective than in-person teams”*.

With the currently increasing popularity of remote work in the present day and adapting to the new normal, organizations have faced both challenges and opportunities. Butler (2022) highlights that it is no longer optional to manage change in the workplace, but rather a necessity. Organizations must recognize that, in the future, an increasing number of employees will want the opportunity to choose where and when it is most suitable for them to work. Thus, the impact of digital work will continue to grow as more organizations adapt to the new normal (Oxford Economics & Citrix, 2017). The trend of global development is increasingly oriented towards digitalization, as well as maximum efficiency and employee well-being. It is timely and prudent to become acquainted with today's changing ways of working.

The nature of virtual work has drastically changed in the past few years. After the Covid-19 pandemic, research has focused on some remote leadership developments such as effectiveness of remote leaders and HR developments. Therefore, the center of attention has moved towards remote working and thus interest to remote leadership is increasing.

However, literature of virtual leadership has increased after the Covid-19 settled down. Hence, the existing literature mainly focuses on industries in public sector and first respondents' well-being rather than remote leadership. (Nicola et al., 2020) Contreras et al. (2020) state that Covid-19 pandemic made it an essential requirement to expand our knowledge on leadership performed in virtual working environment.

Managers need to change their leadership styles, especially after Covid-19 pandemic, in order to adapt to the new normal. Stewart (2006) argues that due to the breadth of the literature discussing leadership, it has become a challenge to define and determine the term leadership. The rich literature of leadership mainly discusses the complicated and multidimensional meaning of the leadership term, hence making it difficult for others to determine it. Additionally, Stewart (2006) states that studies will focus on researching the ever-developing nature of leadership in the next decades. Referring to Sinclair et al. (2021) who underline that the effectiveness of change comes from the leader's awareness of employees' needs and propositions. Therefore, it is prudent to study the nature of remote leadership and how has it been developed after the significant influence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the subject of interest is now remote leadership and, how leadership styles are in need of reformation and development in the remote work field. Butler (2022) states that the main principle for successful remote leadership is to openly define the problems and undeniable consequences, and how to solve them together as a team. Secondly, leaders are required to clearly determine the expectations that concern both work and life. Lastly, the importance of maintaining a healthy working culture in remote work settings and recognizing the inevitable challenges, such as with communication and maintaining collaborative team spirit. Other noteworthy subject is to recognize the international aspect in remote teams and what role remote leadership has in these teams. International remote teams provide increased performance and creativity for organizations when led successfully. Nevertheless, international remote teams challenge

leaders through aspects such as cultural differences, time-difference, and different geographical locations. (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

1.1 Research gap, questions, and objectives of the study

This subchapter presents identified research gap. The study is conducted since the focus of previous research has been on remote work from employees' perspective. The remote leadership has been in need for further studying, especially after Covid-19 pandemic. Remote leadership has been compared in the literature to similar concepts such as e-leadership and leading virtual teams, but it is crucial to study how global pandemic affected remote leadership. Furthermore, studies have shown how the nature of working drastically changed due to the pandemic. Equally, it is important to investigate the leadership aspect during this time. Consequently, this is noted to be one of the research gaps in the literature that is in need for studying.

For this reason, the aim of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the development in remote leadership due to the global pandemic. The study focuses on manager position leaders who have experience of remote leadership before and after Covid-19 pandemic. The study analyzes the managerial perspective of remote leadership. Additionally, the thesis examines how remote leadership is shown on international remote teams. Hence, the study aims to find knowledge on which remote leadership developments lead to successful remote leadership in current hybrid work. Therefore, the study aims to answer to the following research question.

- 1. How has remote leadership developed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and how is remote leadership shown on international remote teams?*

Leaders in organizations must adjust their leadership style accordingly to the remote work environment in order to maintain competitiveness and efficiency. Hence, this

study aims to find answers to how remote leadership has developed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and recognize the key learnings and takeaways to utilize in post pandemic time. In this thesis, the post pandemic time refers to current time when gatherings are no longer restricted by the government. The first objective of the study is to gain deeper and broader understanding of this phenomenon in remote leadership perspective. Additionally, the second objective of the study focuses on understanding how remote leadership is shown on international remote teams.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

Next the structure of the thesis is presented. The thesis can be divided into five sections. The first section includes research gap, questions, and objectives of the study. In addition, the structure of the thesis is presented. In the second section the theoretical chapters are presented. This section discusses the nature of remote work in organizations, international remote work teams, and remote leadership. Furthermore, the impacts of Covid-19 on remote leadership is discussed and lastly the summary of theoretical framework is presented.

After this, the third sections discusses the research methodology used in this thesis. Additionally, analysis and trustworthiness of the data is discussed. The results of the study are presented in the fourth section. Lastly, the fifth section presents the conclusions of the study, theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations of the study and future study proposals. Moreover, the interview template can be viewed in the attachments.

Table 1. Structure

1. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research questions • Structure of the thesis
2. Theoretical chapters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work in organizations • Remote leadership • The impacts of Covid-19 on remote leadership • Summary of theoretical framework
3. Research methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophy • Approach and method • Strategy • Data collection and sample • Analysis and trustworthiness of the data
4. Results of findings from the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote leadership during Covid-19 pandemic • International remote teams • Development of remote leadership
5. Conclusions of the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key findings • Theoretical contributions • Managerial implications • Limitations of the study • Future study proposals

2 Remote work in organizations

This chapter discusses the nature of remote work in organization and what kind of different outcomes remote work has. The focus is centered to the remote work itself but considers both employee and organizational perspective. Additionally, this chapter presents teams that are international and operate remotely.

2.1 Remote work

Remote work was widely discussed in the literature before the Covid-19 pandemic, but the research was mostly concentrated on employees' choice to voluntarily attend to work remotely. The most significant change related to remote work was caused by the global pandemic, Covid-19. The pandemic changed the nature of remote work from a voluntary choice towards a mandatory way of working, above all to maintain the safety of employees. Remote work is a widely popularized way of working in the past few decades since the information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been improved in their efficiency and enabled extensive availability to high-speed internet (Allen et al., 2015, p. 59).

Recent developments in technology and changes in both social and economic relations have led to a result, where organizations are considering alternatives of diversified work arrangements for example, remote work. The definition of remote work has faced a few challenges. The most substantial challenge is the incapability of research to define the term. In recent decades, the term telecommuting has been used as a synonym with remote work. The main challenge is that literature presents multiple varying terms that overlap with each other but often represent diverse concepts of telecommuting. Synonyms used for telecommuting have been, for example, telework, remote work, distributed work, virtual work or working from a distance, among other terms. (Allen et al., 2015). Remote work is also seen as a form of work, which is increasingly used nowadays

by both companies and workers and both categories showed an increased new interest in it (Claudiu, 2017). The definition for the term telecommuting varies along with the research that uses identical terms with the term telecommuting. Currently in the literature, the term remote work is used as a synonym for the term telecommuting (Allen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, in this thesis, the term remote work is chosen to use when discussing work that can be performed outside office and through ICTs in virtual work context.

2.2 Challenges of remote work

It is noted that the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the number of remote workers worldwide since the pandemic required people, who could perform their work from home to transit to remote work mode. (Wang et al., 2021). There are challenges associated with remote work and these challenges arise from, for example, in implementing effective programs for remote working to maintain competitiveness. Due to this, advanced technology is recognized as indispensable for organizations. Advanced technology can be considered as the primary thing in remote work, therefore technical support issues are important to reckon among remote workers and in organizations (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). The constant improvements in wireless communications and data technologies enable higher data transfer speeds to the remote workers and the outcomes are decreasing dissimilarities in network and mobile connectivity (Nandhakumar & Baskerville, 2006). Thus, maintaining the work performance level in remote work settings.

There are recognized following noteworthy disadvantages of remote work. Contreras et al. (2020) address certain disadvantages in remote working, such as social isolation and career progression. The emotional effect of social isolation appears to be substantial in the context between worker cohesion. In remote work, isolation have removed the sense of belonging from workers (Mann et al., 2000). Overall, the relationship between social isolation and depression is significant (Aylaz, et al., 2012 & Prieto- Flores et al., 2011), and social isolation is considered an element of risks related to symptoms of

depression. (Cacioppo et al., 2010 and Singh & Misra, 2009) Challenges, such as the isolation, can lead to health problems. In the long term, people may even face mental disorders such as depression and loneliness that the isolation related to remote work may cause. The isolation due to remote work increased during the pandemic time, when leisure activities and social gatherings were limited.

In addition to this, Conner (2003) emphasizes the lost possibility of comparing remote workers' productivity, practice analysis or comparing results and their progress comparison can be done between immediate colleagues in present. The lower performance due to the absence of positive peer pressure is caused by the absence from an office environment, which can also lead to increased feelings of isolation. Besides, Jackson et al. (2006) underline that it is difficult to retain the feelings of solidarity and pride that workers feel as being in an organization in the long term with remote workers.

Apart from feelings of isolation, remote workers can experience divergent career progressions. One disadvantage of remote work is a slower career progression (Mann et al., 2000). Also, Lim and Teo (2000) along with Horwitz et al. (2006) state that full-time remote working may influence on workers' career progression through fewer opportunities of promotion, due to the absence from the office environment and lack of opportunities in networking.

Another concern in remote working is information security which can form into an obstacle for employees to work remotely. In general, transition to remote work has been seen as a challenge when organizations try to maintain security of their information technologies. Liu & Wang (2014) underline that profitably managing the risks of information technology questions continues to be an essential challenge for organizations and in the terms of organizations' strategies and strategy projects. Hence, the negative impacts of information technology risks are significant. Therefore, organizations that allow their employees to work remotely and operate outside their organization, must recognize

possible problems and attempts of hacking in information technology. These issues are substantial challenges and must be addressed (Evangelakos, 2020; James & Griffiths, 2014).

When organizations are proceeded to remote working, especially quickly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, rapidly deployed systems can leave the resources of organizations' vulnerable. Therefore, when organizations expand their workforce or method of work, the security is forced to take a secondary place due to the need for fast development. Thus, to protect against these information technology risks, it is significant to carefully consider how the new exertions are mandated on a security environment in organizations through the perspective of fast deployment. In addition, it is noticed that the use of organizational cloud data needs careful consideration. If organizations are creating for example, new internal reports or policies, it is essential to identify possible misconfigurations that can be exposed the organizational data to an unintentional group. (Evangelakos 2020).

Nowadays, usage of ICTs enables the transfer of knowledge work in large quantities (Kubátová, 2016). The fact that employees work in different cultural contexts and through virtual work settings is considered to negatively affect employees' experiences and complicate the collaboration between them since the risk of misunderstandings increase (Nurmi & Hinds 2016). Judging from this, the challenges seem to lie in the building of trust in the team and between its team members but also in preventing them from feeling isolated or detached. Thus, these organizational challenges need to be concentrated on by the of these organizations.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the Covid- 19 pandemic had a major influence on the way of working. In organizational perspective the main challenges occurred to be the rapid shift towards remote working and ensuring safe ICTs for working and maintaining quality in remote leadership. Thus, remote work challenged the management of organizations to cope with the prevailing remote work situation, most of the leaders needed to adjust their leadership style to respond to the new situation. On the other hand,

remote workers also encountered challenges, when the home environment changed due to the pandemic increasing distractions because of family responsibilities at home or increasing feelings of loneliness in single households. Overall, the adequate communication between leaders and subordinates is one of the central challenges. Before anything, it must be noticed that communication through ICTs and other virtual settings is mostly incomplete. Nevertheless, the thesis focus on development of remote leadership and leadership challenges are discussed later in upcoming chapters.

2.3 Remote work advantages

Also, positive outcomes are related to remote working. The main favorable results are better achieved balance between work and family life, increased job satisfaction and job performance due to the decreased stress levels. (Contreras et al., 2020) Martinez-Sanchez et al. (2008) note that the benefits related to virtual working methods, especially remote work arrangements concern specifically women and help them most regarding family commitments. Ahmadi et al. (2000) add that remote work can help couples, in which both persons in the relationship have careers, to achieve a balance between employment and family life.

To maintain employees' freedom as a positive benefit, it is noticed that the most essential factor in remote work are trust, transparency, and accountability (Lohrmann, 2018). The relationship and more frequent communication between remote workers and leaders, were associated with higher levels of interpersonal trust and interestingly seen among the remote workers only, versus non-remote workers (Staples, 2001).

