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**The effect of hybrid work on knowledge sharing in  
Finnish multinational corporations**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The shift to hybrid work after the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the organizational practices and circumstances in which knowledge sharing takes place. This thesis explores the effects of hybrid work on knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations (MNCs), with a specific focus on the difference between explicit and tacit knowledge sharing.

The study adopts a qualitative research design, using empirical data collected through ten semi-structured interviews with managers and employees across four different Finnish MNCs, which were analyzed thematically. The research suggests that hybrid work does not have a straightforward positive or negative effect on knowledge sharing, but the impact depends on the type of knowledge being shared and the coordination of hybrid schedules.

Digital tools support the sharing of explicit knowledge regardless of the working location, while tacit knowledge sharing remains dependent on the physical co-presence. Digital environments cannot effectively replicate the side-by-side learning and observation of non-verbal cues that the physical office provides. In addition, an unintentional structural asymmetry arises when team schedules are uncoordinated, creating a hybrid information gap. In this gap, remote employees are excluded from spontaneous informal knowledge flows and career visibility. Additionally, while digital infrastructure has lowered the initial barriers to cross-border contact within MNCs, deeper knowledge sharing remains shaped by cultural norms and linguistic friction that operate independently from hybrid arrangements.

To address these challenges, organizations should actively coordinate team-level hybrid schedules to ensure the inclusion of remote employees and reduce information asymmetry.

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**KEYWORDS:** Hybrid work, knowledge sharing, MNC

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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Covid-19 pandemian jälkeinen siirtyminen hybridityöhön on muuttanut organisaatioiden käytäntöjä ja olosuhteita, joiden alla tiedon jakaminen tapahtuu. Tämä pro gradu - tutkielma tarkastelee hybridityön vaikutusta tiedon jakamiseen suomalaisissa monikansallisissa yrityksissä. Tutkielman erityisenä painopisteenä on ero eksplisiittisen ja hiljaisen tiedon välillä.

Tutkimus hyödyntää laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää, jonka empiirinen aineisto on kerätty kymmenellä puolistrukturoidulla haastattelulla neljän eri suomalaisen monikansallisen yrityksen managerien ja työntekijöiden kanssa. Aineisto on analysoitu temaattisesti. Tutkimus osoittaa, että hybridityöllä ei ole yksiselitteistä positiivista tai negatiivista vaikutusta tiedon jakamiseen, vaan vaikutus riippuu jaettavan tiedon tyypistä sekä hybridiaikataulujen koordinoinnista.

Digitaaliset työkalut tukevat eksplisiittisen tiedon jakamista riippumatta työntekijän sijainnista, kun taas hiljaisen tiedon jakaminen on edelleen riippuvainen fyysisestä läsnäolosta. Digitaaliset ympäristöt eivät pysty tehokkaasti jäljittelemään rinnakkain oppimista ja ei-verbaalisen kehonkielen havainnointia, joita fyysinen toimistotyö tarjoaa. Lisäksi tiimien aikataulujen koordinoimattomuus synnyttää tahattoman rakenteellisen epäsymmetrian, joka luo hybridin tietokuilun. Tässä kuilussa etätöitä tekevät työntekijät jäävät ulkopuolelle spontaaneista epävirallisista tietovirroista sekä uralla etenemisen kannalta tärkeästä näkyvyydestä. Vaikka digitaalinen infrastruktuuri on madaltanut monikansallisten yritysten sisäisiä rajojen ylittäviä kontaktikynnyksiä, syvempää tiedon jakamista muovaavat edelleen kielelliset erot ja kulttuuriset normit. Nämä toimivat riippumattomasti hybridijärjestelyistä.

Vastatakseen näihin haasteisiin organisaatioiden tulisi aktiivisesti koordinoida tiimitason hybridiaikatauluja etätyöntekijöiden osallisuuden varmistamiseksi ja tietoepäsymmetrian vähentämiseksi.

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**AVAINSANAT:** Hybrid work, knowledge sharing, MNC

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# 1 Introduction

This section introduces the thesis by explaining the background of the study, then presenting the research questions, objectives and delimitations. Finally, presenting and explaining the structure of the study and key terms.

## 1.1 Background of the study

The Covid-19 pandemic forced companies to quickly adapt and change their ways of working. To avoid spreading the virus, organizations changed from traditional office working to remote work arrangements. Although this was a temporary solution at first, these changes significantly reshaped the organizational practices. After the pandemic, many organizations did not fully return to the traditional office work but instead adopted hybrid work arrangements combining both remote and on-site work. (Alasoini et al., 2025)

Hybrid work has increasingly become the common way of working. European Union's statistics indicate that 18% of women and 19% of men are now working consistently with the hybrid arrangements. Furthermore, survey evidence indicates that after the pandemic 60% of employees preferred a work environment where they could work remotely several times during the month. (Eurofound, 2022) In Finland, the transition has been particularly notable. After the pandemic a rapid transition was made, and hybrid work became the new normal. (Alasoini et al., 2025)

At the same time, knowledge sharing remains crucial for organizational performance, especially in multinational corporations (MNCs). Knowledge is seen as a strategic resource and a tool to gain competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). For multinational corporations the competitive advantage depends on their ability to create and share knowledge across geographically dispersed units (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). Knowledge sharing between employees also supports innovation, performance and competitiveness (Castro & Moreira, 2023). Prior research emphasizes that organizational

success does not only depend on knowledge creation but also on effective knowledge sharing among individuals (Wang & Noe, 2010).

Hybrid work changes the circumstances in which knowledge sharing usually takes place. While hybrid arrangements offer benefits like improved work-life balance and cost savings (Ferreira et al., 2021). They also introduce challenges related to communication and social interactions (Wang et al., 2021). Hybrid work might support knowledge sharing through improved digital connections but also act as a barrier as it reduces face-to-face interactions and informal communication. (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023; Alasoini et al., 2025)

As organizations are still adapting to the transition towards hybrid work, research in this area remains relatively limited (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Before the pandemic the research focused on virtual teams and knowledge sharing within them (Raghuram et al., 2019; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). However, it still remains unclear how the new hybrid arrangements influence knowledge sharing.

Addressing this research gap is important both academically and in practice as it contributes to the knowledge sharing literature by examining hybrid work as a context that changes the environment in which knowledge sharing happens. From a practical perspective this study provides insights for organizations on how to support knowledge sharing in an increasing hybrid environment.

## **1.2 Research questions and objectives of the study**

This thesis aims to explore how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations. The study focuses on the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, as these two types of knowledge are affected differently by hybrid arrangements.

The primary research question of the thesis is:

1. How does hybrid work affect knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations (MNCs)?

The secondary research questions are:

1. How does hybrid work promote knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs?
2. How does hybrid work limit knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs?

### **1.3 Delimitations of the study**

This study has several delimitations. First, the focus is on internal knowledge sharing among employees within Finnish multinational corporations. External knowledge sharing between firms or other organizational networks is outside the scope of this study. Second, the empirical focus is on multinational corporations operating in Finland. While the theoretical discussion draws on international literature, the findings are not intended to be generalized beyond this context. Third, the focus of the study is on hybrid work arrangements implemented after the Covid-19 pandemic. Fully remote or fully office-based work arrangements are not examined independently. These delimitations allow for a focused analysis of hybrid work and its influence on knowledge sharing within the defined organizational setting.

### **1.4 Definitions of key terms**

*Hybrid work:* A work arrangement where employees split their working time at the traditional workplace and working remotely from home (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023).

*Multinational Corporation (MNC):* A multinational corporation (MNC) is an organization that consists of geographically dispersed units, including headquarters and subsidiaries that operate across national borders (Chini, 2004).

*Knowledge sharing:* Knowledge sharing refers to the processes where employees share information, expertise and skills within the organization (Ahmad & Karim, 2019; Wang & Noe, 2010).

*Tacit Knowledge:* Tacit knowledge refers to knowledge, which is based on experience, context-specific and is difficult to formalize or codify (Hau et al., 2013).

*Explicit knowledge:* Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that is codified and documented and can be easily stored and shared through formal systems and digital platforms (Hau et al., 2013).

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into six main chapters. The first chapter is the introduction where the topic is introduced. This chapter explains the background of the study and presents the research questions and objectives and delimitations. Finally, the key terms are defined, and the structure of the study is explained.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and presents the framework of the study. First, hybrid work's development is examined, defining its characteristics and placing it within the Finnish MNC concept. Then knowledge sharing is examined by defining the processes, examining the difference between tacit and explicit knowledge and examining knowledge flows across MNC subsidiaries. Finally, the impact of hybrid work on knowledge sharing is examined through facilitators and barriers and the conceptual framework is presented.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings' relationship with prior research. Chapter 6 concludes the study. Key findings are presented and the chapter also outlines practical implications, discusses limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

## 1.6 Acknowledgement of AI Usage

In this thesis AI tools were used to support the research process mainly on a technical and linguistic level. The use of AI was limited to improving language and clarity and the content, conclusions and analysis are based on the writer's own work and thinking. The AI tools used in this study are listed below.

*QuillBot* - Used as a tool for paraphrasing during the writing process to help to avoid unintentional plagiarism. See: [www.QuillBot.com](http://www.QuillBot.com)

*ChatGPT* – Used as a tool to improve grammar and clarity throughout the writing process. The purpose was to enhance readability and support academic writing, as English is not the writer's native language. See: [www.chatgpt.com](http://www.chatgpt.com)

*Gemini* – Data processing was assisted by Google Gemini, which was used to capture live audio and generate the initial draft of the interview transcriptions. All final transcripts were manually reviewed and checked against the recordings by the author. See: [www.gemini.google.com](http://www.gemini.google.com)

## **2 Literature review**

This chapter reviews literature on hybrid work and knowledge sharing, forming the analytical lenses for this study. Hybrid work provides the understanding for the post-pandemic conditions of working. Knowledge sharing provides the understanding of how employees share knowledge and expertise within this context. These lenses will guide the interpretation of the interview data in the empirical chapters.

### **2.1 Hybrid work in the Post-Pandemic era**

This section provides the background for the study. It begins by examining the evolution of hybrid work from early remote work practices to its current state. Next, hybrid work is defined, and its main characteristics are discussed. The study is then placed in the Finnish MNC context by examining the factors that have shaped hybrid work adoption in Finland.

#### **2.1.1 Evolution of Hybrid work**

Remote work is not a new phenomenon and has existed since the 1970s but it has developed slowly (Eurofound, 2022). Before the pandemic it was usually seen as a privilege for a very specific group of skilled workers and remote work was done very occasionally and was agreed to with the employer in advance (Alasoini et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2021). The hybrid way of working has been evolving from earlier work practices and the technological improvements. As the information technology and tools improved over time, it allowed the work to be done from other locations than the office, for example from home or mobile devices (Raghuram et al., 2019).

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, it forced companies to adapt and people to work from home to avoid spreading the virus (Eurofound, 2022). The Pandemic moved people to work from home in a very short period of time (Wang et al., 2021). This sudden shift caused by the pandemic helped to break down many of the cultural and managerial

barriers that had previously slowed down the adoption of more flexible work arrangements (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Research suggests that the effects of the pandemic were the biggest impact on the ways of working in modern history (Wang et al., 2021; Wontorczyk & Roznowski, 2022).

After the pandemic, hybrid work has become a very common way of working and is described as the “new normal way of working” (Alasoini et al., 2025). Rather than working fully remote, over 70% of employees who work from home are working within the hybrid arrangements. The most common way of working is working 2 days from home and 3 days at the office. (Bloom et al., 2024). This mix of combining remote and office days has become a very common post-pandemic way of working, as it combines the benefits of both working environments. It allows the employee to keep the flexibility, autonomy and time saved from not travelling to the office, while still keeping the benefits of face-to-face interactions and social connections happening naturally in the office. (Bloom et al., 2024; Eurofound, 2022)

### **2.1.2 Defining Hybrid Work**

Hybrid work is a combination of traditional on-site working and remote working. In hybrid work, employees usually can work both remotely from a different location e.g. home office or another location and on-site in the office. (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021) The information technologies have improved, making it possible to work virtually from almost anywhere, making hybrid work a very common way of working in organizations (Wontorczyk & Roznowski, 2022). Organizations have very different demands on hybrid work, but the common way of having a few mandatory office days has been seen as the best balance between remote work and office work. Providing flexibility with remote work but also having the advantage of collaborating with co-workers in person at the office. (Liu et al., 2024)

Hybrid work can be seen as an arrangement where the employee has the option to combine both in-person and remote work. They can decide their working locations with

the office and other remote location, such as home. Hybrid work makes it possible for the employees to work remotely with colleagues working from the office and attend the office to collaborate with co-workers face-to-face. (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022)

Flexibility is the key characteristic of hybrid work. This applies to both location and scheduling the working hours. Employees get bigger control over where and when they work compared to the traditional 9-5 in the office model. (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023) For example, hybrid work allows employees to work from home a few days a week and come to the office on certain days for meetings or teamwork. Some organizations fit the hybrid work to fit for their needs, where everyone has certain days that they have to be in the office and other days can be worked remotely if needed. Other organizations might use a more flexible hybrid model, where employees or teams decide on the office days depending on their tasks or personal needs. (Bloom et al., 2024)

All hybrid arrangements rely heavily on digital communication and collaboration tools to compensate for the physical distance between workers. Real-time communication platforms, cloud software and other ICT tools are essential for the hybrid work to be effective. Ensuring that the employees working remotely can work effectively with the people working from the office. (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023)

Since the hybrid work arrangements are flexible, they can be adapted to different employee needs and roles. Research suggests that hybrid work allows for a more personalized work experience, better flexibility and consideration of the needs and different situations of the employees (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Alasoini et al., 2025). For example, employees who have a longer commute to work or have to take care of their families might prefer to work remotely more often, while those who need specialized office equipment or want to have more face-to-face connections might choose to work from the office more often (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022). Employees often say that they have less interruptions when working from home, compared to the office, indicating that if employees feel like they have more autonomy on how they work, they can be more productive (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). At the same time the role of the

physical office is changing. Rather than being used for individual work, offices are increasingly seen as spaces for collaboration, social interactions and places for feeling the sense of community (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023).