Employees are calmer and less stressed at home, as their remote working environment is more relaxing than the office environment. More peaceful working environment leads to fewer distractions. The decrease in distractions influences the emotional levels positively and is also an advantage in remote work if constant interruptions in the office environment cause irritability. Moreover, the need for commuting from home to work has

reduced because of remote working. This lowers the stress levels of employees who feel emotionally stressed to be stuck in a traffic jam due to commuting. Less time in commuter traffic shorten the workday, which enables employees to balance their work and leisure life (Mann et al., 2000). Stress levels are simultaneously decreasing when emotions of irritability, frustration and anger that relate to stress of commuting decrease. Reduced need for commuter traffic is shortening the workday, which enables employees to balance their work and leisure life (Mann et al., 2000). The impact of reduced commuter traffic reduces greenhouse gas emissions that are seen as primary concern due to their influence on climate change. In addition, Beastley et al. (2001) agree that remote work causes less environmental impact and, in that case, has a positive impact on society at large. As a conclusion, organizations, which participate in environmentally friendly aims to decrease their environmental impact could apply remote work into the organizational strategy to achieve the targeted goal (Siha & Monroe, 2006).

2.4 International remote work teams

The environment in remote work exists through virtual settings and through information communications technologies, which is seen as suppressing the wealth of cultural backgrounds in international organizations. In this regard, effective communication between remote workers and their superiors is an essential factor in achieving mutual trust and efficient work performance. The studies discussing innovative outcomes are increasingly encouraging organizations to leverage possibilities by cross-cultural employees who have the variable collection of knowledge and ideas due to their different cultural backgrounds (Hoever et al. 2012). In literature, researchers have discussed that in a context of cross-cultural organization, strategic advantages for organizations can be provided through multicultural teams (Earley & Gibson, 2002; Shapiro et al., 2005). For instance, the usage of skills related to culture and language in international collaboration leads in higher levels of skill diversity (Barner- Rasmussen, et al., 2014).

The increased set of skill variety can increase requirements to be dependent on communication systems and the urge for developing coordination to match the distances and time zones (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). The increased willingness to learn and cooperate with people from other cultures, along with individual's appreciation of cultural diversity is related to employees' previous experiences from cultural differences (Orr & Scott, 2008). Judging from this, employees with multicultural background have a better tendency towards the willingness and the ability, to promote the creative outcome of culturally diverse teams (Jang, 2017).

Nonetheless, Chand et al. (2009) discuss the understanding of global teams and underlines that people have, due to their cultural background, differences in attitudes and behaviors in time management, efficiency related orientation, competitiveness, and conception of social responsibility. Hence, it is recognized that each location brings up different behavior in individuals. However, transferring them to another location, the new behaving according to the new location were adapted by individuals. Thus, this kind of adaptation is delineated away from the form of remote work rises possibilities to cultural diversity challenges in international context. (Chand et al., 2009). Regardless of these advantages, global virtual teams encounter more communication challenges than face-to-face teams. The lost or distortedness of traditional communication mechanisms relate to the communication via ICTs, where some of both vocal and nonverbal communication are often missed.

Remote work enables people to work despite the personal location or time zone. Thus, the globalization has been in the center of increasing remote working globally. (Ferreira et al., 2021) The main benefit in international remote teams is the possibility to utilize diversity based on people with different cultural background and mindsets. Thus, this kind of diversity offers valuable input to challenges in organizational level, for example in strategic issues, when people are remotely gathered to work together. (Fried & Hansson, 2014)

Although remote work is considered complex, especially in international context, the understanding of cultural backgrounds, time zone and real-time connection benefit the employer and employee. The importance of providing yearly face-to-face meetings among international remote workers is noticed, thus the aim is to increase the feelings of belongingness. In person meetings also positively drives trust building. Hence, these face-to-face meetings require careful consideration, scheduling, and goal orientated mindset in order to be successful and beneficial. (Haapakoski et al., 2020 pp. 62-65)

Moreover, Haapakoski et al. (2020) state that meetings in remote work nature specifically require consideration and planning when operating with international teams since work cultures differ nationally. This rises challenges into consideration when meetings are for international teams. The challenge occurs, for example, between Asian and United States' work cultures, where the core difference is the pace of the meetings. Work culture in Asia desires the ideology where everyone attending the meeting is given enough time to prepare their part. On the contrary, work culture in the United States bases on spontaneous and rapid movements. (Haapakoski et al., 2020 pp. 62-65)

Overall, the main importance is to provide the structure and goals of the meeting to all the participants in international remote teams. Additionally, it is significant to share what the participants of the meeting are required to provide in the meeting and whether there are further next steps needed in the future. (Haapakoski et al. 2020)

3 Remote leadership

The third chapter focuses on remote leadership. It provides an overview of theoretical frameworks related to remote leadership in virtual context. Furthermore, it discusses what kind of nature remote leadership has in general and in organizations. Additionally, the role and significance of remote leadership in international teams are discussed.

3.1 Remote leadership in organizations

Nowadays organizations are required to deal with continual changes such as technological development, globalization and competition and other sudden circumstances. The unexpected global pandemic, the Covid-19, challenged the leaders of organizations in new different ways. In general, Yukl (2012) define as the actions that impact people and factors in an organization, which aim for common success or share a common interest. The focus on leadership is on the behavioral factors that influence personnel, work performance, and organization itself. (Yukl, 2012).

Other conceptions are also identified. Rosari (2019, pp. 19-20) discusses two different definitions of leadership and identifies the central factors in both definitions. The first conception considers leadership as an action, which directs a group to a certain course without compelling forces. Additionally, this definition explains leadership as a process that gives guidance to people to act on their ideas. In turn, the second definition understands leadership as a relationship, which has mutual influence on both the parties in the relationship and who have mutual intentions and aims. Thus, the central factor in the conception of leadership relationships is that the relationship is built on influence. This influence is defined “ *as using persuasion to have an impact on other people in a relationship*”. (Rosari, 2019, p.20). Moreover, Gandrita et al. (2022) describe leadership as an interpersonal relationship where the leaders have certain influence onto their

followers. Hence, this process is associated with the supervision between leaders and subordinates in organizations.

However, the sudden event of Covid-19 pandemic required developments especially in virtual leadership in order to maintain successfulness in the business operations in remote work (Contreras et al., 2020). Also, Whiteside and Dixon (2022) highlighting the importance of remote leadership, which is considered as a main factor in order to gain successful outcomes and efficiency in remote working. They discuss the change in remote work's nature since the COVID-19 outburst in 2020, which required workplaces to set the remote work as a mandatory way of working. Before the global pandemic, the nature of remote work was concentrating on certain common factors, such as remote work being a way to reward employees, or it was based on the employee's status and work tasks. (Whiteside & Dixon, 2022).

Henderikx and Stoffers (2022) address that the most significant and noteworthy skills required from leaders in virtual work settings are soft skills, communication skills and understanding of digital era. In addition, it is considered equally important to have skills in teambuilding and understanding the individual's adaptability and flexibility. However, they recognize the soft skills to be a necessity in interpersonal communications in order to create rewarding business relationships. Marin- Zapata et al. (2022) define soft skills as interpersonal skills, where both the social and people skills are essential. Nevertheless, soft skills address those required emotional skills, which help to manage the employee performance and motivation in different work situations. Additionally, it is recommended that leaders over explain or communicate through ICTs to balance the lack of in person contact and in order to increase mutual trust in virtual conversations (Krehl and Büttgen, 2022).

Overall, the central skills in remote leadership are emotional intelligence, ability to motivate and build a team (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022). They address that leaders are required to have additional competences in order to succeed in today's workplaces. Since

all present workplaces are digitalized to some level, there is a need for a deeper understanding in leadership challenges in technology-based work environment. Therefore, managers are required to foster flexibility and support creating apprehensive relationships with digital technologies. (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022).

Borth (2020) discusses following four main characteristics in successful remote leadership are the following factors, clear expectations, rightful focus, thorough communication and committing to flexibility. Therefore, remote leaders are required to establish understandable and direct expectations for employees in their remote work settings, meaning that every employee fully understands what is required from them in their daily work and projects. Secondly, the rightful focus is required from remote leaders since it is seen to increase trust between leaders and employees and thus decrease micromanaging. The focus is required to be on the key factors of work tasks, which demand empathy from remote leaders to understand employees' feelings and family related issues while working remotely (Borth, 2020).

The successful remote leadership demands constant communication between leaders and employees. Borth (2020), highlights the importance of mutual communication and making time to arrange these along with daily working. Lastly, remote leaders are required to commit to be flexible in their work whether they are working at the office or remotely. According to Kelley and Kelloway (2012) communication through ICTs is considered to increase misunderstandings when nonverbal indications are diminished. This nonverbal body language covers two thirds of the contents of the messages. Therefore, it is highly expected that not only mutual understanding decreases but also creating the correct perceptions of others face inevitable challenges. Additionally other negative outcomes are recognized, such as decreased leader impact and lower team cohesiveness. Overall, communication via ICTs is considered to be more indifferent than in-person communication and thus it is perceived negatively. (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012).

It stated that the one of the most significant factors in remote leadership is the context. (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012) The context matters more in remote leadership than in in-person leadership due to the lack of previously mentioned non-verbal expressions. Overall, remote leadership should concentrate on scheduling planned meetings for communicating to maintain spontaneous atmosphere of communication. Thus, frequent communication is stated to result positive outcomes in remote leadership. (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012).

As a result, contemporary technology-based work environment requires leaders to be people centered. Leaders in organizations are required to have skills in adaptation, supporting employees, and understanding them in order to thrive on constantly changing working environment (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022). Additionally, Whiteside and Dixon (2022) found certain solutions in authentic leadership style. The central ideology in authentic leadership is to cherish soft skill-based leadership style. Thus, the leaders need to foster the authentic leadership style to lead efficiently in remote work context. Their study implied that employees' needs for positivity, transparent leadership, and empathy are recognizable in remote work. Authentic leadership style fosters positive psychology, and three main elements are identified. These elements are leaders' self-awareness, moral perspective, and relational transparency. Therefore, by utilizing authentic leadership style, leaders can answer to the emerged needs of their employees. (Whiteside & Dixon, 2022).

Whiteside and Dixon (2022) state that challenge related to work- life balance was solved by giving the employees the authority to design the best schedule between work and family commitments in their day-to-day life. On the other hand, issue with isolation was solved by raising the number of remote meetings between leaders and employees. Additionally, they highlight the need for strong social support during remote work. Thus, the need lies in increasing positive psychology and organizational identity among employees. These goals are reached by transparent reflection and being aware of the need of positive cooperation and thus, acting accordingly by increasing the amount of both

group and one- to- one meetings. Therefore, the authentic leadership style has been seen to give answers to work- life integration and isolation challenges. (Whiteside & Dixon, 2022).

3.2 Well-being of leaders

One noteworthy aspect is to focus on the well-being of leaders. Yemiscigil et al. (2022) state that psychological well-being of leaders decreases mental health risks and risks of stress. Therefore, good psychological well-being is important since it is considered to influence on leaders' performance directly on both team and individual level. In addition, Hou et al. (2022) support this by addressing the positive long-term developments for organizations when leaders' well-being is considered and maintained. However, Yemiscigil et al. (2022) state that the Covid-19 pandemic influenced on leaders' well-being as well. In terms of leadership developments, it is essential to understand how the leaders' well-being influences on their leadership performance. Generally, well-being of leaders considers stress management and emotional resilience. (Yemiscigil et al.,2022).

Well-being of leaders is a broader topic than just stress management and emotional resilience. Yemiscigil et al. (2022) state that leaders should focus on their identity as a leader. Hence, they address that leaders can increase their knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses when they are challenged to identify themselves in their leadership role. Focusing on identity-based reflection, leaders can further focus on self-development, increase awareness, and therefore decrease work related stress.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic most leaders faced sudden changes and new challenges related to their daily work tasks. Thus, most leaders encountered a new situation in reflecting their leadership identity in remote work context since in-person leadership styles do not automatically fit into remote work context. Changes in leaders' well-being are seen to vary individually due to differences in age, gender, business industry, and other personality factors. (Yemiscigil et al.,2022).

3.3 Virtual teams

Virtual teams are understood as a team that works collaboratively from different locations or work units. Thus, the core idea of the definition evolves around “*the dimensions of geographic distribution and use of digital information and communication technologies*”. (Mayer et al., 2023 p. 3) Therefore, the members of virtual teams have very little in-person contact with one another and due to this the work is mainly independent. Referring to Han and Hazard (2022) the essential factor in virtual teams is the work happening through ICTs and across different time zones. In addition, they state that virtual teams are considered to attract and to enable working with proficient employees globally.

Additionally, Liao (2017) defines virtual teams by identifying three essential elements, the structure of the team, location, and environment of the work. The structure of the team explains that virtual teams consist of individuals with shared work tasks and simultaneously hold mutual accountability on the goal. Secondly, the virtual teams perform from different locations around the world, across time zones, and therefore lack in-person meetings and contact. Lastly, the virtual team is dependent on its technological working environment. According to Han and Hazard (2022) the virtual teams differ from face-to face teams since they lack physical interactions and contacts among other team members, making it challenging for leaders to lead the team. Furthermore, virtual teams challenge to understand interpersonal communication when these are transferred through virtual work settings (Han & Hazard, 2022).

According to Liao (2017) virtual teams are beneficial for both employers and employees working in virtual teams. Since the nature of virtual teams allows employees to enjoy work flexibility, it is easier for them to also maintain work-life balance. Secondly, the popularity of virtual teams consists of the achieved work satisfaction among employees.

Nowadays, modern organizations have adapted the usage of virtual teams due to its popularity.

Furthermore, Liao (2017) add that the virtual teams are considered to hold the competitive advance since they promote the global attraction towards organization and make it possible to work with professionals despite the geographic location. Supporting the beneficial aspect of virtual teams, Gibson, and Gibbs (2006) discuss the conducted outcomes of international remote teams including cultural backgrounds and experiences, which make them versatile. They state that problem solving in international remote teams is shown to improve creativity.

The central enabler in virtual teams is the advanced use of ICTs. (Liao, 2017). Additionally, research conducted by Batirlik et al. (2022) shows that the organizational need to meet the competitive standards in the current economy requires organizations to gather the right people at the right time to achieve set goals. Therefore, virtual teams have been seen as a result to this. (Batirlik et al., 2022)

3.4 Leadership in virtual teams

The role of leadership in virtual teams encounters challenges since the high performance of virtual teams requires effective leadership. The challenges are built to the factors such as, building relationship and trust, which both require more investment in time since the virtual work environment dispel social richness. Thus, Mayer et al. (2023) state that leadership is also needed in virtual teams to overcome conflict situations. Liao (2017) adds that virtual teams challenge leadership in ways where the leaders are required to focus especially on coordinating and facilitating the teams' process. Nevertheless, the main identified challenge lies in leadership effectiveness. (Liao, 2017). Han and Hazard (2022) also underline the importance of leadership in virtual teams in order to achieve the highest effectiveness among team members and therefore for the organization.

Leadership is seen as an ability to purposely drive people to achieve results, which would not happen without successful influence of the leader on their followers. (Benzel 2021) In leadership the relationship between superior and subordinate requires four main elements in order to complete its purpose. At first, the relationship requires influence, secondly the relationship includes two parties, leaders, and followers. Next, the parties in the relationship aim for substantial changes and lastly, the leaders and followers promote common intentions (Rosari, 2019, p. 25). Contreras et al. (2020) add that especially remote work increases risks in supervising sensitive information when employees are given more autonomy in terms of time and space. This challenges virtual leadership when regular leadership styles do not automatically fit into the technological work environment and fostering mutual relationship is also performed via ICTs. Overall, in this thesis leadership includes influence between at least two parties when it is performed remotely.

3.4.1 Shared leadership in virtual teams

Shared leadership is generally defined as leadership style where traditional position of charge has divided between two leaders instead of one (Han & Hazard, 2022). According to them, in this leadership style one person shares leadership with another person, therefore, the responsibilities are shared among defined leaders. Shared leadership is understood through shared values and co-influencing people towards set goals (Han & Hazard, 2022). Mayer et al. (2023 p. 5) support this by describing shared leadership as emergent and dynamic. Thus, the shared leadership challenges the traditional and hierarchical one-person in charge situation. In the perspective of virtual teams, shared leadership emerges in more challenging ways since the communication mainly happens through ICTs. Thus, the virtual working environment fades facial expressions and non-verbal impressions away. However, shared leadership in virtual teams has indicated positive results in making virtual teams successful. (Mayer et al., 2023)

Shared leadership style increases the effectuation of virtual teams since team members are understood to be aware of the workload of other people, for example in a project.

Furthermore, Han and Hazard (2022) state that shared leadership fosters collaboration and therefore increases trust-building, through knowledge sharing and co-coordinating work. Overall, shared leadership shares similar themes in various research, for example themes such as shared decision making, team building mindset and reciprocate influence and cooperation. Thus, all the team members, individuals and leaders have an essential role in completing the common goal together. (Han & Hazard, 2022).

3.4.2 Task- and relationship- oriented leadership in virtual teams

As an outcome of globalization, digitalization, and fast improvements in technological developments, leadership has risen to the focus in global virtual teams as well. Referring to Batirlik et al. (2022) who understand that in order to measure the performance of virtual teams, leadership is required to be in the focus.

Therefore, Batirlik et al. (2022) state that the classical leadership method has identified two separate behaviors for leading virtual teams, task- oriented and relationship- oriented leadership a. The first mentioned behavior, task- oriented approach, concentrates on separating the roles and responsibilities between leaders and the members of the team. The task-oriented leadership in virtual teams aims to assure guidance to achieve the given tasks, and operating business processes. In addition to this, Mayer et al. (2023) state that the task-oriented leadership is challenged when the nature of shared task increases to be complex and when team members are dependent on others based on their tasks. Overall, the central behavior in task-oriented leadership is providing that all the available resources are used in profitable manner in the team, and that the members perform successfully within given time and place. (Batirlik et al., 2022)

Relationship-oriented leadership approach, on the other hand, leads virtual teams through support and well- being of the members in a team. (Batirlik et al., 2022). The essential factor is that in this leadership approach, creating and maintaining good relationship between leaders, employees, and team members. Additionally, they address that relationship- oriented leadership aims to respectfully treat all the members in an

organization and focuses on the social needs in order to foster genuine relationship. The relationship- oriented leadership approach aim to keep morale and desire on a high level among team members, making the relationship- oriented leader approach successful if leaders and followers have accepted the relationship- oriented approach. (Batirlik et al., 2022) According to Mayer et al. (2023), the essential factor in order to foster positive experience in relationship- oriented leadership style is the way in which communication challenges, conflicts, and trust issues are solved among parties in the relationship. Liao (2017) conclude that task- and relationship- oriented leadership can be performed on the individual members of the team or the whole team.

3.4.3 Multilevel framework of virtual leadership

Below is presented the adapted theoretical multilevel framework for leadership in virtual teams. In this model, the remote leadership is divided into two different levels. One level discusses leadership style in virtual team level and the other discusses individual level.

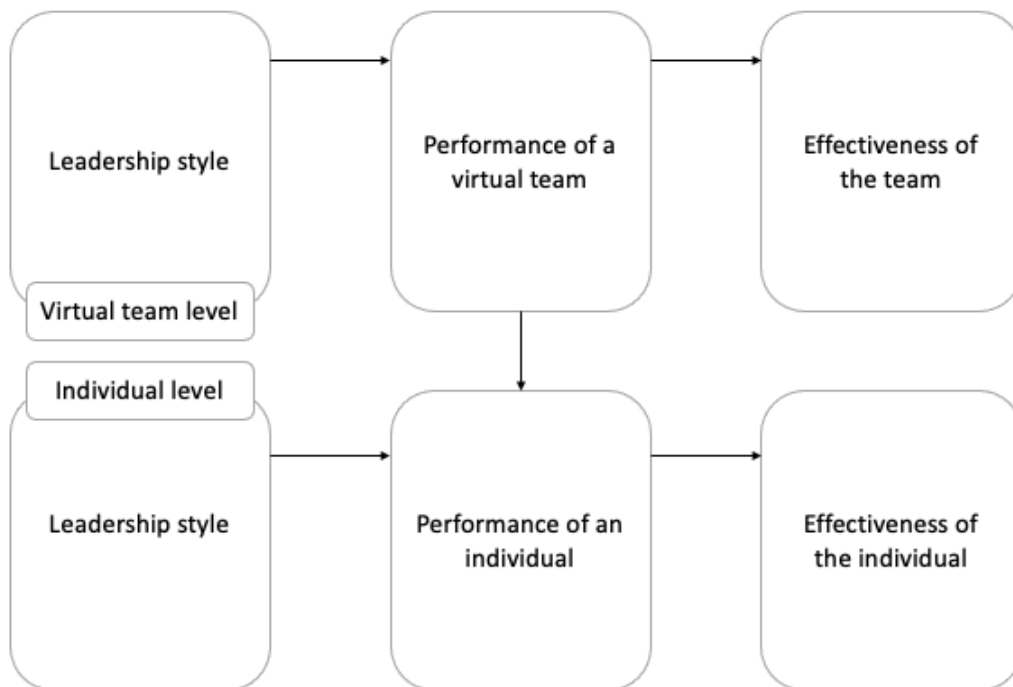


Figure 1. Leadership model in virtual teams (Adapted from Liao, 2017 p. 649).

At first, the model discusses leadership style in virtual team level. On this level it is highlighted the importance of virtual collaboration, shared mental models, trust, and virtual team conflict. Therefore, virtual collaboration on a team level fosters both task- and relationship- oriented leadership approach in order to foster beneficial virtual collaboration through ICTs. Thus, virtual collaboration requires leaders to train team members to use the virtual tools in their work. (Liao, 2017)

Secondly, Liao (2017) defines shared mental models be technical mechanisms that team help members to share knowledge and manage their mutual work. These shared mental models need to be adjusted to answer the needs of the team to achieve their full potential. Lastly, trust and conflict in a virtual team discuss the importance of trust building which has immediate influence on conflict management among virtual team members. Thus, they state that leaders are required to provide efficient communication platforms in virtual work settings, and schedule enough in person meetings with their employees. Trust building is considered to increase when team members are transparently communicating with each other on a regular basis. However, face-to-face meetings further develop trust in a team when people can see each facial expressions and other significant signs of body language. (Liao, 2017).

Virtual teams also encounter conflict situations, which challenge the leaders of virtual teams. Thus, the importance is in solving these situations in order to increase the team's efficiency. (Batirlik et al., 2022). They state that the conflict can be based on different expectations, understanding or goals between team members. In addition, conflict can emerge in relationship or task levels. The responsibility is on leaders to manage and overcome conflicts despite the level of them. However, Liao (2017) argues that the conflicts happening in relationship level have mainly negative impact to the whole team. On the other hand, if the conflict happens at a task level, the outcome can be beneficial for the

team and not directly harmful. It is argued that interpersonal conflicts should be rather managed in face-to-face meetings than through virtual work arrangements. The core idea is to provide a common environment whether it is in person or remote meeting, to clarify misunderstanding and foster transparent communication with team members. (Liao, 2017). Hahn and Semrau (2022) address that team members need to reflect the conflict in order to learn from it. Furthermore, they state that the ability to reflect and learn from the conflict situation indicates how much the team can develop by sharing knowledge transparently. Overall, the trust between team members indicates how willingly individuals are ready to take responsibility on their actions and act accordingly to solve them. (Hahn & Semrau, 2022)

The virtual team's leaders also influence team members on an individual level. Thus, it is essential to focus on the relationship between leader and an individual employee. Liao (2017) with Hahn and Semrau (2022) argue that certain elements in leader-member exchange theory (LMX) have significant influence on leadership in virtual teams, especially when discussing the relationship between leader and an individual follower. LMX theory includes four essential levels that are affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect. These levels help leaders to pursue positive and beneficial relationships with their individual team members. If focusing on the levels of professional respect and contribution LMX levels, leaders foster relationship on a task-oriented level with their individuals. On the other hand, affection and loyalty refers to the relationship-oriented fostering, requiring leaders to develop trust through communication and support. (Liao, 2017) However, LMX theory is considered to indicate unequal behavior from leaders to their followers when individual relationships are required to foster differently. Nonetheless, Hahn and Semrau (2022) discuss that in a virtual work environment high level and quality of LMX answers to the challenges that virtual leaders encounter with their team members in both task- and relationship related concerns.

3.5 Leadership in international remote work teams

International remote work teams have taken their popularized place in organizations by providing advantages such as, high level of problem-solving skills, decreased transportation costs, and expanded opportunity to attract talented workforce (Aarthi & Sujatha, 2022). Additionally, international remote teams may play a significant role in organization's sustainable actions if leaders implement it to the organization's strategy directions (Dumitraşcu-Băldău & Dumitraşcu, 2019).