Coordinating and communicating becomes more difficult when some of the team members are in the office and others are working remotely. If not well planned, remote members may be excluded, which weakens the collaboration. It is also difficult to maintain a shared organizational culture with the hybrid environment, since it is harder to communicate company values or foster innovation when employees are not regularly physically in the office at the same time. (Bloom et al., 2024; Eurofound, 2023)

Leadership and management also have to adapt to the hybrid environment. Traditional management ways with physical presence and supervision do not work the same if the employee is working remotely. Therefore, the managers need to trust their employees and evaluate based on their outcome performance. (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023)

### **2.1.3 The Finnish MNC Context**

Before the pandemic remote work was very limited in Finland. According to the study made by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2025), Finnish corporations had occasional remote work if the employer and employee agreed on it and working at the office was expected. Work was done at the office and was seen as the normal way of working and employees had a responsibility to be physically present at the office. Even though the change to remote work during the pandemic was fast and employees had very little experience with working remotely, the following transition to hybrid work was relatively smooth. Nowadays, hybrid work has become a very common way of working in Finnish companies and more than one million Finns work remotely weekly. (Alasoini et al., 2025)

To understand why hybrid work spread fast in Finland after the pandemic it is important to understand the characteristics of Finnish work culture. The Hofstede's model of

cultural dimensions is a widely used framework for comparing different national work cultures (Hofstede, 2011). The Power distance and Masculinity-Femininity dimension are particularly relevant in the Finnish workplace context (Saari et al., 2018). The Power distance describes how much employees accept different power distributions within the organization. Lower levels of power distance are linked to flatter hierarchies and prefer communication with others when making decisions, rather than top-down decision making. The Masculinity-Femininity dimension describes whether a culture focuses more on competition and individual success or on cooperation and maintaining a good work-life balance. (Hofstede, 2011)

Finland scores 33 on the Power distance and 26 on the Masculinity dimension. This places Finland as one of the lowest scoring countries in Europe on these dimensions (Hofstede Insights, 2026). These scores suggest that workplaces in Finland prioritize cooperation and positive work relationships over status and rewards. Flat hierarchies and employee autonomy have also been identified as characteristics of Finnish work life (Saari et al., 2018). The short power distance also reflects the equality Finns value in the workplace. The Finnish work communication style is open and focused on the subject. The professional relationships do not rely on personal relationships. Finns also respect the agreements that are made in the workplace. (Halme et al., 2014)

Research on Finnish working life shows that employees and managers have a small distance, suggesting low levels of hierarchy and inequality. The research also shows that Finland's high standards in working life are reflected in both a high level of job autonomy and chances for personal development. It also suggests that the Finnish workplace culture is very feminine, meaning that employees value cooperation, job security and good relationships with management. The Finnish management is described as open and collaborative. (Saari et al., 2018) Organizations that have low power distance trust their employees to do their work. Employees are more willing to share knowledge more openly when they are trusted by management. (Wang & Noe, 2010) The smooth shift to remote work during the pandemic was supported by these cultural factors. The strong digital skills, good technological infrastructure and a high level of trust between

employees and management made it possible. (Alasoini et al., 2025) Finland had already achieved a high level of digital readiness before the pandemic. Its digital readiness has been built on decades of investment in IT education and communications infrastructure. (Halme et al., 2014) Finland's high level of digital readiness makes it easier for organizations and employees to adapt to the new ways of working (Alasoini et al., 2025).

MNCs and their subsidiaries face challenges in coordinating hybrid work both locally in units and globally across international borders (Castro & Moreira, 2023). Unlike domestic corporations, MNCs have to manage organizational networks which are separated by locations and time (Chini, 2004). As employees are located across different time-zones it reduces the window for real-time collaboration (Lauring & Zhang, 2018). When hybrid schedules are added to this challenge, the coordination becomes even harder. International units decide their own hybrid schedules, which makes it logistically challenging to organize collaboration, as it can be hard to find a time where the whole team is available at a given time. (Alasoini et al., 2025; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023)

This means that even when employees would be present in the office, the foreign subsidiaries might be in a different time-zone or working from home. This forces MNCs to rely more on asynchronous communication than real-time collaboration. (Lauring & Zhang, 2018; Eurofound, 2022)

The combination of Finland's high trust, autonomy-oriented work culture and its widely adopted hybrid work arrangements (Alasoini et al., 2025; Saari et al., 2018) make Finnish MNCs a relevant context to investigate how hybrid work affects internal knowledge sharing in MNCs. Hybrid work is particularly relevant, because knowledge sharing is dependent on interactions between employees (Wang & Noe, 2010). These interactions are reshaped in the hybrid arrangements where employees split their time in the office and home.

## **2.2 Internal Knowledge Sharing in MNCs**

This section examines how knowledge sharing works within MNCs. It starts by defining intra-organizational knowledge sharing and examining the process and channels knowledge moves within organizations. The chapter discusses the difference between tacit and explicit knowledge and the challenges of sharing the types of knowledge. Then it addresses the challenges of multidirectional knowledge flows across MNC subsidiaries.

### **2.2.1 Processes of Intra-organizational Knowledge Sharing**

Knowledge sharing can be described as an interaction where employees provide their skills or knowledge to help others. With these interactions, employees share their skills, past experiences with each other, turning knowledge into practical use within the organization. (Wang & Noe, 2010) This means that knowledge sharing is not limited to formal knowledge sharing but also includes personal experience and practical skills. On an organizational level knowledge sharing can be described as where the organizational and individual knowledge is turned into business processes through employee engagement and communication. (Ahmad & Karim, 2019; Wang & Noe, 2010)

Knowledge sharing has been defined in different ways in studies, but they usually share a common aspect on knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is generally seen as the process of individuals sharing or making knowledge available to others inside the organization (Ahmad & Karim, 2019).

This study focuses on intra-organizational knowledge sharing between employees, teams and units within the same MNC. External knowledge sharing with customers or other organizations are not in the scope of this study. Therefore, this study will use knowledge sharing under the mentioned definition of making knowledge available to others inside the organization.

Knowledge is not stored in one place within the organization. Knowledge flows through many levels and forms within the organization. On an individual level knowledge exists

as employees' personal skills, experience and know-how. Collective knowledge goes beyond the individual level and is in the social networks and interpersonal relationships. On an organizational level the knowledge is integrated in the daily routines, shared beliefs and cultural values. Knowledge that can be documented is accessible across the organization. Knowledge is therefore a resource that is constantly present in the interactions between the people, routines and structures of the organization. (Chini, 2004)

Intra-organizational knowledge sharing is a process of knowledge moving between individuals, teams and organizational units. This movement does not happen on its own and is dependent on several factors. Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) divide the factors that influence knowledge flows in MNCs into five key elements: 1. The knowledge stock value of the source unit, 2. The source units' motivational disposition, 3. The presence and quality of transmission channels, 4. The target units' motivational disposition, and 5. The target units' ability to receive knowledge. This means that knowledge flows within an MNC when one unit has valuable knowledge and both sides are willing to share and receive the knowledge. Knowledge needs effective channels to be transmitted, and the receiving unit needs to be able to understand and use the shared knowledge. (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000)

The process of intra-organizational knowledge sharing involves more than just sharing the knowledge. Knowledge transfer is an important part of knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010). Knowledge transfer can be seen as a process involving sharing, receiving and re-creating organizational knowledge (Castro & Moreira, 2023). The transmission channels are very important in this process. Knowledge cannot flow without these transmission channels and the richer and more open they are, the more it supports the knowledge flow. (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000) In MNCs these transmission channels can be formal or informal and vertical or lateral (Chini, 2004). Formal channels are structured organizational mechanisms, for example teams and taskforces that are used to coordinate activities across units. Informal channels rely on social interactions and

personal relationships, for example mentoring and job rotations. (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000) Vertical channels refer to knowledge flowing across different hierarchical levels, for example between headquarters and subsidiaries. Lateral channels refer to knowledge flowing between subsidiaries at the same level. (Castro & Moreira, 2023)

As knowledge is transferred it moves through the organization, but it does not stay the same. Knowledge is constantly transformed and modified as it flows through the organization. (Chini, 2004) Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe the changes of knowledge with the SECI model, which identifies four ways knowledge is transformed. Socialization, where individuals share knowledge without codifying it during the transfer. Externalization where tacit knowledge is codified with documentation or written guidelines. Combination where existing elements of explicit knowledge are used to create new knowledge. Internalization, where people apply the explicit shared knowledge to their own routines and practices. These four approaches create an ongoing cycle that allows knowledge to be transferred and recreated within the organization. (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Chini, 2004)

### **2.2.2 Tacit vs. Explicit Knowledge: Challenges of Internal Transfer**

To better understand the process of knowledge sharing, the different characteristics of knowledge need to be examined.

Tacit knowledge refers to the knowledge that is difficult to express in words and often based on intuition. It is typically based on the individual's experience, such as know-how and skills (Hau et al., 2013). Obrenovic et al. (2015) state that tacit knowledge is tied to the person's insights and social context. Meaning that tacit knowledge requires direct human interaction to be shared. For example, a new colleague is onboarded by working with a more experienced colleague, who shares the know-how through face-to-face interactions and building a connection with the colleague (Obrenovic et al., 2015). Because tacit knowledge is informal and often described as practical know-how,

developed through experience, it is very valuable knowledge but challenging to transfer (Park et al., 2022).

Explicit knowledge is knowledge that is formal and easily acquired. Unlike tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge can be documented and coded with words or numbers. For example, manuals and databases. Explicit knowledge can be easily expressed and shared. (Hau et al., 2013) Because explicit knowledge is recorded and easily transcribed, it is easier to share than tacit knowledge. For example, organizations can share documents and databases allowing employees to access and reuse knowledge. (Obrenovic et al., 2015) Since explicit knowledge is codified and usually in the form of data or written text, it does not rely on face-to-face interactions to be shared. This means that explicit knowledge can easily be shared across subsidiaries and is not dependent on the location. (Park et al., 2022) However, as the explicit knowledge is easier to access, it is less unique than tacit knowledge. Similar knowledge can be easily acquired by competitors, for example by analyzing public research or reports. This does not make explicit knowledge less important than tacit, as it is crucial for communication and information sharing for organizations. (Hau et al., 2013)

Comparing tacit and explicit knowledge helps to explain how different types of knowledge are used, rather than highlighting differences between them. Table 1 shows how tacit and explicit knowledge are applied in the workplace.

	<b>Explicit knowledge</b> <b>Formal, academic-type knowledge (“know-what”) that is expressed through written or digital language, media, or data. It is grounded in established work procedures and typically relies on documentation and codified systems.</b>	<b>Tacit knowledge</b> <b>Practical, action-oriented knowledge (“know-how”) that develops through experience and practice. It is rarely stated explicitly and is often based on intuition and personal insight.</b>
Work process	Structured and coordinated tasks that follow routines and assume a stable and predictable environment. Knowledge is formalized and results in clearly defined knowledge assets.	Adaptive and improvised activities that respond to complex and changing conditions. Individual expertise is emphasized, and knowledge emerges through action.
Learning	Learning by doing, trial and error, and self-directed learning within areas of existing expertise. Learning objectives are typically defined by the organization.	Supported by supervisors or team leaders who encourage openness and trust, enabling increased sharing of knowledge and professional judgment.
Teaching	Organized and planned by trainers, based on syllabus and formats chosen by the organization to meet predefined goals and needs.	Informal and personalized, including mentoring, internships, coaching, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, competency-based development, brainstorming, and peer-to-peer learning.
Type of thinking	Rational and analytical, relying on established facts and tested methods, with an emphasis on convergent problem-solving.	Creative and adaptable, less structured and open-ended, supporting divergent thinking and new insights.
Knowledge sharing	Knowledge is extracted, documented, stored, and reused through formal channels such as reports, databases, emails, and electronic discussion platforms.	Knowledge is shared informally through interaction, networking, face-to-face communication, videoconferencing, chatting, storytelling, and the personalization of knowledge.
Motivation	Employees are motivated by assigned tasks and objectives that support specific organizational goals.	Employees are encouraged through leadership, vision, and frequent personal interaction.
Rewards	Closely connected to business targets and competition within the organization. Rewards are often scarce and may not directly encourage knowledge sharing.	Include both financial and non-financial incentives that directly support knowledge sharing and acknowledge creativity and innovation.
Relationships	Typically hierarchical, such as supervisor-subordinate or team leader-team member relationships.	Open, informal, and unstructured, built on voluntary and spontaneous exchange of knowledge.
Technology	Primarily task-oriented and influenced by cost and availability. Organizations invest in IT systems to build structured knowledge libraries and databases.	Used to access personalized information and support communication, knowledge exchange, and collaboration, while maintaining a balanced level of IT structure.
Evaluation	Based on tangible work outcomes and measurable performance, with less focus on creativity or knowledge sharing.	Based on observed performance and continuous, informal assessment.

**Table 1. Tacit vs. Explicit knowledge in the workplace (Adapted from Smith, 2001 p. 314)**

Sharing tacit knowledge is a lot harder than sharing explicit knowledge within the organization. Tacit knowledge is based on individual experiences and skills, making it hard to record and pass along as data. (Hau et al., 2013) Compared to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is connected to the personal experiences of the employee that it cannot

be separated and transferred into sharable data. Sharing tacit knowledge needs close collaboration or learning through years of working along with others. (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Hau et al., 2013) Explicit knowledge is easier to share as it can be easily shared through digital channels (Park et al., 2022). This means that sharing tacit knowledge takes a lot more time and effort from the sender and receiver than sharing explicit knowledge (Hau et al., 2013). Nonverbal cues are more difficult to see through digital channels in hybrid environments where face-to-face interactions are less common (Alasoini et al., 2025). This makes it harder to share tacit knowledge as sharing it depends on close relationships, non-verbal communication and shared experiences. These elements are lost in the digital environments, making sharing tacit knowledge harder in hybrid environments. (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023)

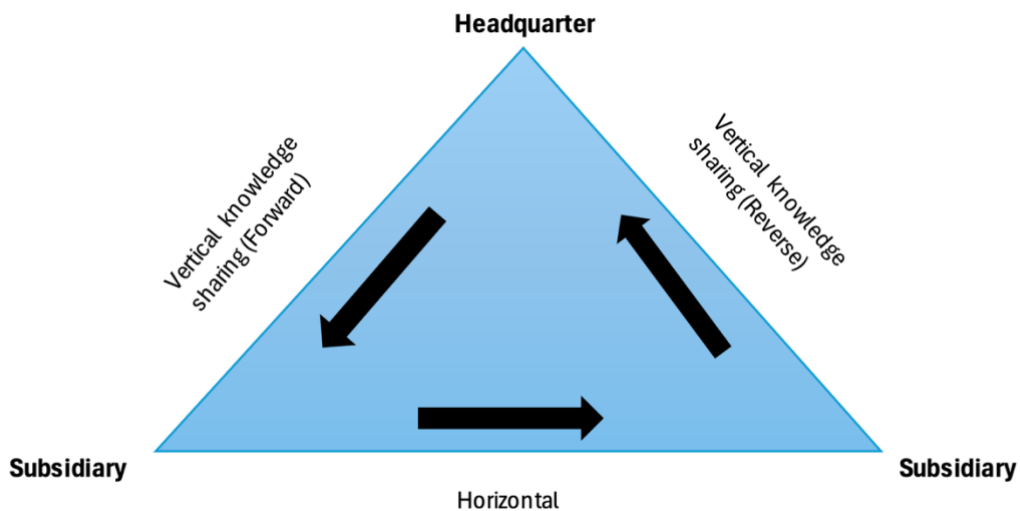
### **2.2.3 The MNC Perspective: Internal Knowledge Flows across Subsidiaries**

A multinational corporation can be defined as an organization consisting of geographically dispersed units, including headquarters and national subsidiaries operating across national borders (Chini, 2004). The competitive advantage of MNCs is in their ability to create, integrate and share knowledge effectively across units (Grant, 1996). From this perspective, knowledge sharing represents an important tool which MNCs use to support their activities and gain competitive advantage, as effective knowledge sharing between units support organizational learning and improve their performance (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). Also, multinational corporations are seen as cross-border international networks operating in diverse environments, where subsidiaries interact with local markets (Nell et al., 2011). This shift from traditional hierarchical structure views subsidiaries as semi-autonomous units and important sources of knowledge, rather than passive receivers of headquarters instructions (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012).