Leadership rises in the central when leaders are building an international remote team (Dumitraşcu-Băldău & Dumitraşcu, 2019). They address that it is crucial to understand the goals and the needs of a team when hiring international workforce. Also, the leaders are required to acknowledge the characteristics that are needed from the team members in order to collaborate successfully and achieve set goals. International remote teams provide competitive advantages when leaders understand to focus on competences such as multiculturalism and geographic dispersion when building and managing an international remote team. Overall, it is stated that one of the key factors is to know the natural cultural background of every international team member. (Dumitraşcu-Băldău & Dumitraşcu, 2019).

After identifying and understanding the cultural background and natural characteristics of team members, leaders of international remote teams are required to focus on the virtual working environment. According to Chamakiotis et al. (2021) communication plays a main role in virtual working environments and especially when team consists of members with different cultural backgrounds since communication via ICTs is generally considered to be highly complex with the risk of misunderstanding. Hence, leaders of an international remote teams need to understand the cultural and language diversity that affects communication (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Remote leaders are required to choose virtual tools that best suit and support the team's cultural dimensions. Hence, the team has a better possibility to communicate with mutual understanding and avoid insufficient reception of the messages. Furthermore, remote leaders should focus on the

frequency in communication whether it is a trust building matter or matter of work tasks. (Dumitraşcu-Băldău & Dumitraşcu, 2019).

Furthermore, Chamakiotis et al. (2021) address that leaders with international remote teams are required to create a psychologically safe working environment in virtual context. They also state that it is important to increase a team's sense of belonging and meaningfulness, when having a fully virtual team. Although, international remote teams can provide increased performance and creativity for leaders to utilize, it is important to acknowledge and manage the emerged challenges. International remote teams bring challenges to leaders when considering the management with multiple and different time-zones, culturally different work practices and geographical separation in a team. Altogether, the cohesion of an international remote team is highlighted to be significant when encountering leadership challenges in such team. (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

4 The impacts of Covid-19 on remote leadership

The world faced a mandatory transition to stay at home due to the global pandemic in 2020. People were instructed to avoid human interactions and the jobs that were possible to perform from home made a transition to remote work. This chapter discusses the impacts that pandemic had on remote leadership at the time of the pandemic and in post pandemic time. Lastly, this chapter presents the summary of the theoretical framework.

4.1 Remote leadership during mandatory transition to remote work

In December 2019 the Covid-19 virus rapidly spread on a global level and was infecting people in all continents (Hossain 2021). Hossain (2021) explains how the virus highly increased the number of deaths and infections around the world. The fast spread of the virus is explained through its contagious nature, where the virus infects people commonly by droplet and transmits like any other viruses, through human interactions. Generally, the symptoms include cough, fever, and feelings of sickness but the virus still led numerous people to death. Therefore, the study stated that the main adjusted safety measures included maintaining good hand hygiene with thorough cleansing. Although the symptoms of this virus are similar as symptoms of flu, the Covid-19 virus managed to accelerate into a global pandemic and there has not yet been discovered cure for this illness. Nevertheless, the globally decided solution for decreasing and slowing down the spread of the virus was to go to the lockdown and minimize human interactions. (Hossain 2021).

The virus that led to multiple deaths globally also rearrange the economic situation across the world. Due to the lockdowns, the economic situation rapidly changed in supply chain and leading to significant challenges in trade, commerce, and other industry sectors. (Hossain 2021). Hossain (2021) states that the Covid-19 pandemic is the most

considerable challenge after the Second World War that the world encountered, it is concluded that the way world does business has changed. On the other hand, the new economic situation led to new opportunities and challenges in this post pandemic time, for example enabling organizations to develop their business (Hossain 2021). However, Sampat et al. (2022) addressed noteworthy negative factors concerning individuals, such as health concerns, financial stability, and well-being in general that organizations need to recognize.

The significant engagement in remote working has influence on employees' work outcome and can change the nature of work for example, in autonomy, in job requirements and work perspectives (Wang et al. 2021). Organizational leaders were studied by Wang et al. (2021) during the Covid-19 pandemic and how did they use technological devices. The central requirement in using digital tools was to decrease the feelings of isolation among remote workers. They state that leaders were required to focus on advanced usage of ICTs in order to achieve set goals, such as, reciprocal communication, maintain team spirit, mentoring and giving and receiving feedback. Additionally, the advanced usage of digital tools required discussing with cameras on and screen sharing activities as well. The difference in utilizing virtual tools was recognized between remote work context and at the office use. Thus, it was noted that leaders lack the broad usage of virtual tools in remote work, and simultaneously limiting in person interaction. (Wang et al. 2021). However, Krehl and Büttgen (2022) state that remote leaders succeeded to achieve more personal level with their employees while using video conferencing tools and mutually sharing the home environment with their employees' during meetings.

Also, Krehl and Büttgen (2022) address the key factors regarding to the effectiveness of remote leaders. Thus, the main key factors in driving the effective remote leadership were well designed and structured remote meetings, sharing digital notes and creating safe and open virtual work environment. On the other hand, the factors to decrease the remote leadership effectiveness were named to be challenges to create trust in teams through virtual work settings, motivating employees to actively participate remote

meetings and the usage of available digital tools. Wang et al (2021) concluded that the leaders should, during this kind of remote work times, properly allocate and provide a work policy and tasks in order to decrease confronted challenges and since the remote work was mandatory.

However, Loyless (2023) notes that in transformation, leaders are required to have efficient strategic communication, which is essential. Consequently, it is argued that leaders, especially remote leaders in virtual working environment are required to manage efficient communication in order to be effective leader. Hence, the leaders are seen to have better influence and long- term strategic value over their employees in an organization. (Loyless, 2023).

Additionally, Loyless (2023) states that risk of misunderstanding increases due to the virtual working environment, which further emphasizes the importance of remote leaders to pursue effective communication. Therefore, communication is required to have emotive language and to focus on chosen phrases, and style of the language when expressed in virtual context. As understood that remote work and hybrid working are here to stay, the effective remote leaders are required to have competence in communicating via virtual tools and due to this effectively direct their employees and achieve results, such as motivated, goal oriented, and collaborative employees. (Loyless, 2023).

4.2 Remote leadership in post pandemic time

The nature of working has taken a significant development due to the past global pandemic. According to Wang et al. (2021) remote work was not widely used working method before Covid-19 outbreak but due to the mandatory transition to remote working, remote working spread globally. However, they consider remote working a remarkable advantage for higher- income earners, whose job is possible to perform via ICTs and somewhere else than at the office.

Thus Sampat et al. (2022) state that post pandemic time has changed organization's remote work practices. Hence, most organizations require returning to the office for work and has stated certain days for their employees to be present at the office. However, due to the unsureness of experienced pandemic, it is challenging for employees to return to office. It is noted that the health risks related to the virus are the strongest barriers for people to leave full time remote working. Therefore, long-term perspective for balancing working from home and present at the office is in need of attention. (Sampat et al., 2022).

Developments in remote working due to Covid-19 such as adaptability, flexibility, increased innovation and creativity, cultural transitions and rebuilt trust are the reasons to further develop models for working (Verma et al., 2023). Thus, many organizations have noticed to reshape their working policies and developing their ICTs in order to enable sufficient hybrid work environment for employees. In addition, it is highlighted that organizations need to understand the importance of cultivating new attitudes and strategies to lead employees in post pandemic time. (Sampat et al., 2022).

Post pandemic time is crucial for the leaders and their subordinates in the terms of transitioning and familiarizing themselves into the new way of working. According to Loyless (2023) leaders are required to combine the understanding of this transformation and how to efficiently communicate this to their employees. Additionally, they state that leaders are now required to develop their communication skills when the new ways of working emerge. Hence, the remote leaders need to focus on designing certain communication strategies in a post pandemic time in order to ease the transition towards hybrid working among employees. Therefore, the level and quality of an internal communication is strongly in the central for leaders to consider in their leadership work. (Loyless, 2023).

In the perspective of leadership, Sampat et al. (2022) address that in post pandemic time leaders provide their employees flexibility to work remotely and manage work tasks accordingly. Simultaneously, returning to work at the office created spontaneous meetings

and collaboration among employees. Verma et al. (2023) highlight the importance of redesigning leadership style to decrease challenges and stress factors when transitioning to new way of working. Below is presented a comprehensive, combined, and summarized table that presents the key elements regarding post pandemic time and hybrid working in new normal situation.

Table 2. Key elements in hybrid work

<p>Balancing working from home vs from office</p> <p>Leaders should give employees a possibility to choose the days to work at the office (Sampat et al., 2022)</p>	<p>Team building</p> <p>Leaders should provide safe environment for employees to enhance their creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills. (Sampat et al., 2022)</p>	<p>Work policies</p> <p>Comprehensible work policies are required to design for hybrid working in order to manage negative associations related to hybrid work. (Sampat et al., 2022)</p>
<p>Work-life balance</p> <p>Leaders should not forget the well-being of their employees' when transitioning into hybrid work mode but rather recognizing the challenges identified during full remote work mode. (Sampat et al., 2022)</p>	<p>Trust building</p> <p>Leaders are encouraged to focus on increasing trust in order to maintain high work performance. Thus, the reciprocal communication is essential. (Verma et al., 2023)</p>	<p>Employee engagement</p> <p>It is essential for leaders to recognize factors that directly influence on workers' engagement in post pandemic workplace. (Verma et al., 2023)</p>
<p>Stress indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Health concerns -Stress due to commuting -Challenges to adapt to new way of working (Sampat et al., 2022) 	<p>Leadership style</p> <p>Leadership styles are in need for development in order to provide diverse, competitive and effective workplace in the future. (Verma et al., 2023)</p>	<p>HR developments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assessing jobs for hybrid model -Reshaping recruitment process -Developing leadership styles -Redesigning performance management (Verma et al., 2023)

4.3 Summary of the theoretical framework

This sub-chapter presents the summary of the theoretical framework used in this study. The focus of the thesis is to gain deeper and broader understanding of the development of remote leadership due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how it was shown on international remote teams. The theory section presents three leadership theories utilized in virtual work context. These are shared leadership in virtual teams, task- and relationship-oriented leadership, and multilevel framework of virtual leadership. When examining

the remote leadership developments due to Covid-19 pandemic, this thesis utilized these theories and previously identified successful remote leadership factors in the analysis of the data that was collected.

At first, the theory section discusses the identified concept and nature of remote work and how it brings both challenges and advantages to both organization and employees. However, the sudden outburst of Covid-19 pandemic increased the number of remote workers worldwide and raised remote work to be one of the remaining ways of working nowadays. (Wang et al., 2021). Thus, the organizations were required to transition their workers to remote work in order to ensure the safety of their employees' health and the continuing of the business. However, the rapid transition required applicable and developed technology. Thus, organizations faced challenges due to the usage of ICTs and other security issues related to the sudden transition to remote work (Liu & Wang, 2014), which further challenged leaders by new emerged challenges.

In addition, one of the challenges is stated to be the isolation that remote workers faced during pandemic (Contreras et al., 2020). Even though remote work increased work satisfaction for example due to decreased distractions and need for commuting, the feeling of social isolation was seen to lower work performance and career progression. Furthermore, the relationship between social isolation and well-being was recognized. Secondly, the risk for employees' isolation at the time of the pandemic required recognition and leadership actions from leaders to decrease the negative risks.

Remote work is considered to offer significant opportunities as well, such as attracting international workforce globally, giving a possibility to balance work and leisure time, and maintain organizational competitiveness. (Aarthi & Sujatha, 2022) Overall, understanding the nature of remote working and its duality, leaders can manage the challenges and risks related to them but also utilize the opportunities to increase the overall work performance of employees and attractiveness of an organization. This also includes leaders with international remote teams.

The concept of international remote work teams is presented and discussed. The central ideology is expressed through the divergent geographical locations that the team members have from each other. Furthermore, Dumitraşcu-Băldău and Dumitraşcu (2019) state that the international remote work teams add value by merging different cultural backgrounds and competences for the leader to utilize. According to them, leaders are required to not only understand the individual and personal differences in cultures but the difference in business cultures as well. Bennet (2022) discusses that developed usage of virtual tools, such as collaborative virtual tools, in remote leadership context is essential, especially if the team has language diversity. With the help of these tools, the leaders can positively influence on employees' engagement, performance, and increase social connections, indicating increased trust building among their international remote teams (Bennet, 2022).

By understanding the influence that Covid-19 had on remote work, remote workers, and leaders, it is possible to gain valuable knowledge on how to manage challenges in post pandemic time. Due to this, remote leadership is in need of development when new way of working has emerged, hybrid work. Hybrid work combines remote working with working at the office, making it a flexible way of working nowadays. (Webex, 2023). Moreover, the challenges related to remote leadership exist around leaders' requirement to provide thorough communication, flexibility, and setting clear expectations in remote work context. Thus, it is essential for leaders to develop their leadership styles in remote work context in order to avoid negative outcomes and to success both in different and challenging conditions (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022).

The theory section further discusses the remote leadership styles along with leadership theories concerning virtual teams, on an individual level and cohesively on a team level. The well-being of leaders is also considered in the literature review. Overall, the central and successful remote leadership styles focus on reciprocal communication, trust, flexibility, and overcoming conflict situations.

Moreover, the literature review discusses remote leadership elements in current post pandemic time. The core elements lie in recognizing the challenges that each team had during the pandemic and finding appropriate solutions in order to manage with them in after pandemic time, in hybrid work. Thus, the leaders are required to reflect and transparently discuss these emerged issues with their employees. It is significant for leaders to recognize their own well-being and leadership identity in order to overcome stressful situations. On the other hand, the role of Human Resources (HR) is necessary in order to provide valuable coaching and knowledge for organization's leaders to develop their leadership skills in post pandemic time. (Sampat et al., 2022 & Verma et al., 2023).

5 Methodology

The fifth chapter presents the designed research method. In this thesis the data is collected by using a qualitative research method. The central data collection methods in qualitative research method are observations, surveys, interviews and both book and visual analysis. In this thesis, the most suitable research and data collection method was seen to be the interviews. Additionally, data collection and analysis and sample are presented. Thus, in this chapter the explanation on how the empirical data is gathered and analyzed in this thesis is provided. Finally, the chapter discusses the reliability and validity of the study.

5.1 Research philosophy

This section discusses and determines the most suitable research philosophy. According to Saunders et al. (2019), research philosophy refers to the knowledge, hypothesis, and study's nature to dividing it in a certain way in order to develop knowledge. Besides, research philosophy is considered as an understanding of the practices how data should be collected and analyzed. It is significant to discuss since researchers can have different presumptions concerning knowledge and nature. (Saunders et al., 2019).

In general, four main philosophies are identified. These are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Overall, the term research philosophy consist of the knowledge development and the nature of knowledge. The firstly introduced central ideology, positivism, is related to the phenomena, which is observed through reliable fact-based data. Additionally, the phenomenon is observed through quantitative regularities in order to gain important data. Secondly, the critical realism aims to explain the surroundings around us, meaning what do we see and experience. Therefore, it relies on the reality and its basic structures, which creates the visible appearances. Critical realism can consist of either quantitative or qualitative methods of philosophy. However,

interpretivism aims to explore meanings of subject and social phenomena. Thus, the qualitative method with small samples is the most suitable for interpretivism research. Lastly, pragmatism is explained as a study that concentrates on practiced study, where the data is analyzed through different perspectives and combined data. Moreover, pragmatism is described to have philosophies from both interpretivism and positivism. Thus, it is workable with both mentioned philosophies. (Saunders et al., 2007 & Saunders et al., 2019 p. 144-151)

Previously mentioned interpretivism approach considers the phenomenon in the ground reality of experiences, backgrounds, and approaches of the participants. Thus, the approach of interpretivism aims to understand and utilize the gained data from the experiences of the interview participants. (Saunders et al., 2019) Hence, this research philosophy was considered to be the most suitable for this study because the interviewees' experiences concerning remote leadership during pandemic and afterwards are in the central. Therefore, the empirical data for this study is gathered by using qualitative methods and in-depth investigations with some respondents of the interviews.

5.2 Research approach and method

When the most suitable research philosophy for the study is selected, it is essential to present the research approach and method. Saunders et al. (2019) present three methodological choices for the researcher to choose, these three choices are deductive, inductive, and abductive methodological choices. Zefeiti and Mohamed (2015) discuss these three approaches and how they differ from each other. The first mentioned deductive approach concentrates on hypotheses' building and testing whether they are correct or incorrect. Alternatively, the inductive approach is not based on testing theories but is rather driven by developing theories through observation of patterns. Lastly, the third approach, abductive, combines those two ideologies. Thus, the abductive approach starts from sudden or unexpected facts and the research process commits to the explanations. Additionally, in the abductive approach it is possible to adjust existing

literature or new theories can be developed based on finding of the gathered data. (Dudovskiy, n.d). This study follows an abductive methodological approach since the abductive approach is seen as most suitable option for qualitative study, which this study is. Since abductive approach also suits for study conducted with small samples, it is one of the reasons why this approach is chosen for this thesis.

Next, the research method is discussed. Research methodology is seen to help to solve research problems when used systematically. The central conception is to find answers to research questions, which requires the usage and application of scientific procedures. (Patel & Patel, 2019) Overall, research types vary from each other but each one of them have significance. Hence, it is possible to distribute research in multiple ways, for example through different settings of time and place, principle, and technique.

Research can be conducted by using three accepted and most common approaches. These methods are quantitative, qualitative, and lastly, mixed methods. It is essential for the researcher to choose the most suitable method for conducting their research. Considering the research question, it is essential to prepare for what kind of data is needed in order to find answer to the research question. (Williams, 2007). According to Patel and Patel (2019) who argue that qualitative research is generally suitable method when studying behavior of humans. Additionally, qualitative research method is less structured since it can develop new theories. (Williams, 2007). On the other hand, the opposite method is quantitative research method, which focuses on measuring phenomenon in terms of quantity. (Patel & Patel, 2019). The qualitative research method is suitable and preferred when finding answers to relational questions of variables within research. Additionally, the quantitative research method can have predictive, confirming and, explanatory findings. (Williams, 2007) In this research the used method is qualitative method. Hence, this method is considered the most suitable when the aim is to explore the development of remote leadership due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how remote leadership is shown on international remote teams.

5.3 Research strategy

Generally, literature has identified main research strategies for utilization. These are descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, and possibly combination of all previously mentioned methods. Descriptive method aims to explain peculiar factors in phenomenon. However, this method does not necessarily require examining the causes that induces the phenomenon. Descriptive method focuses on understanding “what” rather than answering to the “why” in research. Overall, descriptive research method includes three singular methods that can be utilized. Hence, these three possible methods are a case study, observational study, or survey research. (Bhat, 2022).

Secondly mentioned exploratory method of research focuses on understanding and investigating a research question that has not properly understood or yet researched. Therefore, the aim is to study phenomenon that has little theory as a support, but the data is rather gathered to understand certain patterns behind phenomenon. When using this method, it is possible to gather data from secondary sources or primary sources. Primary research methods for applying are for example, interview, focus groups, or surveys. Alternatively, in secondary research method the secondary sources indicate that the data can be gathered from studies, newspapers, or books. (Bhat, 2022).

Lastly, Bhat (2022) discusses the explanatory research method and states it to be most preferred method among research methods. This research method aims to answer questions why certain events happen when information is limited and unavailable to access. This research method complements the descriptive method; however, the explanatory method provides additional information about the object that is under observation. The most preferred and commonly utilized research methods consist of literature reviews, in-depth questions in interviews, focus groups or analysis of a chosen case. (Bhat, 2022).

When the aim of this thesis is to gain deeper understanding of the influence of Covid-19 pandemic on remote leadership and how it affected international remote teams, it is

necessary to study the elements that remote leadership had before pandemic, how the phenomenon affected to it, and what are the key learning from this. Thus, the explanatory research strategy suits well for this purpose and is chosen to be used.

5.4 Data collection

This chapter presents the chosen data collection method used in this thesis. The data collection method explains how the information is gathered and measures the collected data. The data collection method is considered as the most significant part of the study and therefore, it is addressed to be done systematically. Thus, this systematic approach aims to successful results of answering the research questions and evaluating the collected data. (Saunders et al., 2007).

There are two types of data that are divided into two groups, primary data, and secondary data, which each have different source for the researcher to gather the data. Primary data is based on the researchers own data collection methods and therefore the data is self-collected. Furthermore, this data collection method makes the collected data to be more authentic and reliable than the data collected from secondary sources as secondary data is. Thus, the secondary data has been collected by another person, making the data more unreliable due to the possible data changes or other modifications. However, the secondary data gives researchers the previous knowledge, developments, and possible changes. (Saunders et al., 2007).

The research interview has three essential forms, structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews have questions that are predetermined, and they are asked without scope for follow-up and with little or none of variation. Therefore, the questions are identical and standardized, leaving no place for biases to arise in the interview. Instead, the aim of unstructured interviews is to gain deeper knowledge about a generic topic but are generally time consuming and hard to manage. Additionally, semi-structured interviews ask certain key questions in order to pursue deeper detailed

responses from the interview participants. Thus, the gained knowledge is considered to be based on factors that have not been thought of before. Also, these key questions utilized in a study help in understanding the areas that are explored. (Bhat, 2021 & Gill et al., 2008).

As the aim of the study is to gain deeper knowledge about how remote leadership has developed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and how remote leadership is shown on international remote teams. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most applicable data collection method for this thesis. In order to achieve the goals of the study, the interviews gained new knowledge and insights for analyzing. According to Gill et al (2008) the purpose of the research interviews is to gain deeper understanding of the motivations, experiences and for example beliefs. Therefore, understanding these factors the researcher can gain and analyze sensitive data that could possibly not be shared in groups. Thus, through interviews it is possible to study the topics or phenomena deeper, than have been done before. However, the essential point is that qualitative study methods enables the access to gain more profound information than could be gathered with quantitative research methods (Gill et al., 2008).

Overall, five interviews were held with leaders from insurance and energy field. All the interviewed leaders agreed to recording of the interview, which gave the researcher the possibility to properly analyze and transcribe the data afterwards. Additionally, the interviews were held privately as one-to one conversations. However, two of these interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom and the rest the three of them in face-to-face meetings. The main language of the interviews were Finnish, the native language of both parties, but one of the meetings was held in English since it was the interviewee's native language. Furthermore, to analyze from the collected data, the most significant insights and comments were translated from Finnish to English. The conducted interviews had varying lengths of duration from thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews were designed in advance; hence the participants were able to express their thoughts and

feelings transparently since they were given the possibility to pre-read the interview questions. The interview template can be found in the attachments.

5.5 Sample

The sample of the thesis consisted of five respondents. These respondents were all working in managerial position with international team members or team members in geographically different location. For these reasons, these five respondents were the most suitable to participate in this study. The age range of interview participants was between the age of 40 and 51 years. The teams that respondents were leading had between 9-14 team members. Both female and men leaders participated to the study, no other gender was identified in this study. Over half of the participants were women. Furthermore, the leadership positions varied among the participants, which made it possible to gain wider data from the interviews.

Hence, the varying leadership roles gave insights from different level of leadership but all of them deeply focused on the remote leadership. During the time of interviews, the participants worked in a hybrid mode, meaning that they work partly remotely and partly at the office. Two of the interviewees have very strong experience from international virtual remote teams. Also, the rest of the interviewees have experience from remote leadership before the mandatory transition to the pandemic which mainly based on occasional remote work and leading employees or partners in geographically different locations. The participants of the interviews were selected based on their leadership experience in order to gain valuable data for the study. The participants were recruited from the network and personal connections of the researcher.

As shown in the table below, leaders from different levels were selected to interviews. Their experiences varies due to their diverse teams that they lead. Additionally, the participated leaders differ by age that enabled to gather data based on different length of leadership careers.

Table 3. Participants of the interviews

Respondent 1 Age 41, Female Insurance field Team leader	Remote leadership experience before Covid- 19 based on max. 1 day per week.	Remote leadership experience now in a new normal, is built on 50/50 principle at the office vs remotely.
Respondent 2 Age 40, Female Energy business Change management & Engagement lead	Remote leadership experience before Covid- 19 based on flexibility 1-2 days per week.	Remote leadership in post pandemic time is basing on flexibility and international remote projects.
Respondent 3 Age 40, Male Insurance field Head of EB Underwriter	Remote leadership experience before Covid- 19 based on max. 1 day per week.	Remote leadership experience now in a new normal, is built on 50/50 principle at the office vs remotely.
Respondent 4 Age 51, Female Insurance field Head of international partner network	Remote leadership experience before Covid- 19 based on leading virtual team.	Continues leading virtual remote team.
Respondent 5 Age 48, Male Insurance field Head of sales and client services	Remote leadership experience before Covid- 19 based on max. 1 day per week.	Remote leadership experience now in a new normal, is built on 50/50 principle at the office vs remotely.