In this context, a strong knowledge sharing culture becomes critical for supporting organizational performance and fostering innovation in MNCs operating in diverse institutional and cultural settings. The increasing adoption of hybrid work arrangements

further increases the complexity of knowledge sharing, as collaboration often takes place across different organizational, geographic and virtual boundaries. It is important to view knowledge sharing from the MNC perspective as prior research has often focused on single-country or single-sector context, overlooking the complexity of knowledge sharing in multinational corporations. (Maina, 2024)

In multinational corporations, knowledge flows in multiple directions both within and between organizational units. Knowledge sharing in many directions increases the complexity of managing and supporting knowledge sharing (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). The knowledge flow in MNCs is visualized in Figure 1 below. The figure includes the vertical knowledge sharing from headquarters, reverse vertical knowledge sharing from subsidiaries to headquarters and horizontal transfers between subsidiaries. This multidirectional figure is supported by the framework Gupta and Govindarajan (2000), who view MNCs as networks of subsidiaries that both receive and generate knowledge.



**Figure 1. Knowledge sharing flow in MNCs. (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000)**

Knowledge sharing in multinational corporations is complex and takes place across geographically dispersed units, multiple organizational levels and different cultural

contexts. Different from domestic corporations, MNCs rely on multidirectional knowledge flows between headquarters and subsidiaries (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000).

Geographic distance makes knowledge sharing in MNCs more difficult as it reduces the face-to-face interactions and the time-zone differences make the spontaneous cooperation difficult. Technology has improved communication tools, reducing effects of physical distance, but they remove the important social cues. This can increase the distance between units. (Lauring & Zhang, 2018) The distance between units is important for creating trust. If there is less trust between the units, they are less likely to share knowledge with colleagues in other units. (Castro & Moreira, 2023) Geographic distance also makes it harder to share tacit knowledge. Sharing tacit knowledge is even more challenging when teams or units are geographically separated because tacit knowledge needs close collaboration. (Jasimuddin et al., 2015)

Cultural differences in multinational corporations go beyond interpersonal dynamics and become embedded in structural knowledge flows. It is important to understand that knowledge is affected by culture. Sharing cross-cultural knowledge is more complicated than sharing knowledge inside the same country as different cultures affect the perspective and way of thinking. Subsidiaries operate within different national and cultural environments, which may shape the attitudes towards hierarchy, reciprocity and openness towards knowledge sharing. (Chini, 2004) Cultural distances between headquarters and subsidiaries might influence the direction and intensity of knowledge sharing, especially when the shared organizational values are not fully integrated across units (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). Language differences and social categorization might further complicate knowledge sharing across borders (Maina, 2024).

Prior research on knowledge sharing in multinational corporations shows that successful knowledge sharing depends more on organizational, cultural and leadership related factors than on official organizational structures designed to support knowledge sharing. For example, shared organizational values and culture strongly influence the willingness

to share knowledge across subsidiaries and organizational boundaries. (Maina, 2024; Supiyandi et al., 2025)

Having organizational values that support knowledge sharing is not enough on its own. Knowledge sharing depends on whether these values are actually practiced and adopted by the employees in their daily work. When the values are adopted by the employees, they build trust and lower status related barriers. This supports knowledge sharing across different units of the organization. If these values exist only at a formal level, knowledge sharing may be limited by hierarchy or knowledge hoarding. (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012)

Leadership has also been identified as a supportive factor for knowledge sharing in MNCs. Leadership helps to integrate the organizational values into the daily work and helps to create a supportive environment, where knowledge sharing is encouraged across all levels and subsidiaries (Maina, 2024; Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). Technology can support knowledge sharing across subsidiaries, but research shows that it cannot replace the supportive norms and social interactions (Maina, 2024).

Knowledge sharing in MNCs is affected by geographic distance, cultural differences and the relationships between units (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). While prior research has identified these challenges in traditional office-based environments, the effects of hybrid work are still unexplored (Maina, 2024). This is particularly relevant to investigate in the Finnish MNC context as hybrid work has become deeply integrated in the work culture (Alasoini et al., 2025).

The difference between tacit and explicit knowledge sharing is central for this study as hybrid work affects these differently. Explicit knowledge can be codified and transferred through digital channels, while tacit knowledge depends on close interactions and shared experiences (Hau et al., 2013; Park et al., 2022). Explicit knowledge sharing is therefore less affected or even supported by hybrid arrangements, but tacit knowledge sharing is more vulnerable to the reduced face-to-face interactions that hybrid work creates (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023). The balance between informal and formal channels

is also very important for this study as hybrid work shifts communication towards more scheduled communication and reduces informal face-to-face communication in typical office environments (Alasoini et al., 2025; Härmä, 2025).

## **2.3 The Impact of Hybrid Work on Internal Knowledge Sharing**

This section examines how hybrid work influences knowledge sharing. It identifies the factors that support knowledge sharing in hybrid environments and then factors that limit knowledge sharing in hybrid environments in the context of Finnish MNCs. This section is divided into factors that support knowledge sharing in hybrid environments and barriers that limit it. This allows the study to examine the conditions under how knowledge moves in hybrid Finnish MNCs and provides the structure used in the qualitative analysis to organize and interpret the interview data.

### **2.3.1 Facilitators: Promoting KS in Hybrid Finnish MNC**

The impact of hybrid work on knowledge sharing can be viewed by examining the differences between office days and home days. Office days support collaboration and the sharing of tacit knowledge. (Alasoini et al., 2025) Home days rely on digital tools and online communication, which support the sharing of explicit knowledge (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023).

Enterprise Social Media (ESM) refers to internal digital platforms, such as collaboration tools and internal social networks in the organization, that allow employees to communicate and interact with each other within the organization. ESM can support knowledge sharing by helping employees to learn the colleague's expertise and role through visible online interactions, such as shared groups and collaborative documents. This makes it easier to identify who to approach for help and reduces uncertainty when contacting someone. Therefore, employees feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing knowledge. (Keppler and Leonardi, 2023) During home days, ESM platforms help

to maintain relationships and work as a tool to compensate for the informal visibility employees would have in the office (Wu et al., 2023).

Working remotely has also increased the use of sequential communication, such as recorded presentations and written chats, meaning that the shared knowledge is stored and can be accessed later and multiple times. This makes it easier for employees working from different locations and time-zones to access the same information and reduces the need for live meetings. (Vuchkovski et al., 2023) When knowledge is documented and made easy to access, employees can access it regardless of the working location. In hybrid environments this supports knowledge sharing as it ensures that employees have equal access to the organizational knowledge regardless of the working location. (Alasoini et al., 2025; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023)

On home days, digital tools become the primary channel for communicating and knowledge sharing. Digital tools are an important supportive factor for knowledge sharing in hybrid environments. If digital tools are made accessible and easy to use for everyone, it reduces the barrier to share knowledge between those working in the office and the ones working from home. If the digital tools are easy to use, it reduces the effort needed to find information. This makes employees more comfortable staying connected and seek advice or share knowledge in hybrid environments. (Wu et al., 2023)

Knowledge sharing can be more challenging if employees have different experiences in using digital tools. For example, employees working from home might be less likely to seek advice or stay connected to their colleagues, if they feel like these digital tools are not as good compared to working from the office. Organizations that invest in accessible and standardized digital tools create better conditions for knowledge sharing. Also, digital tools that support social interactions can improve knowledge sharing by reducing the emotional strain linked to digital communication. (Wu et al., 2023) New digital tools, such as AI can help to share knowledge by helping to capture and share complex knowledge that would be difficult to integrate into daily work processes. AI alone is not

enough to improve knowledge sharing but helps with the existing knowledge sharing practices and social interactions. (Olan et al., 2022)

Individual factors also have an important role in hybrid knowledge sharing. Personal motivation and digital knowledge are key drivers of digital knowledge sharing in remote work settings. Employees who are motivated and comfortable at using digital tools are more likely to share knowledge in hybrid environments. This becomes important on home days as employees rely on their own digital skills. (Tønnessen et al., 2021) Existing relationships also support knowledge sharing. Colleagues can more easily switch between in-person and virtual communicating while still sharing knowledge with each other. (Wu et al., 2023)

Trust and psychological safety are key facilitators of knowledge sharing in hybrid settings, especially when sharing knowledge across geographically dispersed units (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023; Supiyandi et al., 2025). When employees feel safe, they are more willing to share their expertise and seek knowledge without the fear of judgement. This creates better conditions for knowledge sharing across teams or subsidiaries. (Supiyandi et al., 2025) In hybrid environments where there are less face-to-face interactions, knowledge sharing relies on relational confidence. This means that employees trust that their colleagues will help and share knowledge with them. (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023) To build trust leadership has to be supportive towards knowledge sharing and create a safe space for employees to share their ideas (Supiyandi et al., 2025). Management that supports knowledge sharing and openness by treating mistakes as lessons learned, rather than punishing for them, foster trust needed for knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010).

Organizations are also adjusting their structure support hybrid work. New roles, such as specialized IT positions focused on employee well-being have evolved to address the demands of digital environments (Vuchkovski et al., 2023). At the same time the role of the physical office is changing. Rather than being used for individual work, offices are increasingly seen as spaces for collaboration, social interactions and places for feeling

the sense of community (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Time spent at the office helps to build trust and creates opportunities to have spontaneous face-to-face interactions. These interactions are important to maintain the work relationships that could weaken in the digital environment. (Wu et al., 2023)

Language differences can further complicate the communication and knowledge sharing issues when moving to digital channels where non-verbal cues are limited (Lauring & Zhang, 2018). In MNCs English has been usually adopted as the common corporate language to communicate across units, but the lack of fluency has been identified to act as a barrier to cross-border knowledge sharing and collaboration (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). The lack of fluency can lead to a power-authority distortion, where the headquarters managers who have formal authority in the relationship have to give up some of their authority to subsidiary managers who are more proficient in the corporate language (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). In Finnish MNCs this barrier has hardly any effect. Finnish managers do not usually experience power-authority distortion as they have excellent English skills and can communicate effectively without losing their authority to subsidiary managers. (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013; Halme et al., 2014)

The characteristics of Finnish work culture, such as the low power distance, low masculinity and flat hierarchies create good conditions for these supportive factors to take effect (Alasoini et al., 2025; Saari et al., 2018). The employees are already used to open dialog and autonomous working, which means that trust between management and employees is on a good level (Halme et al., 2014; Saari et al., 2018). The investments in digital infrastructure and the high digital readiness of the Finnish workforce support the use of digital tools for knowledge sharing (Halme et al., 2014; Alasoini et al., 2025).

### **2.3.2 Barriers: Limiting KS in Hybrid Finnish MNCs**

While hybrid work offers new opportunities for knowledge sharing, it also creates social and structural challenges that may limit knowledge sharing. One of the causes behind these challenges is the uneven split between home days and office days. Colleagues

following different hybrid schedules affect knowledge sharing in the office and in digital environments. (Härmä, 2025)

One of the major challenges is the loss of spontaneous and informal communication. Casual interactions, such as short conversations at the office during breaks or at the coffee machine often support informal knowledge sharing and the sharing of tacit knowledge. (Alasoini et al., 2025) Remote workers might experience isolation and miss these informal interactions limiting spontaneous knowledge sharing (Ferreira et al., 2021). When working in digital environments the communication is often more planned. This can slow down the information flow and limit the spontaneous knowledge sharing (Vuchkovski et al., 2023). The loss of informal interactions is specific to home days. The casual interactions and spontaneous knowledge sharing do not take place when working from home and planned digital communication rarely can fully replace these interactions. (Härmä, 2025)

This is closely linked to the difficulty of sharing tacit knowledge. While explicit knowledge is easily documented and shared, tacit knowledge is more complex and depends on visual cues, experience and shared understanding, which is difficult to communicate through digital channels as the non-verbal expressions are harder to see in digital environments (Ferreira et al., 2021). In a hybrid environment where the employee can have autonomy over their own schedules, it can limit the days they are physically present at the office with their colleagues. This reduces the opportunities to the spontaneous face-to-face encounters and makes it harder to maintain the close relationships needed to share tacit knowledge. (Alasoini et al., 2025) Evidence from Finnish hybrid workplaces points out that hybrid work reduces the opportunities for informal learning and receiving tacit knowledge, such as overhearing colleagues discuss problems and solutions or being physically present to get a chance to receive tacit knowledge. As tacit knowledge depends on the presence and communication that office days provide, home days can therefore limit how tacit knowledge moves within the firm (Härmä, 2025).

The difficulty of sharing tacit knowledge has increased when employees lack the confidence to approach and seek knowledge from colleagues they do not have a relationship with (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023; Vuchkovski et al., 2023). Sharing tacit knowledge is harder without strong social ties because it needs close connections to justify the time and effort needed to transfer it. Compared to tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge is easy to document and communicate in the hybrid environment. (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023)

Hybrid work has also created communication barriers. Employees have to coordinate their presence, which raises the bar for reaching out to a colleague. The quality of communication is also affected by digital interactions. Employees might multitask and speak over each other during online meetings, and the non-verbal cues are hard to read online. The more sensitive topics are also avoided in hybrid environments. Employees might avoid sharing complex or sensitive information and prioritize their routine daily work over these complex or sensitive subjects. These communication barriers limit the spontaneous interactions and chances to build trust between coworkers, which is essential to share tacit knowledge in the hybrid environment. (Alasoini et al., 2025)

Hybrid work might also cause a proximity bias where managers might unintentionally favor employees who work more often physically in the office, when making decisions about promotions or access to information (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). This creates an unequal environment where employees working from home are excluded from informal discussions and decision-making happening in the office (Vuchkovski et al., 2023), reducing their access to knowledge and making them look like they do not contribute to knowledge sharing (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). This is affected by the unplanned office-home split. The informal coffee chats happening in the office, do not reach if an employee is working from home. (Härmä, 2025).

In hybrid environments the decision to not share knowledge might grow as employees who are more present in the office might get access to informal information that the

ones working from home are not, supporting the idea that knowledge can be a source of power (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). If employees see knowledge as power, they might refuse to share it to maintain an advantage. (Wang & Noe, 2010) Also, managers might have limited experience in leading hybrid teams and might find it difficult to motivate and support employees without traditional face-to-face interactions, especially when they have to manage with employees working from different environments at the same time. (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Vuchkovski et al., 2023)

Hybrid work can also create a silo effect within the organization. These silos develop from differences in location, areas of expertise and team goals instead of formal hierarchies. Hybrid employees focus on their own team, which creates a circle of close colleagues. This keeps the strong ties in the team in place, but weak ties which depend on informal casual interactions between different teams are weakened. (Leonardi, 2021) These weak ties are needed to share knowledge across the organization. When moving to hybrid work the loss of informal communication affects the weak ties. The strong ties within the team that works and cooperate together stays strong but the weak ties with those who employees do not work directly with daily are weakened. The strong ties survive the change to virtual environments, but the weak ties rely more on spontaneous interactions in the office. (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021) For example, in digital environments there can be a lack of knowledge sharing between two different functioning silos which are not directly connected with each other, for example between marketing and sales (Vuchkovski et al., 2023).

Younger and new employees are especially negatively impacted by the siloing in hybrid environments, as they are unable to learn informally from senior coworkers, missing out on important tacit knowledge and organizational norms (Leonardi, 2021). New employees often do not have strong ties within the team, which can make it harder to ask questions or support (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023). Building mutual trust needed when meeting new people is slower and harder in digital environments than in person. This makes it harder for new employees to grow the relationships needed for knowledge

sharing. (Alasoini et al., 2025) This is supported by case study evidence from Finnish hybrid work environment, showing that tacit knowledge of senior employees does not often reach newer employees as there are less physical interactions (Härmä, 2025). The silo effect also reduces knowledge sharing across teams, which is essential for organizational learning (Alasoini et al., 2025). In MNC settings the geographically dispersed subsidiaries can silo from the headquarters as they develop their own knowledge sharing cultures and share knowledge internally (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012).

In MNCs these challenges are also affected by the cultural differences and geographic distance between the units. Hybrid work reduces the face-to-face interactions and cross-unit collaboration, which are essential for building relationships across subsidiaries and needed for knowledge sharing. (Björkman et al., 2004; Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012) In the Finnish context these barriers are notable. The Finnish work culture values autonomy and flexibility, which supports hybrid work but also increases the communication challenges. (Alasoini et al., 2025)

Reviewing both the facilitators and barriers from the perspective of employees' everyday knowledge sharing in hybrid work, several factors stand out. The main element influencing both facilitators and barriers is the split between office days and home days, which shapes the kinds of knowledge employees can access. Office days support spontaneous interactions and face-to-face collaboration that support tacit knowledge sharing and home days rely on digital tools and planned communication that suits better for explicit knowledge sharing. (Alasoini et al., 2025; Keppler & Leonardi, 2023) The strength of existing relationships also matters as employees need established relationships to share knowledge across digital channels. Newer employees might find it harder to build trust and informal contacts needed for knowledge sharing (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023; Härmä, 2025). At the organizational and cultural level, digital tools, ESM platforms and the Finnish low power distance and high trust make it easier for employees to navigate these conditions, even though the loss of spontaneous and

informal interactions makes it harder to access tacit knowledge in hybrid arrangements (Alasoini et al., 2025; Halme et al., 2014).

## **2.4 Synthesis of Literature and Theoretical Framework**

This section summarizes the literature reviewed and presents the conceptual framework that guides the empirical part of the study. The logic through the literature review is that hybrid work shapes how knowledge sharing happens in Finnish MNCs by creating facilitators and barriers that influence knowledge sharing outcomes. The key categories from the literature review are the facilitators supporting and barriers limiting knowledge sharing in hybrid environments and the difference between tacit and explicit knowledge and how they are affected by hybrid arrangements. These categories serve as the analytical lenses for the empirical section of the study, providing the structure for interpreting and organizing the interview data.

### **2.4.1 Summary of the Hybrid-MNC tension**

Hybrid work has become the new normal way of working in Finland (Alasoini et al., 2025). Hybrid work gives employees flexibility on when and how they work. Hybrid work combines the autonomy of remote days and the face-to-face interactions and social connections of office days. (Bloom et al., 2024; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023) This flexibility relies on digital communication and digital tools to reduce the physical distance between employees (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Finland's high level of digital readiness, which has been built by decades of investments in IT education and communication infrastructure has supported the organizational change to hybrid work (Alasoini et al., 2025; Halme et al., 2014). The Finnish work culture supports the hybrid work adoption with its low power distance, flat hierarchies, employee autonomy and mutual trust between the management and employees (Saari et al., 2018; Alasoini et al., 2025).

How hybrid work affects knowledge sharing depends on the type of knowledge being shared. Explicit knowledge can be codified and documented. It is easier to share through

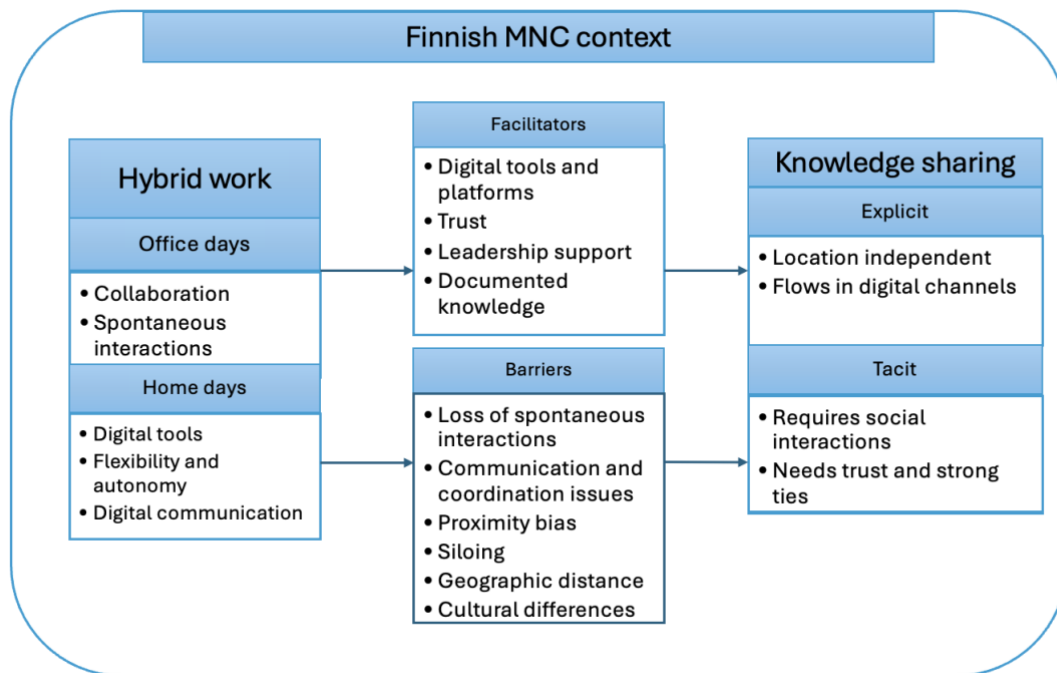
digital channels. (Park et al., 2022; Hau et al., 2013) Tacit knowledge on the other hand is not easily codified as it is based on the individual experiences and skills (Hau et al., 2013). Sharing tacit knowledge in hybrid environments is harder as sharing it depends on close relationships, non-verbal communication and shared experiences. These elements are lost in the digital environments, making sharing tacit knowledge harder in hybrid environments. (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023)

Knowledge sharing is further complicated in MNC settings. Knowledge flows in multiple directions in MNCs and is affected by geographical distances and cultural differences (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012; Luring & Zhang, 2018). These challenges further complicate the sharing of tacit knowledge as it requires close collaboration (Jasimuddin et al., 2015). Hybrid work deepens this issue by reducing face-to-face interactions that are needed to build cross-unit relationships (Björkman et al., 2004; Alasoini et al., 2025).

Hybrid work offers both promoting and limiting factors for these challenges. Digital tools and documented knowledge help to share explicit knowledge across different locations and reduce the need for face-to-face connections. (Keppler & Leonardi, 2023; Wu et al., 2023; Alasoini et al., 2025) On the other hand, hybrid work can create communication barriers, and reduce the spontaneous and informal communication happening in the office (Alasoini et al., 2025). Hybrid work can also cause siloing and proximity bias (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Leonardi, 2021). Hybrid work also makes the sharing of tacit knowledge harder as tacit knowledge depends on the presence and communication that usually happens in the physical presence of the office, as it reduces the opportunities to have spontaneous face-to-face interactions and maintain relationships needed for tacit knowledge sharing (Alasoini et al., 2025; Härmä, 2025).

### **2.4.2 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this thesis is presented below in Figure 2. Hybrid work is divided into office days and home days. Office days support collaboration and spontaneous interactions. Home days support flexibility and autonomy but rely on digital tools and communication. Hybrid work creates facilitators and barriers that influence knowledge sharing in the organization. The facilitators include digital tools and platforms, trust, leadership support and documented knowledge. The barriers include the loss of spontaneous interactions, communication and coordination challenges, proximity bias, siloing, geographic distance and cultural differences. These factors affect knowledge sharing outcomes depending on the type of knowledge. Explicit knowledge is not dependent on the location, and it flows well through digital channels. This suggests that hybrid work supports sharing explicit knowledge in the hybrid environment. Tacit knowledge requires social interactions, trust and strong ties. This makes it more vulnerable to the barriers created by hybrid work. The Finnish MNC context represents the environment in which these relationships take place.



**Figure 2. Conceptual framework**

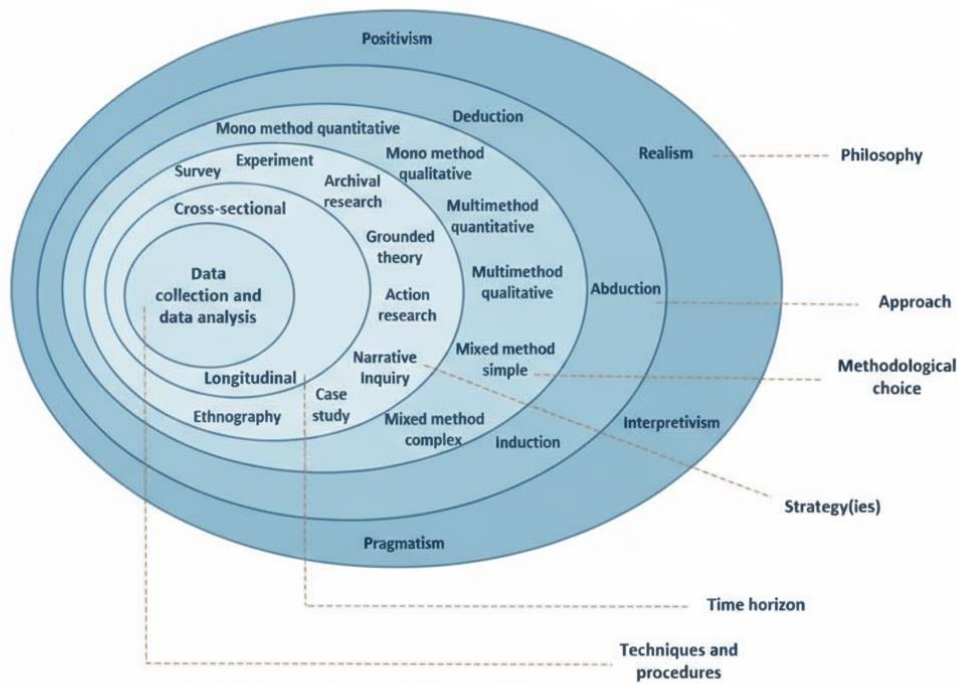
Figure 2 visualizes the framework. The arrows indicate the direction of influence. Hybrid work conditions (Office & Home) shape the facilitators and barriers of knowledge sharing, which affect how explicit and tacit knowledge is shared within the Finnish MNC context.

### **3 Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodology of the study. First, the research methodology is presented, using the research onion by Saunders et al. (2023). Then the data collection method and data analysis is presented. Finally, the reliability and validity of the study is reviewed.

#### **3.1 Research design**

When choosing a research methodology, it is important to understand what it means. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) research methodology is a tool for identifying and solving the research problem. The methodological approach of this thesis follows the research onion developed by Saunders et al. (2023). The research onion presents six layers to guide research towards developing a practical methodology. By following the research onion, it allows the researcher to develop a research strategy.



**Figure 3. Research onion (Saunders et al., 2023 p. 131)**

The outermost layer of the research onion represents four different research philosophies. These represent assumptions about how knowledge is created and what can be considered as valid and acceptable knowledge in research (Saunders et al., 2023). This study adopts an interpretivist research philosophy. Interpretivism suggests that social reality is complex and influenced by context. It is shaped by how individuals understand and view their own experiences. (Saunders et al., 2023) This approach is suitable for this study as hybrid work and knowledge sharing cannot be seen as an objective or measurable phenomena. Hybrid work and knowledge sharing can be experienced differently depending on the role, individual and organizational contexts. To understand how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations requires exploring employees' personal experiences and views.

The second layer represents the theory development. This study uses an abductive approach. Abduction involves moving back and forth between existing theories and

empirical data. In this thesis data is used to explore the phenomenon of knowledge sharing in hybrid arrangements, while also using existing theories to support and identify patterns. (Saunders et al., 2023)

The third layer represents the choice between quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research. This thesis will use a mono-method qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are suitable when the aim is to get a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and explore it from the perspective of those who experience it. (Saunders et al., 2023) In quantitative research the focus is on testing a hypothesis using mostly statistical and mathematical methods. The aim is to expand or create knowledge about the research problem through measurable data. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

Given the nature of the study, qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews is a suitable approach. A quantitative research design would not capture the complexity of how employees experience knowledge sharing in hybrid work settings. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) also state that qualitative methods provide more flexibility. This makes the qualitative approach particularly suitable for researching unstructured problems in new or less researched areas where an exploratory approach is needed (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The fourth layer represents the research strategy. This study uses a case-based interview strategy. The participants are specifically chosen from Finnish multinational corporations. Saunders et al. (2023) suggest that semi-structured interviews should be the primary data collection method for studies that aim to understand the participants' perspectives, experiences and views to understand a phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews include pre-determined questions and follow the same basic structure for all participants but still leaves room for open and informal discussions around the topic. The main benefit of this approach is that it provides a standardized interview setting but leaves room to explore new insights as the answers are not predetermined (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This flexibility is important when studying a complex phenomenon, such as hybrid work and knowledge sharing.

The fifth layer represents the time horizon of the research. This study uses a cross-sectional time horizon, meaning that it examines how employees in Finnish multinational corporations experience hybrid work and knowledge sharing at a specific point in time. In the center of the research onion is data collection and analysis. (Saunders et al., 2023) These will be described more in detail in the sections 3.2 Data collection and 3.3 Data analysis.

### **3.2 Data collection**

The empirical data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with employees and managers working in Finnish multinational corporations. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the way to collect data because it allows the participants to describe their experiences in their own words. It also maintains a consistent structure across interviews. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) This aligns with the interpretivist research philosophy that was adopted for this study. The interview guide was structured around the conceptual framework presented in section 2.4.2 (See Appendix 1.).

The participants were contacted through the personal network of the researcher using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research where the goal is to find participants who have relevant experience and knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Saunders et al., 2023). The selection criteria in this study was that participants work in a Finnish multinational corporation and have experience working in a hybrid arrangement.

The final interview sample consisted of ten participants from four different Finnish multinational corporations operating in different industries. Six of the interviewed participants work for the same company (D) and the remaining four participants represent companies A, B and C. As the researcher had limited reach into getting participants from companies fitting the scope of the study, the overrepresentation of company D is acknowledged. However, the shared themes across all four companies

support the wider applicability of the findings. As agreed mutually with the researcher and participants, all participants, companies and identifying details have been anonymized so that no individual or organization can be identified from the study.