5.6 Analysis of the data

This chapter discusses the analysis of the collected data. Saunders et al. (2007) state that the aim of the data analysis is to recognize regimes in data. In qualitative research method, the analysis is described to be a systematic search of process that aims to arrange the gathered data to promote the understanding of phenomenon. Overall, this includes categorizing and coding the data, deducting the useless information of the data, observing consistent patterns, and finally compiling the gathered evidence to find objectives from the data. (Saunders et al., 2007).

Content analysis is understood to be one of the methods for data analysis (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 10). According to Wilson (2016 p. 41) content analysis is utilizable both in qualitative and quantitative research. This method enables systematic analyzation of verbal,

written, and visual documentation. In addition, Bengtsson (2016, p. 8) discusses that content analysis focuses on finding the essential meaning from the gathered data and therefore, aims to conduct applicable conclusions based on the findings. Overall, interviews, conversations or open-ended questions can be the sources of data. Hence, the goal is to emphasize the factors and attributes of the chosen content through analyzation of how somebody said something, what did they say and to whom they said it. (Bloor & Wood, 2016, as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The interviews conducted for this thesis were recorded with the interviewees' permission. The recordings were saved as audio files. When the data has been gathered and recorded, the author of the research can choose whether to partially or completely transcribe the gathered data to make conclusions. Alternatively, the researcher can make conclusions directly from data. Nevertheless, Bengtsson (2016 p. 11) state that whether the process have been done thoroughly and transparently to avoid mistakes and maintaining the quality of the data, human mistakes are always a risk and not inevitable. However, to avoid making these kinds of mistakes, the researcher decided to first code and transcribe the data gathered from interviews and thereafter the conclusions were made. In this thesis the data was fully transcribed, but the representation of the data findings are presented with citations from the participated interviewees. Therefore, this supports the confirmability in this study and reader can review the objectivity of the study as well.

5.7 Trustworthiness of the data

Saunders et al. (2007, p. 149) understand reliability of the study to be *“the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings”*. Additionally, Puusa and Juuti (2020) state that reliability requires certain capacity to decide the right methods and approaches to answer the research questions and to conduct the study. Thus, the trustworthiness of a study requires both high reliability and validity (Bickman & Rog, 2008). In addition, Saunders et al. (2007 p. 150) determine validity as *“whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about”*.

Four characteristics are recognized to emphasize the quality of qualitative research. According to Nowell et al. (2017, p. 3) these are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability. Credibility has two determined aspects, the certainty in the value of a data and understanding of them. The first aspect indicates how the study is conducted in a way that the believability supports the findings. The second aspect indicate the actions that are taken in order to emphasize the credibility to external readers. (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). Next, transferability is understood by the qualitative findings that are usable in other settings. Thus, readers can assess the applicability of the data when comparing to other contexts. (Nowell et al., 2007, p. 3).

Furthermore, Morrow (2005 p. 252) determines the dependability to be a coherence of the data over time and conditions and in order to reach dependability the research process is required to be logical, traceable, and distinctly documented. Lastly, confirmability is understood as objectivity that assures that others can confirm the research's findings. Besides, the essence is that findings are based on the participants' words and not the possible biases coming from researcher. (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3).

The reliability in this thesis was ensured by providing carefully designed research questions to the participants beforehand. Additionally, semi-structured interviews grant the possibility to have flexibility in interview situations, which was utilized if needed. Nevertheless, the structure of the interviews, basic questions and themes were consistent in every conducted interview. Additionally, the author provided a safe environment for the participants to ask for clarification for research questions if needed. Hence, the credibility was ensured when the researcher was given a possibility to explain or rephrase the question for achieving a mutual understanding. Lastly, this chapter provides adequate information on research methods for readers to evaluate the transferability and applicability. The research process of this study is presented in detail in order to prove its logic and traceableness.

6 Results

This sixth chapter presents the results of the study. Additionally, the results relate to the findings from the presented literature review. The study aimed to gain deeper understanding of the development of remote leadership due to the unordinary phenomenon, Covid-19 pandemic, and what kind of specific features remote leadership has in international remote teams.

6.1 Remote leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic

As mentioned, companies faced sudden challenges and transition to remote work in 2020 when the global pandemic hit. Hence, the leadership style of managers required development in order to meet the need that the unusual situation rose into consideration and to maintain ongoing business in organizations. (Butler, 2022). The Covid- 19 pandemic changed the nature of remote working when it became mandatory way of working globally in Spring 2020. Hence, the participants reflected their remote leadership experiences through the time during and now, after the pandemic.

Four of the respondents had some remote leadership experience before the mandatory transition. One of the respondents was leading a fully virtual and international team.

“I had led my team remotely before the pandemic approximately 1-2 days per week. However, some projects required remote leading. Generally, remote working based on flexibility before the hit of the pandemic.” (Respondent 2)

“The nature of remote work was different before the pandemic and my team rarely worked remotely, if so, they had one remote workday in a week. Remote work wasn’t for example a part of rewarding program etc. In addition, employees were required to have an acceptance to work remotely from their team leader.” (Respondent 5)

“The team members were allowed to have maximum one day per week for remote working and during the remote workday, their work tasks were based on back-office tasks. In addition, only one employee per team was allowed to work remotely at a time. Before the pandemic, none of the team leaders worked remotely, so remote work was rare among team members.” (Respondent 1)

“My team rarely worked remotely before the pandemic time, but remote work was possible to arrange in order to provide flexibility if the employee needed it for personal matters. However, the need for remote workdays was rare and wasn’t utilized much.” (Respondent 3)

Before the mandatory transition to remote working, the nature of remote work was based on the employee’s personal need to request a day for remote working from their team leader. Hence, it was discovered that the remote work in respondents’ teams was not used to, for example, as a part of a rewarding program. Thus, the central idea was to provide flexibility if it was needed by their team members. Additionally, above mentioned respondents, number one, three, and five, stated that only one employee was allowed to work remotely at a time in their teams.

The main identified remote leadership styles that the respondents express in their job are transparent communication, providing autonomy, increasing collaborative work, and developing individuals personally. These leadership styles were also expressed during transition and during pandemic time. However, since the transition to remote work mode was sudden and fast, the participated leaders reflected that a lot of support was needed from the HR and their closest colleagues. Following challenges based on leadership were encountered and reflected among respondents.

“When the mandatory transition to remote work happened, the number of spontaneous meetings at the office vanished. Thus, made it challenging to really know

how the team members were feeling at a time. As a leader I felt that I am required to contact all my team members in order to maintain frequent communication. Therefore, I booked daily sessions on a calendar for communicating my employees individually via Microsoft Teams. Additionally, I aimed to separate the meeting from work topics to personal calls, because I wanted to show trust and concern towards my employees.” (Respondent 1)

“I recognized the risk of my team members to isolate when the global pandemic hit, and when the situation was unsure. I as a leader needed to understand that not everyone in my team handled the uncertainty as well as I did. Hence, I shift my focus to understand the personal factors that may increase their stress at home and which of them affects to their working. Therefore, the main challenges for me as a leader were focused on recognizing the stress factors that affected my employees individually and hence, managing the work tasks accordingly. My aim was to maintain balance between work and leisure time, increase transparent and reciprocal communication, and increase my compassion towards my team members.” (Respondent 2)

*“Even though, I have led a virtual team before the hit of the pandemic, I recognized the inevitable need, in this special situation, as a leader to really concentrate and understand the individual needs of my team members. Hence, I understood the importance of psychological safeness among team members that could have either become a challenge or it can give us a possibility to become a closer team. Thus, we increased the number of virtual meetings with the team.”
(Respondent 4)*

As it can be seen from the answers of respondents, number one, two and four, who understood the need to increase the number of virtual meetings among their team members individually and together to avoid isolation of team members and feelings of loneliness. These leadership actions have positive outcomes especially in remote leadership context (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). Additionally, the answers show how

respondent number one, two and four are concerned about the decreased possibility to communicate in in-person and recognize the negative risk for employees' isolation.

On the other hand, the respondent number four expresses her understanding of psychological safeness and recognizes its significance especially in international remote teams. Whiteside and Dixon (2022) highlight that psychological safeness can be achieved by increasing transparent communication individually or together as a team, which respondent number four aimed in her remote leadership actions. In addition, previous responses also indicate that leaders with number one, two, and four felt certain pressure and worry in their leadership position when considering their subordinates well-being.

"As a leader, I have focused on providing autonomy for my employees to work on the set goals in their job. However, I recognized that during pandemic time my team members diverged from each other's. Additionally, the main challenge was decreased brainstorming during our remote meetings, which made it challenging to ensure whether all team members understood the discussed topics or set goals after all." (Respondent 5)

"I, on the other hand, started a new leadership role during the pandemic time. Thus, for me it was challenging to get to know my new team members remotely and orientate one new employee, also fully remotely. On the other hand, constantly contacting people turned out to be profitable when gaining new knowledge of my colleagues and work tasks." (Respondent 3)

Based on the answers of respondent number five and three who approached the situation through task-oriented leadership style. Thus, they aimed to provide a suitable working environment for employees to complete their task despite the pandemic time and mandatory remote work time. However, task-oriented leadership style encounters challenges when the given work tasks increase by their complexity levels (Mayer et al., 2023). Therefore, it can be concluded that at the time of the pandemic, task-oriented leadership

style challenged leaders in remote leadership context when in-person contact, and meetings were restricted.

Overall, the leadership challenges were mostly focused on maintaining the team spirit and feelings of cohesion during the pandemic time. The respondents further reflected other factors that were affecting negatively to their team members and team performance.

"I recognized that the usage of virtual tools challenged the communication with or without cameras on, since body language was not fully interpretable. Thus, this increased uncertainty of really knowing whether the situation is authentic. As a leader, I felt unsure whether the team is honestly listening to me during remote meetings via Microsoft Teams." (Respondent 5)

The response from respondent number five highlights one of the key challenges that remote leaders encounter in remote leadership. When communicating in virtual work context, the nonverbal indications diminish and simultaneously decreases mutual understanding. When this happens between leader and their team, it is stated to negatively impact on team's cohesiveness. (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012).

"I recognized that the during the pandemic my team members had different needs and challenges related to the pandemic and remote working. Thus, I needed to develop different work structures for each individual team members in order to maintain their well-being and work performance. Hence, I wanted to express my flexibility during the pandemic time and that I can support them as a leader." (Respondent 2)

"I realized that, for example, giving and receiving feedback during pandemic time required flexibility and understanding from both the leader and employee. Hence,

I aimed for reciprocal conversation and wanted to increase trust by showing an example by keeping my camera on during virtual meetings.” (Respondent 4)

“Once I recognized that the rhythm of a remote workday may be different, and my team members lacked keeping breaks between all the virtual meetings. I designed virtual coffee breaks as a reminder to keep breaks during the day and to connect with other team members as well. Overall, I wanted to avoid overworking at home environment. ” (Respondent 1)

“I recognized that since the team seemed diverged during the pandemic time, it was mandatory to delegate certain work tasks to individuals.” (Respondent 3)

In addition to the previously identified challenges regarding team spirit and cohesion, the leaders were challenged to recognize the feelings and needs of their team members when working remotely. Thus, leaders faced challenges to maintain and foster natural relationship between them and their subordinates in virtual working environment. Furthermore, the time management was seen as a challenge in terms of possible overachieving or overworking during pandemic time. Based on the answers of all respondents, it can be reflected how the pandemic situation challenged their pre-pandemic time management practices and increased the need to find adaptable solution to these mentioned challenges.

6.2 Remote leadership in international remote teams

This chapter presents the identified features that remote leaders have in their international remote teams based on the gathered data from the interviews.

“I haven’t proactively considered them before. As a leader, I recognized that in order to manage projects successfully, the leader is required to find a good balance between identified cultural differences that the employees in a project have. Thus,

based on my experience in international remote team context, the most important feature is the different conceptions of time. This is essential as a leader to understand in order to plan the project structure accordingly and to be approachable as a leader to listen and learn from cultural differences that may arise. Overall, I noticed that sometimes when I have led an international remote work team, especially during pandemic, I recognized that if the cultural differences are too different managing them becomes impossible. As an example, when I had to lead employees with Aboriginal background it became impossible to stay on the set project deadline when the cultural differences were too different versus the other cultures involved in the project. Therefore, the different concepts of family relations and time management made it challenging to find balance between included cultures in the project.” (Respondent 2)

“ I strongly address the need to recognize and understand cultural differences both in remote work and overall, in virtual work. Thus, I state that the leadership style needs to be adjusted to answer the cultural differences’ needs. As a simple example, the meaning of a lunch hour can differ between cultures, and I was required to understand this when planning or booking virtual meetings among my international remote team members.” (Respondent 4)

Based on the responses from participants number two and four, it is possible to identify the importance of acknowledging the cultural backgrounds when building a cross-cultural team, for example for projects. In order to succeed in a project, leaders are required to build a well-functioning and culturally balanced international remote team (Dumitraşcu-Băldău & Dumitraşcu, 2019).