A total of ten interviews were conducted during the spring of 2026. Interviews were conducted in person or via virtual meetings, depending on the preference of the participant. The interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the participants, mostly in Finnish, except interviews 3 and 10, which were conducted in English. The average duration of the interviews was around 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted during the working hours of the participant, making the 30-minute interview slot the best option to find times suitable for the participants. All interviews were recorded with the verbal consent of the participants and were transcribed by the researcher. The first draft of the transcript was generated using Gemini AI-assisted meeting transcription tool and then manually checked against the recordings to ensure accuracy.

Interview	Code	Company	Sector	Role	Location
1	R1	A	Technology	Employee	HQ
2	R2	B	Logistics	Employee	HQ
3	R3	C	Shipping	Employee	Subsidiary
4	R4	D	Energy	Employee	HQ
5	R5	D	Energy	Manager	HQ
6	R6	D	Energy	Employee	HQ
7	R7	D	Energy	Employee	HQ
8	R8	D	Energy	Manager	HQ
9	R9	D	Energy	Employee	HQ
10	R10	B	Logistics	Employee	Subsidiary

**Table 2. Overview of interview participants**

Table 2 presents an overview of the interviewed participants. The sample includes eight employees and two managers (R5 & R8) from four different Finnish multinational corporations. Eight participants are based in their company's headquarters in Finland, while two (R3 & R10) work from the subsidiary locations of the MNCs. This variation in

roles, companies and locations provided multiple perspectives on how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

There are different methods for analyzing research data, depending on the methodology, researchers experience level and how the results will be presented. Qualitative methods are ideal for more explorative research methods studying unstructured problems. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Braun and Clarke (2006) categorize qualitative data analysis methods into two different types. Those which are limited to specific theoretical or epistemological positions, which limits their flexibility and those like thematic analysis, which is not as limited and more flexible. Because this study does not have a clear hypothesis, the flexibility was key for the analytical process. The data of the study was analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis process suggested by Saunders et al. (2023).

First, the data was familiarized by the researcher by checking the transcripts. This included watching the recordings and checking the transcripts manually. The second step was to code the data by identifying and labelling the data based on the content. Next the codes were grouped into broader categories based on the shared meanings and patterns. These categories were then developed into themes. Then the themes were reviewed and refined to reflect the research questions, which are presented in chapter 4.

### **3.4 Reliability and validity**

In quantitative research, validity and reliability are most frequently used to evaluate the quality of the study (Saunders et al., 2023). Reliability refers to a study's replicability, while validity concerns how well the results of the study can be seen as "true". These traditional evaluations are often a poor fit for qualitative research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Therefore, Lincoln & Guba (1985) proposed an alternative evaluation framework, arguing that studies which recognize the existence of multiple, subjective

realities are not suitable for this traditional approach. They suggest evaluating qualitative research based on the trustworthiness, which is divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility can be compared to internal validity in quantitative research (Saunders et al., 2023). Credibility refers to how accurately the findings represent the participants experience and views (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In this study member validation was used to strengthen the credibility of the research (Saunders et al., 2023). The interviews were recorded using Google meet and transcribed live using Gemini AI-assistant to provide a transcript draft directly after the interview. The participants saw the draft immediately after the interview. After analyzing the data, a clean interview transcript was emailed to the participants to ensure they were understood correctly. The participants who were interviewed in Finnish also received the translated transcripts to ensure that the translation was done keeping their original meaning.

Transferability refers to if the findings can be used or compared within other settings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Qualitative research is often done with a small sample, and its purpose is to explore a specific phenomenon, prioritizing creating understanding rather than statistically generalizable results (Saunders et al., 2023). The sample of this study includes participants from four different MNCs operating in different sectors, with participants in different roles and locations. Although company D was overrepresented consisting of six interviews and is acknowledged to be a limitation to transferability, the fact that the key themes emerged consistently across all four companies supports the transferability of the findings beyond a single corporation.

Dependability addresses how well the research process is described and accurately documented and that the researcher addresses the potential limitations of one's research choices (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). All the interviews in this study followed the same semi-structured interview guide to ensure consistency, but still allowing flexibility to participants to share individual experiences. The interviews were recorded

and transcribed manually using the recordings to ensure accuracy. The methodology chapter captures the data collection and analysis processes in detail to increase transparency.

Confirmability addresses if the findings are truly based on data rather than the researchers own personal interests or biases (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). To support confirmability, member validation was used and direct quotes from participants are used in the findings chapter to link the analysis to the data. The anonymization of participants and companies ensures that this study follows ethical standards. This also allowed the participants to discuss their experiences openly.

## 4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings and analysis conducted from the ten interviews with employees and managers working in Finnish multinational corporations. Five themes identified from the coding process address how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations. The themes are introduced and supported by direct quotes from the participants.

The five themes identified from the interviews were:

1. The dependence of tacit knowledge sharing on physical co-presence.
2. Hybrid work as a facilitator of explicit knowledge.
3. The hybrid information gap.
4. The limits of digitalizing informal knowledge sharing.
5. Cross-border teams and cultural dynamics.

### 4.1 The dependence of Tacit knowledge sharing on physical co-presence

The most consistently raised finding across all ten interviews was that tacit knowledge needs the conditions that physical co-presence creates. While participants acknowledged that digital tools help with the formal information sharing, the transfer of “know-how”, practical skills and contextual understanding was described as more difficult in remote settings.

Several participants identified tacit knowledge as the most valuable and most fragile form of knowledge in their organizations. One managerial perspective reflected this directly:

*In my view it supports it very strongly [office days supporting knowledge sharing], specifically when it comes to tacit knowledge, which is ultimately in my view the foundation of everything here. And the fact that ideation, for example, is completely different when we're here in the office talking*

*together. Somehow, we get things moving in a completely different way when we're here together and talking. (R8)*

This view of tacit knowledge as foundational and of physical presence as the condition to unlock it recurred across interviews from multiple companies and roles. This was frequently described as learning through observation and proximity. These are the kinds of side-by-side interactions in which knowledge is shared not through explicit instructions but through shared actions. R1 described this well:

*It often happens that when I'm in the office, they want to show what they're doing and teach – particularly when it's something done for the first time, like a proper X task. But that never happens remotely, because it just doesn't work the same way – where you're doing something at the same time as talking, and someone is beside you watching. It's a completely different thing to do something face-to-face and teach someone. Learning from someone more experienced is much easier when you're in the same place. (R1)*

This difference here is important. The issue is not that remote screen sharing or video calls are technically impossible, but that the quality and character of the knowledge transfer change. Doing and observing at the same time, which characterizes in person knowledge transfer, is disrupted when shared via screen. R9 made a related point about one-to-one interactions more broadly:

*Basic one-to-one sparring is always better face-to-face. It's also a bit harder to read your colleagues body language and so on, what they're actually thinking about something. Behind the screen someone can be elsewhere doing something, and not everyone necessarily has their camera on. It can be a bit hard to read the situation at times. (R9)*

The loss of non-verbal information, meaning that you cannot read someone's facial expressions, hesitation or disagreement with the topic in real time emerged from the interviews. This goes beyond individual body language to how group discussions happen. R2 noted that remote work removes a form of social accountability that physical presence naturally creates:

*A complex issue doesn't get handled as thoroughly when done remotely. In Teams someone can just mute their microphone. If there's been a misunderstanding or something else, someone goes quiet in Teams in a way they probably wouldn't in an in-person meeting. (R2)*

This points to a subtle but important mechanism. Physical co-presence makes disengagement visible and therefore less likely to happen. In remote settings, you cannot be sure that all participants are actively engaging, which affects both the depth of the discussion and the shared contextual understanding that develops through it.

Another difficulty raised consistently across interviews concerns giving negative feedback and handling sensitive conversations remotely. Participants from different companies independently identified this to be harder to manage without physical co-presence. R2 highlighted the difficulty of supporting the other person through such conversations:

*Giving positive feedback is already easy via Teams, but negative feedback – you can't really support the other person well enough to choose your words carefully. (R2)*

R5 described their own preference to have these conversations in person, noting the importance of being able to observe and respond to the other person's reactions in real time:

*When the conversation involves things related to the employment relationship or personal matters – if I need to give feedback, especially negative feedback, I prefer to give it face-to-face so I can explain myself what it means. Then I can better see how the person reacts, whether we need to talk about it more, or how we move forward. (R5)*

R8 made a similar observation from a managerial perspective:

*Giving someone personal feedback remotely feels difficult. It requires more effort in my view, especially when it's something negative. (R8)*

Multiple participants from different companies and roles raising this point suggest that it reflects the nature of remote interpersonal communication rather than individual preference.

Onboarding also emerged as a very clear case of tacit knowledge depending on physical presence. Multiple participants described remote onboarding as hard. R1 described this with an explicit organizational policy:

*If you start, you're not allowed to work remotely right away. You spend several weeks in the office first. We don't allow remote working from the start for exactly this reason. (R1)*

R9 supported this from their own experiences, noting that they had been spending more time in the office than required due to active onboarding of a new employee. R5 spoke

from a more senior perspective and remembered a disruption caused by system migration that took place remotely:

*It felt somehow quite shocking that they had to learn a new system remotely. Before that they had always been in-person sessions, and if someone fell behind, the trainer was right there to come and show them. I still believe that that kind of training is more enjoyable for those being trained when done in person. (R5)*

The same participant described their response to this challenge, encouraging new employees to be physically present as a default during their start at the organization:

*We have encouraged the new summer interns to come into the office every day. (R5)*

Another, subtler dimension of this theme concerns how tacit knowledge is shared accidentally rather than through deliberate instructions. Several participants described a form of accidental learning that happens through physical proximity, such as overhearing conversations, absorbing context by being in the same room, or picking up cues about the state of work without actively searching for it. R10 described this well:

*Small things that come with experience usually get shared by accident or informally. You can get knowledge and help when remote, but these small things or accidental sharings of knowledge don't happen when working remotely. (R10)*

R5 also expressed a point about this:

*Something always gets lost when one person is remote, or both are remote. (R5)*

This sense that something is lost that cannot be fully compensated for was a recurring theme in the interviews. Suggesting that the effect of hybrid work on tacit knowledge sharing is not primarily a technological problem, but a structural consequence of the reduced co-presence.

## **4.2 Hybrid work as a facilitator of explicit knowledge**

In contrast to the challenges of tacit knowledge sharing, participants consistently described digital tools working well for the storing, accessing and sharing of explicit knowledge. Across all four companies the view was that tools such as shared documents, email and chat applications performed reliably regardless of the user's physical location. This finding is important as it suggests that hybrid work does not hinder knowledge sharing but affects different types of knowledge in different ways.

The accessibility of documented knowledge from any location was recognized by all participants. R3 who works in the office only a few times a month described this as:

*It doesn't really matter whether you're in the office or at home. You can access everything. (R3)*

This statement is meaningful coming from a participant who works remotely very often. The tools are a completely equivalent channel for explicit knowledge, not just suitable substitutes. Other participants also confirmed the same experience of the digital tools working well from any location.

One notable facilitator that emerged from the interviews was the use of new technology, such as AI. R9 described the use of AI tools to assist with communication in non-native languages:

*It's a good tool to spar your own message against it [AI], to make sure the right meaning gets through. Of course you can't rely on it 100%, but it's at least a good tool to check what AI suggests and perhaps tidy things up a bit. (R9)*

R6 described a similar function, stating that they use translation tools to confirm written communication before sending it in order to make sure the intended meaning is preserved:

*I've been using translation tools quite a bit, to make sure it comes across the way I intend. (R6)*

These points suggest that AI and translation tools are functioning as facilitators of knowledge sharing in multilingual MNC environments, reducing the barrier of explicit knowledge sharing that language differences would otherwise create.

However, the effectiveness of digital tools for explicit knowledge sharing was found to be uneven between organizations. Several participants found that when moving from the organizational level to the team level, documentation quality and discipline decline. R1 described this clearly:

*The dividing line is perhaps that if it concerns the whole company, then it gets documented very well, and a lot of information comes out of that. But the smaller the team you move towards, the more it relies on just conversation, and nothing from it is available anywhere afterwards. (R1)*

R8 addressed this from a managerial perspective:

*It [Documenting knowledge] really depends on the individual – how well they store information varies. That's perhaps one area where I'd sometimes like to see more automation. At least information is stored automatically in emails and the like. But clean, structured archiving of knowledge is still a bit lacking. (R8)*

This gap between organizational level documentation and team level practices means a significant share of relevant knowledge remains in a conversational form, not accessible to those who are not present in the conversations. R5 identified the most effective managerial counter to this is to write things down:

*By making sure that all information is also somewhere in writing – that everything gets communicated in writing and not just said in a meeting somewhere. There's not really any other way. (R5)*

The use of recorded meetings and training sessions was raised by several participants as a very useful way to extend access to knowledge across time and location. R9 described how recordings enable review and repetition in a way that single live session cannot:

*If you've had some training and you're on holiday or sick, it still lets you go back and listen through it again and review it if needed. It's not like you have to get it all on the first listen – if something new is being covered, it's really useful to be able to record it and play it back. (R9)*

Even though hybrid recording techniques cannot completely replace in person participation, they can still act as a facilitator.

Another broader dimension of hybrid work, different from the digital tools is the autonomy hybrid work provides for employees to match their working environment to the type of knowledge sharing a task requires. Several participants described using hybrid flexibility to regulate where they work based on the demands of the day rather than a set obligation. R9 described this directly, noting that the decision to come to the office is often driven by the complexity of the knowledge at hand:

*In principle it feels like you get faster answers from colleagues when more people are in the office. If I have something complex going on, that's when I head to the office. (R9)*

Choosing the location based on the needed knowledge represents a facilitating factor that is specific to hybrid arrangements. A fully remote worker cannot access the benefits of in-person collaboration when complex tacit knowledge sharing is needed. A fully office-based worker on the other hand cannot access the focused, uninterrupted conditions that working from home offers for tasks that need deep concentration. When hybrid work is implemented with sufficient flexibility, it enables employees to use the office as a space for knowledge sharing rather than a default location for all work. R8 described the social encounters of office days:

*I get energy from these encounters and good conversations here. It's already nice just to see your colleagues. It creates a quite clear boundary – this is the workplace and home is home. (R8)*

Several participants also positively described the autonomy that supports this task-based flexibility. Several noted that their hybrid arrangements operated on a trust based rather than a surveillance-based model, which allows for genuine self-regulation. R9 described this:

*No one has even kept track so far of which days I'm where. It's maybe based more on the trust that everyone plays by the same rules in terms of how often they're in the office. (R9)*

This trust-based model of autonomy is itself a facilitator. When employees feel free to make task-based decisions about where they work, it can lead to a better allocation of physical presence to the activities that benefit the most from it. The promoting effect of hybrid work is therefore not limited to the digital infrastructure that supports explicit knowledge sharing but also goes beyond the structural conditions it creates for employees to manage their own knowledge sharing environments.

### **4.3 The hybrid information gap**

One of the significant findings of the interviews was the hybrid information gap. This was a pattern where employees who are physically present in the office are exposed to a richer and more timely information flow than those working remotely. This asymmetry is not the result of intentional exclusion, and participants were generally careful to distinguish it from intentional knowledge hoarding. It more comes from a structural consequence of uncoordinated hybrid schedules and the continued reliance on informal, in-person communication for certain types of knowledge.

A key factor in this asymmetry is the absence of coordination in hybrid schedules across many teams. When individual employees independently decide which days to come in, it is unpredictable to know who is present and when. R4 described this directly:

*We work in the office three days a week but which days haven't been coordinated – there's no shared understanding of which days everyone is in the office together. (R4)*

This lack of coordination means that the formation of informal in-office groups is the result of individual scheduling decisions rather than an intentional organizational decision. The result is that the gap between office-present and remote employees varies daily and makes it difficult to ensure consistent inclusion.

R1 described this dynamic of the formation of an informal inner circle among office-present employees well:

*They [Remote workers] easily get left outside the so-called inner circle of people who are permanently in the office, and they're not as up to date on what's happening. And sometimes that leads to conflict situations where people don't really know where things stand, what a person is doing, or what stage they're at in their work. (R1)*

R6 described the experience of being on the receiving end of this dynamic, feeling more like an outsider than a full participant in a meeting or conversation:

*You notice sometimes, if you're the only one remote in a meeting, there's kind of a bit of an outsider feeling. Maybe it's more that they don't necessarily know how to include you in it. (R6)*

This observation points to a dimension of asymmetry that is interpersonal rather than informational. The remote participant is not only receiving less information but also experiencing a different quality of participation. The ability to contribute

spontaneously, read the room and be noticed as an active participant is reduced in hybrid meetings where the majority is co-located in the office.

A related and practically significant aspect of this asymmetry is the exclusion of remote employees from informal decision-making. While formal decisions were consistently described as being communicated through official channels accessible to all, the earlier stages of decision making, including informal discussions, spontaneous ideation and corridor conversations that shape what eventually become the formal decision, were found to occur mostly among those present in the office. R10 described the result:

*Yes, sometimes people plan and discuss things spontaneously at the office. Of course you get the information about the decision later, but your input or opinion might get left out entirely. (R10)*

R2 elaborated on the timing dimension of this exclusion, noting that the point at which remote workers are brought into the conversation is often too late for their input to have an effect on the outcome.

*It's only at the very last moment, when the decision is almost already made and their ability to influence it is a bit reduced, that they hear about it. (R2)*

R6 offered a concrete example of the information flow missing the remote workers:

*Our manager was sick and nobody knew anything about it. Then someone at the office mentioned it, but it didn't reach the whole team. That made me think about how many things must just get said there that don't really travel to the whole team. (R6)*

R5 noted that those who are physically present in the office consistently hear about emerging developments before information reaches formal channels:

*Those who are here [office] will hear about it before the others. (R5)*

R7 described the overall pattern well:

*Official information does get through, but the informal can go missing.  
(R7)*

The gap between these two channels, formal and informal, is central for the core of the asymmetry identified in this theme. Official communications reach everyone, but the informally shared knowledge does not.

A further dimension of the hybrid information gap concerns the career visibility and access to opportunity. R1 described a link between office presence and the likelihood of being included in spontaneous high value interactions:

*I'd argue there's a strong correlation there. [Being present at the office and getting opportunities] Up to a certain point – even from a career advancement perspective – especially in a small company, where you're known by your face. There are a lot of people in roles where we sometimes don't even know they work with us, because they do fully remote. (R1)*

R1 extended this observation by reflecting on how it plays out from a decision maker's perspective:

*I see good results, but they might be completely faceless to me – I might not necessarily connect that good work to a person when I see it. Then I think, oh right, so it was you who did that. (R1)*

This suggests that the information asymmetry created by hybrid work extends beyond immediate exchange of operational knowledge to longer-term dimensions of organizational participation and advancements. Employees who are less visibly present not only receive less informal information but are also less visible as contributors, which may affect how their expertise and performance are seen.

#### **4.4 The limits of digitalizing informal knowledge sharing**

The fourth identified theme addresses the informal, spontaneous dimension of knowledge sharing. This includes the corridor conversations, overheard discussions, coffee machine encounters and to which extent these can be replicated or substituted in a digital environment. The findings across the interviews were clear and consistent. Informal knowledge sharing of these kinds of interactions is resistant to digitalization, particularly in a hybrid setting where some employees are co-located and some are not.

Participants identified particular face-to-face environments as especially beneficial for casual knowledge sharing. R7 noted that these unofficial channels have direct commercial effectiveness and emphasized the operational value of being physically close to important coworkers:

*I have these key stakeholders who are based here in Headquarters and for now on the same floor, so it's really easy to bump into them at the coffee machine and walk over and have a quick catch-up. It's much easier. It adds to the sense of collaboration and working together. (R7)*

R1 described the shared lunch break as another productive setting for informal knowledge sharing, noting that solutions to problems often emerge in these unstructured moments:

*There's the hour-long lunch in the middle of the day, and we've obviously talked about things during it. If there's, say, a burning topic of the day, very often the solution gets found precisely over lunch. And often when you're not actively working but just talking about something, it resolves more easily. (R1)*

Participants described a category of knowledge transfer that is neither planned nor specifically recognized as knowledge sharing, yet which serves as an important channel for the exchange of tacit know-how, problem solutions and contextual awareness. R9 described this mechanism in terms of thinking out loud:

*If you're talking to someone, someone else might overhear and pick it up and say – I actually know the answer to that. It reaches a bit more than just the one person you were originally going to ask. I definitely see it working better in the office. (R9)*

R8 described the same phenomenon from a managerial perspective, noting that physical co-presence makes it possible to detect knowledge needs that might never be expressed digitally:

*Here in the office you notice much more easily when someone is struggling with something. Or you ask how things are going, and someone might say with a lower threshold – hey, I've got this thing going on, could you help, what should we do here. (R8)*

The lower threshold for asking for help in person was a recurring observation. Several participants noted that the act of sending a chat message carries a different social weight than a spontaneous face-to-face question. Reaching out digitally is seen as more intentional and more visible, requiring considering whether reaching out with a question is needed. This may decrease the amount of informal knowledge seeking that happens in remote or hybrid settings. R10 confirmed that informal interactions do not transfer well to the digital environment:

*It [informal conversations and knowledge sharing] happens a lot in the office, but I don't have chit-chat with the ones who are online. (R10)*

This dynamic extends beyond individual knowledge seeking to the broader process of ideation and cross-team coordination. R8 described how geographic separation can cause ideas to develop in isolation, progressing past the point at which collaborative input would have been most valuable:

*Ideas don't necessarily reach us at the point when we should be ideating together. Instead, ideas get developed in one person's own head, in their home office, and things get pushed forward – without necessarily realizing it hasn't even been implemented yet. (R8)*

The question whether a digital coffee break could substitute for the informal encounters at the office was raised directly in all interviews. The responses were skeptical though the reasoning behind it varied. R5 identified the loss of informal conversations as unavoidable:

*It doesn't replace spontaneous knowledge exchange. During COVID we had virtual coffee moments – in my view it's simply not the same thing. Not being physically present doesn't replace that spontaneous knowledge exchange in the office, where someone starts talking about something new and you catch that it might be relevant to our work – that gets lost.*  
(R5)

R8 focused on the structural problem of intentionality, meaning that a scheduled virtual break cannot be spontaneous:

*You don't get that same spontaneity from it. You join the call because you have to, for a specific reason. That already immediately creates the feeling that this is an obligatory thing – even if the intention is to be there without cameras and relax.* (R8)

R2 arrived at a similar conclusion from a different angle, arguing that a virtual coffee break requires a theme or agenda to function at all:

*Not unless there's some kind of theme to it... I'd believe it needs some kind of theme.* (R2)

This observation highlights the tension between structure and spontaneity. Providing structure makes the interaction manageable but at the same time destroys the informal side of it. R4 added a point to this, noting that virtual coffee breaks worked better during the pandemic when everyone was remote at the same time:

*When everyone was remote, it was easier because you were already in that mode. But now it takes more. (R4)*

This finding is important as it suggests that the problem is not the digital interaction, but the asymmetric environment created when a part of the group shares the informal physical context of the office while others are remote. In a fully remote setting the absence of informal interactions is at least shared equally and a virtual alternative can partially fill the gap. In hybrid settings, the virtual substitute competes with an already functioning in-person alternative and the unequal conditions of the two groups reduce the effectiveness of any shared digital informal space.

#### **4.5 Cross-border teams and cultural dynamics**

The MNC context introduces a further set of dynamics that operate alongside and to some extent independently of the hybrid work dimension. This theme addresses two interrelated aspects of cross-border knowledge sharing: The role of digital tools in facilitating contact across organizational and geographic boundaries and the cultural and linguistic factors that shape how knowledge moves within internationally distributed teams.

A finding that challenges the view of hybrid work as a barrier to knowledge sharing is that digital tools appear to actively lower the threshold for reaching people outside one's immediate team or location. This suggests that hybrid work and the digital tools that it has accelerated may enable a form of cross-boundary reach that was harder to achieve in a fully office-based model. R3 described the change in terms of removing a social barrier:

*In the digital world you don't need to know someone to contact them. So, we are removing one wall. (R3)*

R10 described a similar experience of being able to locate and contact relevant people across the organization easily:

*I can find people and what they do more easily with the company systems. So, reaching out is quite easy just by leaving a chat message or email to the correct person, even though you have never met them in person. (R10)*

R9 captured this also very clearly, noting that hybrid tools had made it easier to reach people outside the immediate team than those working nearby in the office:

*I feel I can reach stakeholders more easily through hybrid work tools than my own team members who are over at the Headquarters office. (R9)*

This lowering of the contact threshold is made possible by company ESM systems, role descriptions and chat group structures that make expertise findable in a way that the physical office did not reliably support, as it required already knowing the person. Several participants noted the value of being able to identify the right person for a question or help without needing an existing relationship.

However, this structural accessibility contrasts with a finding about the quality of relationships formed exclusively through digital channels. Participants consistently noted that relationships built without face-to-face contacts remained thinner and more transactional, lacking informal depth. R9 noted:

*It tends to stay more work-focused, and a bit of small talk gets lost. (R9)*

This is consistent with the idea of tacit knowledge. While digital tools support the sharing of explicit knowledge, they underdevelop the social and contextual depth.

An important aspect is the connection between organizational siloing and hybrid work. R1 argued that siloing between departments is fundamentally structural, determined by whether teams have overlapping work, rather than a direct cause of hybrid arrangements.

*The siloing happens precisely when there's no overlapping work. And you can't influence that through your working style – it's specifically about what work is being done. (R1)*

R8 noted that the sense of disconnection from colleagues in other parts of the organization remained regardless of where they worked:

*Well, it feels like we're a bit separate regardless – whether we're in the office or not. They [non-team members] sit somewhere completely different, and we rarely actually bump into each other here. Aside from a few meetings, and often even those are challenging for many people. There might be more of a sense of unity if we were sitting on the same floor and had more face-to-face interaction. Right now, that doesn't happen. It's the same whether we're remote or here. (R8)*

This is an important argument as it suggests that hybrid work may not create siloing, but it may highlight or intensify those that already exist. Organizations where departments operate independently might face knowledge sharing barriers regardless of the working model in place.

Geographic distance was broadly dismissed as a barrier to knowledge sharing by participants. Time zone differences were identified as the main practical challenge rather than the distance itself. R2 described this directly:

*The bigger the time difference, the less shared time there is. (R2)*

Within a European time zone range, this friction was considered insignificant. Collaboration with colleagues in North America or Asia was identified as more constrained with the once-a-day communication cycle limiting the responsiveness that more complex knowledge sharing requires.

In contrast, cultural differences were seen as having more effect on whether and how knowledge is shared. R1 offered a very detailed response regarding this issue comparing different cultures and norms:

*What matters more is how the culture handles admitting mistakes and solving things together. For example, in Southern Europe and Asian countries, it is much more common that it is very difficult to acknowledge that there is a problem and to communicate it further. Whereas people in Central and Northern Europe tend to want to discuss problems in order to resolve them. (R1)*

This observation that cultural norms around problem acknowledgement and openness directly shape the willingness to share knowledge represents a dimension of the MNC knowledge sharing challenge that operated independently of hybrid arrangement. Whether an employee is in the office or at home may matter less than whether the cultural environment encourages or discourages facing difficulties.

Language was identified as an additional friction point, though one that participants generally managed rather than experienced as a fundamental barrier. The use of English as the organizational working language created differences in confidence and fluency that affected the quality and efficiency of knowledge sharing. R1 noted that discomfort with English could suppress knowledge sharing entirely:

*Of course, the working language is English, but in practice the level of English varies enormously. I suspect that often the reason why it's hard to communicate and share knowledge is that people don't feel comfortable speaking in English. Because of that they don't want to share information or talk about their work, or they can't explain their work clearly. (R1)*

For many Finnish employees the effect of language differences was subtler but still present. R9 described the additional effort needed when communicating in a non-native language:

*It slows things down slightly. You have to go over and check emails or information you're sharing a few more times to make sure it comes across correctly and the recipient understands what you're trying to communicate. (R9)*

R8 offered an unusual perspective, noting that their own English proficiency had declined after returning to Finland after working abroad:

*I've noticed that my English has deteriorated a little since moving back to Finland. It doesn't feel quite as natural to communicate in English anymore. (R8)*

This suggests that the language barrier in Finnish MNCs may be partly caused by the reduced exposure to English-language environments. This is a consequence of working more domestically under hybrid arrangements.

Another relevant observation related to the MNC context concerns the cultural attitude towards knowledge sharing. Several participants noted that Finnish organizational culture is open and collaborative, in contrast to context where knowledge is used as power. R7 described this difference directly:

*I know that in other offices in other countries there is perhaps information hoarded as a tool of power. I don't think that's the case here. Here it's more that you help a colleague if you can. (R7)*

R2 noted that organizational size may have an effect on these dynamics, suggesting that smaller organizations are less exposed to knowledge asymmetries that hybrid work can create in larger settings:

*We have a smaller organization, so it's a bit difficult to say. We don't really have these situations, but I would assume that the bigger the organization, the bigger the risk that some people end up in a spot keeping knowledge to themselves. (R2)*

The role of trust in knowledge sharing under hybrid arrangements needs closer attention. Across all ten interviews trust in colleagues and management was reported high and participants consistently described this as removing hesitation from knowledge sharing. R10 described this:

*I have good trust, so I am willing to share my knowledge and don't really think about it. (R10)*

R8 acknowledged that lower trust might cause different behaviors, including subconscious knowledge hoarding, but described knowledge sharing as a default task:

*If there would be low trust, there might be some subconscious knowledge hoarding at play. But as a colleague and in a professional sense I feel I share tacit knowledge regardless. (R8)*

The consistency of high trust across all four companies and all ten participants means that trust cannot be analyzed as a variable in this study, as there is no low trust to compare against. What the data does show in this case is that trust functions as a background enabling condition. Trust allows knowledge sharing to proceed without friction and low trust would likely introduce motivational barriers that no structural or digital facilitators could compensate for.

While reporting high trust may reflect participants giving socially acceptable answers, the consistency across all ten independently conducted interviews supports its credibility. It suggests that in this sample at least, the primary barriers to knowledge sharing under hybrid arrangements are structural and environmental rather than motivational.