“I don’t have straight experience from leading international remote employees, but I do have remote team members in another location than where I operate. Hence, this requires me to understand how to include them to the whole team and how to make them feel as important part of the team than others that share the

same location with their team leader. However, these employees that have different geographical location between their leader and other team members, felt that the team got a lot closer during pandemic time when everybody worked remotely from different locations. Thus, the feelings of inequality decreased during pandemic time and in post pandemic time, I aim to recognize this and plan meetings and office benefits, such as free breakfast, in a way that the team members in despite their different location can have the same benefits.” (Respondent 1)

“My experiences from international virtual teams are based on the fact that the virtual working environment still expresses possible cultural differences and simply do not disappear them.” (Respondent 3)

“For me as a leader is important to communicate clearly and ensure that everybody understands the message despite their cultural differences. Hence, I aim to communicate the message by making complex simple. Alternatively, as a leader I am required to ask follow-up questions if needed and be available and present for my international team members to approach me if needed. Despite the pandemic time and international virtual team, my team members addressed that the team manage to get closer to one another and we utilized unformal WhatsApp group chat for conversations that are not related to work. Thus, the team members can participate as they will and as much as they will. Hence, this kind of platform for sharing experiences demonstrate the significance to include and gather employees together despite their geographical location.” (Respondent 4)

The response from participant number four shows how the leader understands the significance of her team members’ cultural characteristics and fosters clear communication in a way that suits for everyone. Additionally, respondent number four shows her understanding towards broad utilization of virtual tools in communication and in fostering better team cohesion.

As a conclusion and based on the respondents' answers, the significance in identifying cultural features and elements in international remote leadership work lies on the understanding the team members' cultures and what differences are significant in terms of the team performance. Hence, the leader of an international remote team is required to adjust their leadership style to balance the differences among team members, such as different concepts of time, family relations, and differences in business cultures. Additionally, based on the gathered data the meaning of a cultural features does not disappear in virtual working environment. Thus, the leaders are required to be approachable in order to team members to express their cultural differences and to be considered about the cultural features that might not be expressed plainly via ICTs in virtual working environment.

6.3 Remote leadership developments due to Covid-19 pandemic

Previously, it was discovered the main challenges that respondents recognized during the transition and pandemic time. Nevertheless, the research focus is on the remote leadership developments when reflecting the key learnings from Covid-19 pandemic. Next presenting the recognized developments that the respondents reflected through their leadership work.

"Since I recognized the need for leader to understand their employees' personal needs, I tailored certain workdays to answer these needs and created and provided suitable working schedules for each day. However, for these days I also booked virtual meetings for task management as well, meetings were held individually or together with the whole team. Additionally, my focus in post pandemic time is concerned towards solo workers and individual's engagement in order to maintain efficient work performance whether focusing on individual or their input in a team. Overall, I recognized that everyone requires tailored communication in remote work context, one -to -one meetings to avoid overworking, and to provide

emotional support. As key learnings, I would say to have more compassion, trust, and to increase the number of collaborative work meetings or workshops virtually and if possible, in- person as well.” (Respondent 2)

“I recognized that the high level of psychological safeness is important in virtual teams and in remote work context. Thus, I aimed to develop that by showing example to increase trust and encourage my team members, for example using cameras during meeting and arranging non-formal virtual meetings for the whole team to meet and discuss. Additionally, I strongly focused on my way of communication especially when in my team the professional language is English that is nobody’s first language. Overall, I state that the trust is the main factor in order to lead virtual teams and lead remotely. Therefore, leaders are required to be available and virtually present for their team members, common goals are required to be set transparently and clearly, and leaders are required to be open to listen issues that employees might have. Overall, it is significant to understand the meaning of in-person meetings and foster these, especially after the pandemic time and when the team fully operates virtually and remotely.” (Respondent 4)

“I adapted my soft skills based- leadership style to remote work context. Hence, I focused on the relationship between leader and team members. I recognized the time management challenges that happened during remote working and wanted to ease this challenge by focusing my own time management that I could be available for my team members and show the importance of having breaks. In post pandemic time I want to show my trust towards my employees and that we can maintain good work performance together whether we are working remotely or at the office. As a conclusion, I learned to trust that everything is possible if we work together. Therefore, I continue to further encourage my team members to share their experiences and feelings. Hence, the trust between team leader and their team members is highly important.” (Respondent 1)

Respondent number one shows in her answer that she has identified herself as a leader that fosters soft skill- based and people centered leadership style. Therefore, she adapted to the pandemic situation and to emerged challenges through her leadership identity. As Yemiscigil et al. (2022) state, the leaders who have reflected their leadership identity have higher emotional resilience when facing challenging situations in the long term. This refers to the ability to reflect and recognize one's strengths and weaknesses, which can lower leaders' stress levels in the long term and in demanding situations. (Yemiscigil et al.,2022).

Secondly, referring to the three respondents' answers above, it is expressed how these leaders aimed for people centered approach in their remote leadership actions. Thus, they recognized the significance in this mindset during pandemic time and focused on developing this in post pandemic time, in hybrid work. Respondents with number two, four, and one, understood how important and beneficial it is to focus on people and foster the leader-follower relationship. Hence, these leaders expressed relationship-oriented leadership style in their remote leadership actions.

Overall, these respondents addressed that they continue focusing on maintaining good relationship in hybrid work time as well. The key element here is mutual trust, which is gained through frequent communication that also acknowledges language diversity and different locations. Also, understanding the employees' needs, and providing both flexibility and support, are elements to foster good relationship between leader and team members. In addition, the broad usage of virtual tools when maintaining and increasing virtual collaboration rises to the central as well.

"Reflecting my leadership experience and transition to new leadership role during the pandemic, I recognized that due to the pandemic time that it is important to avoid employees to diverge from each other. As a key take away, I would state to focus more on the team's cohesion which I aim to concentrate now in post pandemic time. Hence, I have focused on providing cooperative work situation for my

employees to work together in order to increase the feelings of togetherness and cooperation among team members” (Respondent 3)

“I didn’t recognize much of positive take aways from Covid-19 pandemic, one to say is that we learned to use virtual tools more. However, I reflected that after pandemic time is essential to focus on structuring the virtual meetings and to utilize the virtual tools more broadly, for example breakout rooms, in order to achieve efficient outcomes, such as profitable discussion among team members. Nevertheless, I identified the challenge in post pandemic time to motivate people to come to the office. Hence, finding the good balance in hybrid work is essential to focus nowadays because based on my experiences from the pandemic time the absence due to remote work decreased goal orientation.” (Respondent 5)

The answers of respondents number three and five show that at the time of Covid-19 pandemic, team divergence was recognized as a challenge in remote leadership and noted its negative outcome on team level. It can be seen how important it is for remote leaders to understand how to maintain and build team spirit in virtual working environment as well. However, they understood how significant it is to foster these factors in a team and will focus on increasing team’s cohesiveness now in post pandemic time. The broader use and utilization of virtual tools are in the center of increasing team’s cooperative work in remote work context. (Bennet, 2022; Loyless, 2023). Therefore, both the respondents, number three and five, recognized the importance of planning the virtual meetings in terms of efficiency and mutual understanding.

Overall, the gathered data shows how it is notable that the leaders are in need of reflecting the past pandemic time in order to solve similar challenges that their teams face in flexible hybrid working nowadays. However, these identified leadership developments are applicable to the post pandemic time. It is significant to understand that each team

has separate challenges and goals which require the team leader to concentrate and act accordingly.

7 Conclusions

The seventh chapter concludes the study. First, it provides a summary of the empirical findings and presents an answer to the research question. Next, the theoretical and managerial contributions of the study are presented. In addition, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are indicated.

7.1 Key findings

The aim of this study was to gain deeper and broader understanding of how remote leadership has developed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how it was shown on international remote teams. The study concentrated on understanding the influence of Covid-19 on remote leadership. More specifically, the study aimed to provide overall understanding of the factors that challenged leaders at the time of pandemic and now in post pandemic time, in hybrid work mode. Additionally, the study aimed to explore how remote leadership was shown especially on international remote teams.

The results of the study indicate that leaders were challenged in new ways due to the Covid-19. Due to the unordinary and sudden shift of working, their leadership styles required adjustments, reflecting and developments. Nevertheless, the participated leaders identified the main challenges which they encountered at the time of the pandemic. These challenges evolved around maintaining team cohesion, considering the well-being of their team members, maintaining adequate communication via ICTs, and providing flexibility and support to their subordinates. The findings state that the essential factors in remote leadership are communication and trust. In line with this, Aarthi and Sujatha (2022) address that communication, trust building and fostering leader- follower relationship are positively influencing on the team's performance and problem solving. Additionally, they highlight that efficient leadership has significant role in empowering team members especially in virtual working environment. (Aarthi & Sujatha 2022).

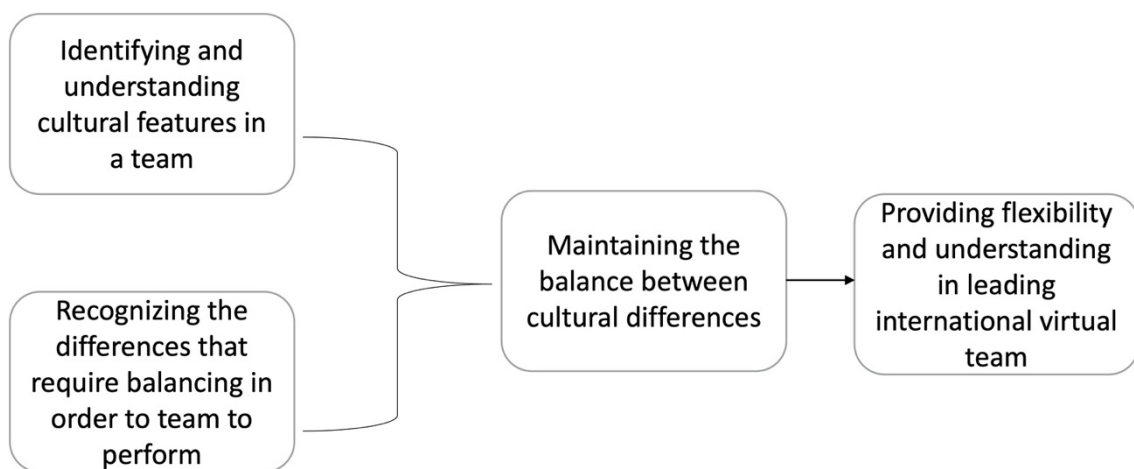
The findings of the study can be reflected through presented theory concerning successful remote leadership in virtual context. It is notable how leaders understood the importance of frequent need to communicate, to manage time, to foster both team spirit and team members individually, and the broad usage of virtual tools.

However, based on the findings, it is possible to identify two leadership approaches that participated leaders expressed on their responses. In this thesis, it was discovered at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, leaders utilized task- and relationship- oriented approaches. Three out of five respondents stressed in their answers that their focus was on factors such as, ensuring the reciprocal communication between leader and team members, increasing mutual trust in virtual and remote work environment, and expressing compassion and support towards their team members. On the other hand, two out of five respondents approached remote leadership through task-oriented approach. Hence, their answers show that they were focused on allocating the work tasks among team members and ensuring the autonomy for employees to complete them.

Looking closer to the findings based on the ways of how remote leadership was shown on international remote teams. It was discovered that the leaders of these teams are required to identify those cultural features that need to be balanced in order to make the team perform efficiently. Hence, the respondents highlighted the following cultural differences that are essential, different concept of time, business culture with differing concept of lunch hour or meeting behavior, and differences on emphasizing family relations. Additionally, remote leaders with international remote teams addressed that the virtual environment further indicate the need to be aware of cultural differences because the communication happens without body language and feelings are not expressed or understood as same as in in-person meetings. It is stated that in remote teams it is important to collaborate virtually, which increases the continuity of social connections and mutual understanding. (Han & Hazard, 2022; Bennet, 2022). Additionally, the broader usage of virtual tools in international remote teams fosters better outcomes. (Bennet, 2022) Judging from this, the importance lies in recognizing each specific cultural

features in order to leaders to act accordingly to find balance and accomplishable functionality for the team. However, referring to one of the respondent's answers that *"in some cases cultural differences differ from each other that much that managing them or finding the balance becomes almost impossible."* (Respondent 2).