#### **4.6 Summary of findings**

The analysis presented in this chapter identifies five interconnected themes that together characterize how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations. Tacit knowledge sharing is the dimension most clearly affected, with physical co-presence functioning as a condition that is difficult to replace for the side-by-side learning, observation and informal exchanges through which tacit knowledge is shared. The sense of accountability created by physical presence, the

ability to read group dynamics and non-verbal cues and the informal learning of contextual knowledge through proximity are all mechanisms that remote settings cannot fully replicate.

On the other hand, explicit knowledge sharing is well supported by digital infrastructure, although documentation weakens at the team level and recorded knowledge access is not as effective as participating in person. AI and translation tools are emerging as additional facilitators in multilingual settings, reducing the language friction. They still cannot replace the direct human interactions that give knowledge its full meaning.

A structural asymmetry arises when hybrid schedules are uncoordinated, creating a two-tier information environment. In this environment the people working in the office are consistently exposed to a richer informal information flow. The asymmetry goes beyond the immediate exchange of operational knowledge to long-term dimensions of career visibility and access to opportunity. The spontaneous and unplanned informal knowledge sharing is particularly resistant to digitalization and attempting to replace it virtually loses its character in hybrid settings where physical and remote participants are not equally included. Finally, the MNC dimension introduces cross-border facilitators through digital tools that lower the barriers to contacting someone but are limited by cultural differences and language friction shaping the depth and openness of cross-border knowledge sharing independently of hybrid arrangements.

The findings are discussed in relation to the existing literature in the next chapter.

## 5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the five themes from Chapter 4 in relation to the theoretical framework and prior literature established in Chapter 2. The structure of the discussion follows the themes identified in the findings. Each theme is examined in relation to relevant theoretical concepts and prior research, considering where the findings confirm, extend or challenge existing literature. Finally, an updated conceptual framework is presented.

### 5.1 Tacit knowledge sharing and physical co-presence

The finding that tacit knowledge sharing is dependent on the conditions that physical co-presence creates confirms and extends the existing literature about tacit knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe socialization as the process through which tacit knowledge moves between people, requiring shared experience and direct interactions rather than codified transmission. The interview data supports this in detail. Participants described learning through side-by-side working, observing colleagues in action and absorbing contextual understanding through proximity. These are the conditions that socialization requires. The finding that these are disrupted in remote and hybrid arrangements confirms that the first stage of the SECI cycle is vulnerable under hybrid arrangements.

Hau et al. (2013) identify tacit knowledge as tied to experience and difficult to formalize or codify. This helps to explain why video calls and screen sharing feel fundamentally different from working together physically. The findings build on this claim as they suggest that the problem is not just the technical difficulty of sharing tacit knowledge remotely, but the loss of the conditions under which tacit knowledge is recognized and requested in the first place. The side-by-side working and observing that makes tacit knowledge visible and transferable is something that digital communication cannot effectively replicate.

Keppler and Leonardi (2023) argue that hybrid work reduces the non-verbal cues and the quality of the relationships on which tacit knowledge sharing depends. The findings confirm this across multiple levels. The participants noted the difficulty of picking up non-verbal cues, the reduced sense of accountability in remote group discussions and the different nature of sensitive interpersonal conversations held outside the office. The finding that giving negative feedback in person is preferred aligns with the relational dimension that Keppler and Leonardi (2023) identify as central to tacit knowledge sharing. These are not just personal preferences but structural conditions through which trust and shared understanding are built between colleagues.

The findings about onboarding are also relevant. Obrenovic et al. (2015) describe onboarding as a clear case of tacit knowledge sharing, where more experienced colleagues share know-how through face-to-face interactions rather than through explicit codified instructions. Organizational policies requiring new employees to spend their first weeks in the office before working remotely suggest that organizations have recognized this need in practice. The onboarding policies described by participants represent a direct organizational response to this, showing that specific practices around co-presence have been formalized even where hybrid schedules remain informally managed.

Härmä (2025) points to the loss of overhearing colleagues discuss problems and solutions as a way that hybrid work reduces tacit knowledge sharing. A form of informal learning where knowledge is picked up “accidentally” through proximity rather than actively sought. The data supports this as participants noted that something is lost in hybrid settings, even when no specific knowledge sharing was intended.

## **5.2 Hybrid work as a facilitator of explicit knowledge**

Park et al. (2022) argue that explicit knowledge is easily codified and shared in digital channels and does not depend on physical proximity. The data confirms this across all

four organizations and participants. The findings that documented knowledge is equally accessible from the office and from home supports this in the Finnish MNC context.

Hau et al. (2013) separate tacit and explicit knowledge partly on the basis of accessibility. They suggest that explicit knowledge can be stored and retrieved without the social conditions that tacit knowledge requires. The findings that participants experienced no loss of access to documented knowledge regardless of working from home confirms this difference in the context of hybrid arrangements. When the digital infrastructure is well in place and functions properly, it can act as a full equivalent channel for explicit knowledge rather than just a substitute.

However, the findings suggest that documentation quality declines as the focus moves from organizational level to team level. This highlights a gap in the literature. Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) identify the quality of transmission channels as a key factor in MNC knowledge flows. The findings suggest that this channel quality is uneven and that the formal channels supporting organizational level explicit knowledge sharing are not consistently replicated at the team level. This might leave a significant share of relevant knowledge to remain in a conversational form, making it not accessible for those who are not present in the original exchange. This points to a gap between what digital infrastructure makes possible in theory and what organizations actually practice at the team level.

The finding suggests that AI and translation tools facilitate explicit knowledge sharing in multilingual contexts and builds on the existing literature. Olan et al. (2022) argue that AI tools help capture and share complex knowledge while functioning alongside the existing social knowledge sharing practices. The data confirms the use of AI for knowledge sharing but adds to it in the Finnish MNC context. The data suggests that AI tools are primarily used to verify and assist with the written communication, reducing the language friction that Harzing and Pudelko (2013) identify as a cross-border knowledge sharing barrier.

The findings about recorded knowledge add to the discussion of explicit knowledge facilitators. For example, the recorded meetings allow knowledge from training sessions and meetings to be viewed asynchronously, extending the accessibility across time-zones and locations in a way that a traditional office model could not easily support. Vuchkovski et al. (2023) note that the increased use of sequential communication, such as recorded presentations means that shared knowledge can be accessed later and multiple times. This supports the view that hybrid work changes when and how knowledge becomes accessible, making some forms of explicit knowledge more accessible than before.

### **5.3 The hybrid information gap**

The hybrid work information gap builds and extends findings from the existing literature. The general idea that hybrid work creates informal asymmetries between office and remote employees is acknowledged by Härmä (2025) and Alasoini et al. (2025). Härmä (2025) specifically points out the uneven split between home and office days and the lack of coordination between colleagues as the root cause. The data of this study confirms this view in the Finnish MNC context and develops the phenomenon into a more complex one than the original framework anticipated.

Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) identify the motivational willingness of the source unit as a key factor in knowledge flows. The findings suggest that the hybrid information gap does not primarily operate through this factor as participants consistently separated this from intentional knowledge hoarding. Instead, the gap rises from the reliance on informal, unplanned in-person communication for relevant knowledge. This is combined with uncoordinated schedules that make the consistent inclusion of remote participants unpredictable. Michailova and Minbaeva (2012) argue that shared organizational values and culture are requirements for effective knowledge sharing across subsidiaries. The finding that high organizational trust was reported across all four organizations and participants suggest that these background requirements are present in this sample. The

hybrid information gap therefore appears as a structural problem that exists despite motivational or cultural barriers.

The career visibility dimension of this asymmetry extends the discussion beyond knowledge sharing. Hopkins and Bardoel (2023) describe this through proximity bias, arguing that managers might unintentionally favor employees who are more present in the office when making decisions about promotions and access to information. Vuchkovski et al. (2023) also note that remote employees risk being excluded from informal discussions and decision-making in ways that make their contribution less visible. The data confirms both arguments and adds to it by pointing out that the asymmetry does not operate through intentional exclusion but through a pattern of performance not being linked to presence. This means that work done remotely may not be easily connected to the person who made it. This finding makes it clearer how the proximity bias plays out in the Finnish MNC context.

#### **5.4 The limits of digitalizing informal knowledge sharing**

The findings that informal knowledge sharing is resistant to digitalization in hybrid arrangements support what Keppler and Leonardi (2023) argue. They suggest that hybrid work reduces the social conditions on which tacit knowledge sharing depends and that digital tools can support these conditions, but they cannot replace them. The data provides explanations why they cannot be replaced. The key finding is not that informal knowledge sharing is reduced in hybrid arrangements, which is acknowledged in the literature, but the problem is different in hybrid arrangements than in fully remote ones. Leonardi (2021) argues that hybrid employees tend to focus on their own teams, maintaining the strong ties within the team but the weak ties with those outside the team are weakened. Hopkins and Figaro (2021) suggest that strong ties survive the transition to digital environments, but weak ties are more vulnerable as they depend on the spontaneous interactions that office settings naturally provide. The informal coffee machine encounters, unplanned exchanges mentioned in the interviews are the kinds of

informal interactions through which weak ties are formed and maintained and are needed to share knowledge between teams that do not work closely together.

In a fully remote setting, the absence of informal in-person interactions is shared equally among all participants. In hybrid settings, informal in-person interactions continue among those who are physically present while remote participants are structurally excluded. Härmä (2025) suggests that the uneven split between home days and office days is the cause of this asymmetry, noting that colleagues following different hybrid schedules affects knowledge sharing in the office and in digital environments. The virtual substitute therefore competes with an already functioning physical alternative and can only partially fill the gap for those who are not present in the office. The finding that virtual coffee breaks were experienced as more effective during the pandemic when all the participants shared the same conditions supports this claim. The effect on informal knowledge sharing is not therefore something that hybrid work necessarily creates but a consequence of the asymmetry it creates between those who are physically present and those who are remote. The challenge for the organizations is not to replicate the informal interactions happening in the office digitally, but to coordinate hybrid schedules to reduce this gap.

Alasoini et al. (2025) and Härmä (2025) describe the shift towards more scheduled communication under hybrid arrangements. The findings confirm this and explain why. Reaching out requires a level of intentionality that spontaneous face-to-face contact does not, making the informal, unplanned knowledge seeking that happens naturally in the office less likely. This helps to explain why informal knowledge sharing declines in hybrid arrangements even though employees do not have motivational barriers to share knowledge.

## 5.5 Cross-border teams and cultural dynamics

The MNC findings both confirm and challenge the theoretical framework. Digital tools lower the barriers for cross-boundary contact, making it possible for employees to reach out to colleagues across organizational and geographic boundaries more easily than in a traditional office model. This challenges the view that hybrid work is primarily a boundary for MNC knowledge sharing.

Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) identify the presence and quality of transmission channels as a key factor in knowledge flows within MNCs. The finding that enterprise social media systems and employee databases make expertise findable without requiring an existing relationship extends the concept of transmission channel quality in a way that was not anticipated. In a traditional office setting, reaching out to a colleague in a foreign subsidiary required either an existing relationship or a formal introduction. Digital tools have lowered this barrier and the finding that some participants feel more easily reachable to distant colleagues than to those nearby headquarters shows that digital tools have changed how relationships and knowledge sharing are structured across MNC boundaries.

However, the finding that relationships formed exclusively through digital channels remain thinner and lacking informal depth confirms that this accessibility has limits. Keppler and Leonardi (2023) identify relational confidence as a key facilitator of knowledge sharing and the finding that digital-only relationships lack the social depth required for this confidence supports this argument. This suggests that digital tools make initial contact easier and support explicit knowledge sharing but do not substitute for the face-to-face interactions that build the trust needed for deeper tacit knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries.

The finding on organizational siloing is important. Participants argued that siloing between departments is determined by whether teams have overlapping work, rather than by hybrid arrangements. This suggests that hybrid work might not create siloing, but it may highlight or intensify those that already exist. This aligns with Michailova and

Minbaeva (2012) who argue that organizational structure and values shape knowledge sharing more than the channels through which knowledge is shared.

Cultural and linguistic factors stand out from the data as operating independently of hybrid arrangements. They shape the depth and openness of knowledge sharing regardless of the working location of the employee. Chini (2004) and Luring & Zhang (2018) identify cultural distance as a structural feature of MNC knowledge sharing. The findings point to a specific way in which this plays out. The data suggests that cultural norms around acknowledging problems and communicating openly operate consistently regardless of working location, suggesting that barriers are not caused by hybrid work itself.

Comfort with English as a working language also differs and language insecurity can reduce participation in MNC knowledge sharing activities. Harzing and Pudelko (2013) note that language proficiency shapes how authority and communication flows across MNC units. Michailova and Minbaeva (2012) argue that organizational values shape knowledge sharing at a level more fundamental than the channels through which it is shared. These factors represent barriers that hybrid work arrangements alone cannot address.

The finding that trust functions as a background enabling condition rather than a variable with variations in this sample is an important observation. Trust is identified in the literature as a necessary condition for knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010; Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). The consistently high trust reported across all four organizations and participants means that trust cannot be analyzed as a factor that explains differences in knowledge sharing outcomes within this sample. What the data does confirm is that the primary barriers identified exist despite a high level of organizational trust. This supports the view that the barriers identified in this study are structural rather than motivational.

## 5.6 Updated theoretical framework

The analysis discussed above suggests several changes to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. The original conceptual framework positioned hybrid work as the independent variable, with facilitator and barriers as the connecting factors and knowledge sharing outcomes divided between explicit and tacit knowledge. The broad logic of the structure is supported by the empirical findings, but the analysis revealed dimensions of complexity that the original conceptual framework did not capture.

The most important change concerns how hybrid work itself is represented. The original framework split office days and home days as the primary factor. Härmä (2025) had already pointed out the uneven split between home days and office days, and the way differing employee schedules can act as a cause of knowledge sharing asymmetries. The findings of this study support this observation in the Finnish MNC context and clarify what the relevant variable is. What matters most is not the amount of time spent in the office or at home, but whether the schedules are coordinated across teams. Therefore, in the updated framework the office and home days split is replaced with a coordinated vs. uncoordinated hybrid schedule split. This change carries a practical implication. The barriers identified in this study are not a natural part of hybrid work, but rather consequences of a specific organizational design choice that can be addressed through scheduling policies.

The facilitators and barriers structure from the original framework is kept in the updated version, as the data supports the difference between facilitators and barriers of knowledge sharing. The facilitators box is refined to reflect what the findings show as facilitators of knowledge sharing in hybrid Finnish MNCs. Digital tools are confirmed as the primary facilitator of explicit knowledge sharing. Cross-unit access, recorded and documented knowledge, AI and translation tools and ESM platforms are all identified in the data as specific facilitators. The barriers are also updated. Hybrid asymmetry is a new barrier that the original framework did not anticipate. It refers to the exclusion of remote employees from the informal knowledge flows that happen among those present at the

office. The remaining barriers are confirmed by the data and are consistent with what the literature review anticipated.

The knowledge sharing box is expanded to include cross-border reach as the third knowledge sharing outcome that was not in the original framework. The finding that digital tools have lowered the barriers to reaching out to colleagues across organizational and geographic boundaries is an outcome that goes beyond explicit knowledge sharing as it concerns how relationships are built across borders. The cross-border reach describes the access to people and expertise across MNC units, rather than only to explicit data. It is supported by the same digital infrastructure supporting explicit knowledge sharing but it creates a different effect. It makes it possible to create new relationships across subsidiaries in a way that a traditional office model could not have supported. However, these ties tend to remain on the surface-level and work focused rather than developing a deeper social foundation.