Figure 2. Remote leadership in international remote teams



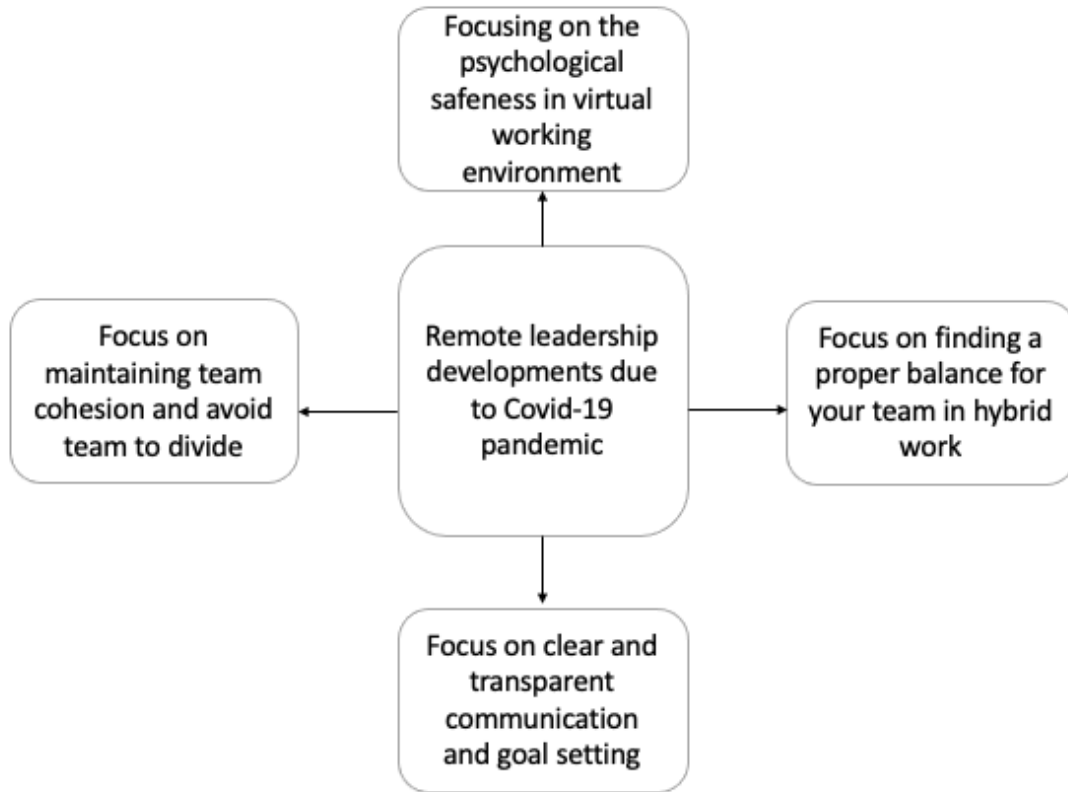
Referring to the remote leadership findings it can be argued that remote leadership certainly was in need of remodeling and developing in order to better answer the needs that post pandemic time requires in terms of hybrid work and remote work. In line with this, Verma et al. (2023) state that since the nature of working has changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic similar changes are required to identify in leadership as well. Next discussing the main identified developments that the influence of pandemic had on remote leadership.

Furthermore, the research shows that the development in remote leadership concentrated on developed usage of virtual tools and communicating through them, time management, individual needs of team members, increasing and maintaining psychological

safeness, and focusing on the risk of team's divergence. Hence, this study gives in- depth evidence on how the remote leadership has developed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how remote leadership was shown on international remote teams have. The conducted research gives interesting insights of how the leaders experienced the pandemic time and how it affected their working. The results of the study present the challenges that leaders encountered and how these were approached and solved. It is significant to notify that the interviews gave deeper knowledge of the insights and experiences of the participated leaders, for example what each of them emphasized or focused on their leadership work. Moreover, the participant leaders reflected and increased the understanding of how to manage emerged challenges in post pandemic time, which is in line with studies conducted by Krehl and Büttgen (2022), Wang et al. (2021), Sampat et al. (2022), and Verma et al. (2023).

Below is presented an illustrative figure of the key findings. The figure 3 shows four main elements that are identified based on the gathered data of development of remote leadership. Furthermore, these key findings are not set in order of precedence, yet each of the findings plays an important role in this study. However, some of the key findings can be more significant in a certain team versus another since each team and leaders have personalized needs and challenges to concur.

Figure 3. Key findings of remote leadership developments



In conclusion, the study emphasizes remote leaders to concentrate on previously mentioned elements in post pandemic time. It is crucial for leaders to maintain team's psychological safeness in hybrid work as well. Additionally, the feelings of togetherness and cohesion of a team are significant in order to team to function and perform successfully in hybrid work. Hence, the proper performance requires remote leaders to further focus on clear and transparent communication internally and when setting goals or allocating work tasks. Lastly, based on the findings, remote leaders are even more required to find proper solutions for finding the balance in flexible working in this post pandemic time.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

This conducted study increases the knowledge of remote leadership and what influence the Covid-19 pandemic had on it. Hence, the study brings new knowledge for leaders to utilize in post pandemic time and in hybrid work. As Sampat et al. (2022) stated how the nature of remote work has changed due to the pandemic in organizations, requiring the shift of focus towards remote leadership developments. Thus, it is significant to understand how remote leadership should be developed in order to answer the needs in post pandemic time when remote working has emerged to be one of the remaining methods of work nowadays. In this thesis, it is identified the nature of remote leadership before the hit of Covid-19 pandemic, the remote leadership challenges that emerged due to the mandatory remote work time and it is reflected the key learnings that remote leaders identified based on the pandemic time. Thus, these key learnings can be utilized in similar challenges that the remote leaders encounter in post pandemic time.

Furthermore, this study is in line with previously conducted studies since it agrees to the need of remote leadership development in post pandemic time. Additionally, this study identifies same factors as does the previously conducted studies in the terms of remote work concept and international remote teams. (Mayer et al., 2023; Sampat et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Han & Hazard, 2022; Liao, 2017;). In this study, it was discovered current challenges and needs for leaders to identify when working in hybrid work environment. Furthermore, this study gives knowledge for leaders to answer these emerged challenges and needs in their teams. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing deeper knowledge of the remote leadership developments due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the study acknowledges how remote leadership is shown on international remote teams and what kind of elements to focus on.

This research confirms the elements of a sufficient remote leader that are required in order to successfully lead a team in virtual working context. The findings are aligned with findings conducted by Kelley and Kelloway, (2012), Henderikx and Stoffers (2022), and Borth (2020). Hence, the overall findings of this study are in line with the previous ones.

However, this study stresses the significance of remote leaders to be genuinely interested in their team members' well-being. Furthermore, this study identifies main challenges that are still affecting their team's performance in hybrid working, such as incoherent team due to the challenges related to the previous pandemic.

In conclusion, the main theoretical contribution that this conducted study provides, is the gained deeper understanding and knowledge of development of remote leadership due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how it was shown on international remote teams. Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing recent insights of remote leadership challenges in post pandemic time and how to approach them. Previously, these topics are not examined together but rather separately. Thus, this study combines two topics and, in this way, contributes to the existing literature.

7.3 Managerial implications

In this section, it is provided the summarized key managerial implications for leaders to utilize. Since this study has not been conducted for any company, the conducted suggestions are considered to be more general. Hence, the findings of this study can be utilized in organizations despite their field of business. Next, the chapter discusses the identified learning factors for leaders to utilize.

In post pandemic time it is crucial for leaders to understand the importance of team and trust building, it is highly important that leaders are aware of these factors. (Sampat et al., 2022); Vermat et al.,2023). Therefore, remote leaders are strongly required to reflect the possible challenges that their team can encounter in post pandemic time, and then reflect whether these challenges occurred at the time of the pandemic. Hence, the leaders can learn and reflect their leadership based on the past, and therefore develop their leadership style accordingly. Nevertheless, whether the remote leaders encounter similar challenges than in the time of mandatory remote work or new challenges in post pandemic time, the essence lies in the need for them to understand the relationship of

cause-and-effect and how these challenges influence on their teams' performance. Thus, remote leaders are required to understand the factors that positively foster their team performance, such as considerate communication via ICTs, providing flexibility, and foster leader-follower relationship.

The study indicates that in the post pandemic time it is significant to maintain proper relationship between leader and individual. Thus, this requires regular and reciprocal communication whether in-person or via ICTs. Furthermore, it is highlighted that in post pandemic time, there is a risk for team to separate from each other, which remote leaders need to be aware of. Nevertheless, in order to leaders to minimize this sort of risk, solution can be found by promoting collaborative work and ensuring the high level of psychological safeness in a team. Overall, remote leaders need to be supported, for example by their organization with efficient training and guidance for them to develop their leadership skills. Secondly, it is indicated that the remote leaders are required to be aware of the cultural differences in their international teams and identifying the most important differences in order to balance them for the team to function well.

7.4 Limitations of the study

In general, studies have some identified limitations, and this study is not an exception. Hence, the following limitations are identified. The first limitation relates to the sample group. The selected participants of the interviews had different leadership experience from different business fields, which make the results ungeneralizable, due to field specific reasons, with other industries. The second limitation takes into account the country-specific generalization. Although, some of the participants are from different countries besides Finland, it is challenging to generalize the country-specification, due to the fact that different countries had their own set policies and limitations concerning Covid-19 pandemic, which affected remote working and remote leadership. The third limitation considers the different remote leadership experiences before the hit of the pandemic, when some of the participants had a lot of experience from remotely lead their team,

some on the other hand had very little experience of this. Almost all the participant leaders had some remote leadership experience before the pandemic indicating that the shift of mandatory remote work was not as significant as for the leaders who have limited experience or no experience of remote leadership.

Overall, the post pandemic time is now settling to find its nature in combining remote work and office working through hybrid work. Hence, it is challenging to determine the long-term effects of remote leadership developments in post pandemic time. The result of the study focuses on the identified challenges at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic which are still emerging and affecting team performance in post pandemic time.

7.5 Future study proposals

Next, it is presented the suggested study proposals for the future. These proposals are based on the findings of this study. Since the finding of this study mainly concentrated remote leadership developments due to Covid-19 pandemic, it would be interesting to future investigate the remote leadership developments or influences based on the current hybrid work mode.

Secondly, it would be interesting to study what kind of balance in hybrid working is considered to be most suitable in terms of well-being of the team leaders. On the other hand, one future study proposal could focus on the well-being of leaders and what kind of influence it has on leadership development. Furthermore, it would be timely to investigate the motivational factors that leaders could focus on in order to attract people to work at the office and in hybrid work mode.

Moreover, another idea relating to hybrid work is to study how to maintain the team cohesion in hybrid work environment if the employees are not required to work at the office on the same days and how to avoid separation of the team in this kind of situation.

In addition, future studies could further investigate and reassess the leadership theories concerning virtual leadership and how they could bring new knowledge in the existing theories when considering the current post pandemic time.

Lastly, based on the respondent's answers, another research idea in the future could concentrate on finding solutions and models to answer the cultural challenges, which make remote leadership nearly possible.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

Background questions

- Age
- Gender
- Work field
- Work title

Remote work

- How many people in your team are you responsible for?
- Did you lead employees remotely before the mandatory transition into remote work mode?
- Which leadership style/styles do you follow in your job?

Remote leadership in virtual work settings

- Did you have specific remote leadership style for guiding your team before the pandemic?
- What were the main challenges you encountered while leading remotely before the pandemic?
- How did you acknowledge cultural differences in your remote leadership style?
- Did you have specific remote leadership style for the transition and/or duration of the pandemic?

Remote leadership in past pandemic time

- Do you currently work remotely? If so, then how many days per week?
- What are the main remote leadership challenges you have encountered during the mandatory remote work time?
- How would/did you work around or solve these challenges?

- What were the main challenges you encountered while leading remotely during the pandemic?
- What are the key learnings from the remote leadership experience based on the Covid-19 pandemic?
- Would/will you implement these changes to your current remote leadership style (hybrid work)?

Remote leadership in international virtual teams

- Do you acknowledge cultural differences in your remote leadership? If so, then how?
- What are the specific features that remote leadership has in international remote teams?
- What influence did pandemic time has on international remote teams?
- What are the key learnings from pandemic time considering international team members?