The hybrid information gap is positioned in the updated framework as a structural consequence of uncoordinated hybrid arrangements rather than an individual barrier. The findings suggest it is a structural outcome that comes from uncoordinated hybrid arrangements and affects all knowledge sharing outcomes. It affects who has access to informal knowledge and gets tacit knowledge through proximity. It also might affect whose contributions are visible to create career and development opportunities.

The final change concerns the position of trust in the framework. The original framework listed trust as a facilitator. The finding that trust was high across all four organizations and participants means it cannot function as a variable. In the updated framework it functions as a necessary condition. This suggests that trust is a characteristic of the Finnish MNC context rather than an active variable. This means that the barriers identified in this study exist despite high trust rather than because of its absence. The updated framework (Figure 4) is presented below.

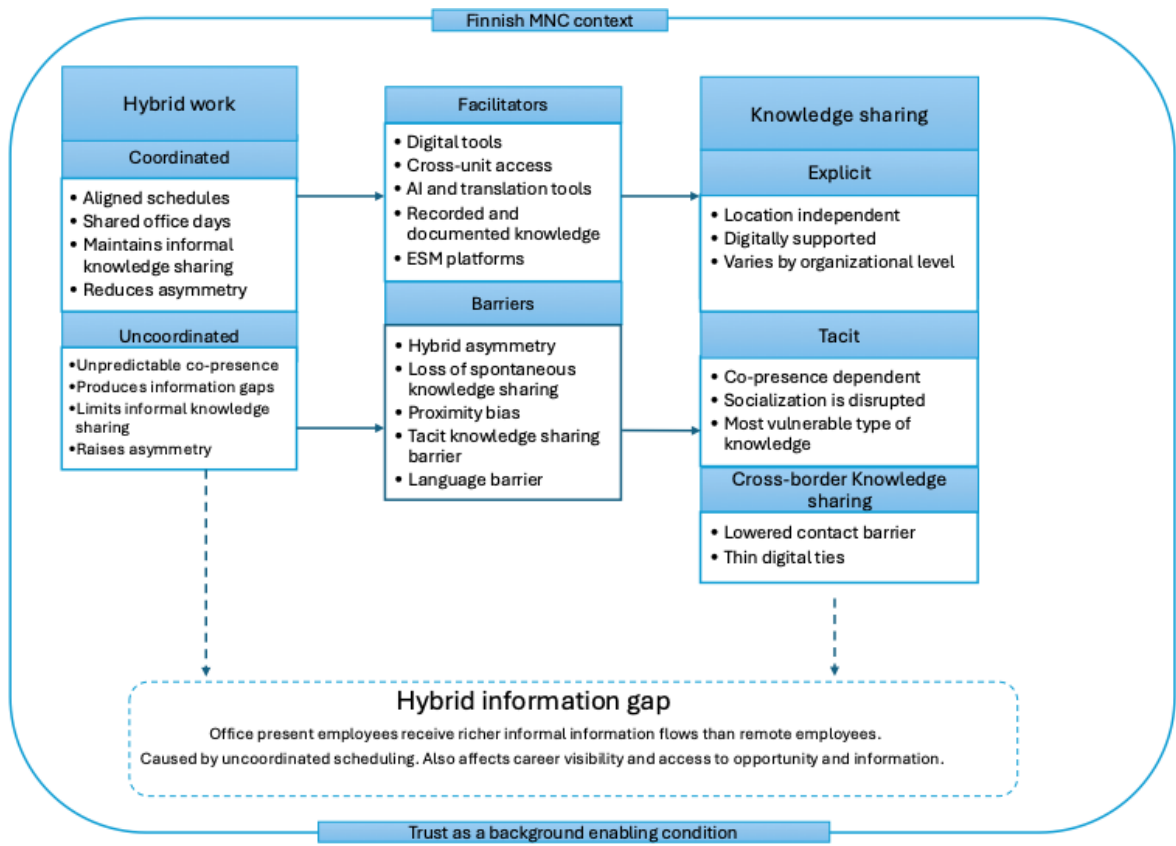


Figure 4. Updated theoretical framework

## 6 Conclusions

This chapter presents the key findings, practical implications, limitations and future research suggestions. The key findings are presented by answering the research questions, then the practical implications are provided. The last section explores the study's limitations and gives suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 Key findings

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of hybrid work on knowledge sharing in Finnish multinational corporations. The study explored this question through ten semi-structured interviews with employees and managers across four different Finnish MNCs and analyzed the data against the conceptual framework. The key findings are presented by answering the research questions guiding the study.

**Primary research question: How does hybrid work affect knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs?**

The findings show that hybrid work does not have a straightforward positive or negative effect on knowledge sharing. The effects depend on two factors. The first factor is the type of knowledge being shared. Explicit and tacit knowledge are affected by hybrid work in different ways. The second factor is whether the hybrid arrangements are coordinated across teams or not. Explicit knowledge sharing is well supported by digital tools and is unaffected by the working location. On the other hand, tacit knowledge sharing depends on physical co-presence and is reduced when the employees are not physically together at the office. Hybrid work also creates a structural asymmetry between office-based and remote employees when the hybrid schedules are uncoordinated. This affects access to informal knowledge and long-term career visibility.

**Secondary research question 1: How does hybrid work promote knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs?**

The findings identify the main ways hybrid work promotes knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs. First, the digital tools function as an effective channel for explicit knowledge sharing rather than just a substitute. Documented knowledge, shared files and chat platforms are accessible from any location. This makes it possible for employees to access organizational knowledge regardless of the working location. Recorded meetings and trainings extend access to knowledge across time-zones and schedules in a way that traditional office-models could not easily support.

Second, AI and translation tools have emerged as facilitators in multilingual MNC environments. These tools can be used to verify written communication and to reduce the knowledge sharing barrier caused by language friction. These tools support the existing knowledge sharing practices rather than replacing the social interactions.

Third, hybrid work enables employees to choose their working location based on the type of task and the knowledge sharing it requires. Complex tasks that benefit from collaboration and tacit knowledge sharing draw people into the office, while tasks that require deep concentration can be completed remotely. This flexibility is only possible with the hybrid arrangement and not possible in fully remote or traditional office arrangements.

Fourth, the digital infrastructure that supports hybrid work has lowered the barriers to cross-border contact within MNCs. ESM systems and chat tools make expertise findable across organizational and geographic boundaries. This extends the transmission channels of MNC knowledge sharing in a way that a traditional office arrangement would not support.

### **Secondary research question 2: How does hybrid work limit knowledge sharing in Finnish MNCs?**

The findings identify four main barriers limiting knowledge sharing. First, tacit knowledge sharing depends on the conditions created by physical co-presence. Side-by-side learning, observation, the ability to read non-verbal cues and the informal

accountability that physical presence creates are aspects that digital settings cannot fully replicate. This affects the onboarding of new employees, the transfer of practical know-how and handling personal conversations, such as negative feedback.

Second, the hybrid information gap emerges when hybrid schedules are uncoordinated across teams. This gap is not a result of intentional knowledge hoarding but a structural consequence of uncoordinated schedules and the continued reliance on informal in-person communication for certain types of knowledge. This asymmetry also has effects on career visibility and access to opportunity.

Third, the informal knowledge sharing is resistant to digitalization in hybrid environments. Informal corridor conversations, coffee machine encounters and overheard discussions cannot be digitalized. Virtual coffee breaks or similar substitutes do not work the same way that physical interactions do. The problem is not the digital interaction, but the uneven environment created when part of the group shares the informal physical context when others are remote.

Fourth, documentation of knowledge declines when coming down from the organizational level. While organizational level knowledge is well documented and accessible, team-level knowledge often remains in a conversational form and is not accessible to those who were not part of the original exchange. This creates an uneven transmission channel quality within the organization. This limits the effectiveness of the digital infrastructure for explicit knowledge sharing at the team-level where most of the daily work takes place. Cultural and linguistic factors also act as a barrier to knowledge sharing, but the findings suggest that these operate independently from hybrid arrangements rather than being created by them.

## **6.2 Theoretical contributions**

This study makes several theoretical contributions.

First, the findings confirm and extend the existing literature on the relationship between hybrid work and tacit knowledge sharing. The SECI model proposed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describes socialization as the process through which tacit knowledge moves between people, requiring shared experience and direct interactions rather than codified transmission. The findings confirm that this stage is very vulnerable in hybrid arrangements but extend the literature by pointing to specific ways in which co-presence supports tacit knowledge sharing. These include accidental learning through proximity, the social accountability created by physical presence and the conditions under which sensitive conversations are best held. This adds to what Keppler and Leonardi (2023) and Hau et al. (2013) describe at a more general level.

Second, the study contributes to the literature on transmission channels in MNCs. Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) identify the presence and quality of transmission channels as a key factor in knowledge flows within MNCs. The findings add to this by showing that channel quality is uneven across organizational levels. Digital infrastructure supports organizational-level explicit knowledge sharing, but team-level documentation quality declines. This has practical relevance for hybrid arrangements, where the absence of physical proximity makes conversational knowledge harder to recover later.

Third, the study extends existing work on the hybrid information gap. Härmä (2025) and Alasoini et al. (2025) identify that hybrid work can create informal asymmetries between those present at the office and remote employees. Härmä (2025) identifies uncoordinated schedules for a cause for this. The findings confirm this through interview evidence and develop this into a more complex phenomenon. The gap is found to operate independently from motivational factors such as intentional knowledge hoarding and is present in organizations where trust and willingness to share knowledge are high. This positions the gap as a structural rather than a motivational barrier and connects it to the proximity bias identified by Hopkins and Bardoel (2023).

Fourth, the study introduces cross-border reach as an additional knowledge sharing outcome that was not anticipated in the original framework. The digital infrastructure

that supports hybrid work has lowered the barrier to contact across organizational and geographic boundaries in a way that the traditional office-model did not directly support. This extends the discussion of MNC transmission channels by Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) and challenges the view of hybrid work acting primarily as a barrier to MNC knowledge sharing.

Fifth, the study contributes to the literature on the role of trust in knowledge sharing. Trust is identified across the literature as a necessary condition for knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010; Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). The consistently high level of trust reported across all four organizations means that trust acts as a background enabling condition rather than a variable explaining differences in knowledge sharing outcomes. This finding may be specific to the Finnish MNC context and characteristics of Finnish work culture (Saari et al., 2018; Halme et al., 2014) and suggests that the barriers identified in this study are structural rather than motivational.

### **6.3 Practical implications and recommendations**

The findings of this study have several practical implications for Finnish multinational corporations and the managers responsible for designing and supporting hybrid work arrangements.

The first practical implication concerns the coordination of hybrid schedules. The hybrid information gap confirmed in this study is not a natural part of hybrid work but a consequence of uncoordinated scheduling. When employees independently decide their own working days, it creates an unintentional asymmetry between those physically present and those who are remote. Organizations can reduce this gap by introducing team-level specific days when all team members are expected to be in the office on the same days. This brings the social conditions for informal knowledge sharing into alignment with the schedules and reduces the exclusion of remote participants.

Second, organizations should invest in team-level documentation practices. The findings show that documentation quality is strong at the organizational level but declines at the team level. Encouraging teams to document decisions and informal knowledge in shared platforms reduces the amount of knowledge that remains in a conversational form.

Third, organizations should maintain in-person onboarding for new employees. The findings show that the early stages of employment rely on tacit knowledge sharing through proximity and observation. Formal policies requiring new employees to be present at the office address this need. Similar attention should be paid when implementing new major systems or organizational changes that require a big learning process.

Fourth, the office should be designed and used as a place for collaboration and knowledge sharing rather than a default location for all work. The findings suggest that the value of being physically present comes from the physical interactions and not from the physical act of sitting behind a desk. Organizations should consider how the office space, meetings on office days and the mixed remote-office meetings support the knowledge sharing that physical presence is most useful for.

Finally, the high level of trust identified should be recognized as an asset rather than something to be taken for granted. The barriers identified in this study exist despite high trust and would likely be far worse in lower-trust environments. Maintaining a trust-based rather than a surveillance-based approach to hybrid work autonomy supports the conditions needed for the recommendations to work in practice.

#### **6.4 Limitations and future research suggestions**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size is small. Ten interviews from four Finnish multinational corporations provide a basis for exploratory qualitative analysis but do not allow for a statistical generalization. The

findings should be understood as a deeper understanding of hybrid knowledge sharing in this specific context rather than as conclusions that can be applied everywhere.

Second, the company D is overrepresented in the sample. While key themes emerged consistently across all four companies, the overrepresentation of a single organization is a limitation to the transferability of the findings.

Third, the study is limited to the Finnish MNC context and should not be generalized to other national or cultural settings. The Finnish work culture is characterized by low power distance, flat hierarchies, employee autonomy and high trust. This creates conditions that may not exist in other contexts. The finding about trust as a background condition is particularly tied to this context.

Fourth, the cross-sectional design captures employee experiences at a specific point in time. Hybrid work arrangements continue to evolve and the long-term effects of hybrid work arrangements on knowledge sharing cannot be addressed within the scope of this study.

Fifth, the study examined knowledge sharing within Finnish multinational corporations. It focused on how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing between employees and units inside the organization. The study did not examine knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries. Knowledge sharing also takes place between firms and their external partners, such as customers, and during inter-firm arrangements such as mergers and acquisitions (Degbey & Pelto, 2021). This inter-organizational setting was outside the scope of this study.

Finally, the data relies on self-reported experiences. While member validation was used to support the credibility, participants may have described their organizations and colleagues in a more positive light than truly accurate. The consistently high reports of

trust across interviews may reflect an actual feature of the Finnish MNC context or it may reflect more socially acceptable answers.

Based on the limitations and implications, there are multiple suggestions for future research. First, a longitudinal design would help to address the long-term effects of hybrid work on knowledge sharing. Following employees and organizations for several years would show how the patterns identified in this study develop over time and whether the coordination of hybrid work would actually reduce the hybrid information gap.

Second, comparative studies across national and cultural contexts would test the boundaries of the findings. Research in low trust environments and with different hierarchies would clarify how the structural barriers interact with motivational and cultural factors.

Third, comparative research between coordinated and uncoordinated hybrid arrangements would directly test the practical recommendation of the study. Identifying organizations that have implemented team-level office days and comparing their knowledge sharing outcomes to those relying on individually managed uncoordinated schedules would clarify the extent and nature of the effect that the findings suggest.

Fourth, future research could examine how hybrid work affects knowledge sharing in inter-organizational settings, such as with customers or other external partners. Examining the effects of hybrid work on inter-organizational knowledge sharing would extend the findings beyond the internal MNC context.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

#### Background and Work arrangement

1. Can you describe your current role and main responsibilities?
2. How long have you worked in the company?
3. How is hybrid work organized in your team?
4. How many days do you typically work remotely vs. in the office?
5. Do you collaborate with colleagues in other countries? If yes, how frequently?
6. How would you describe the level of autonomy you have in deciding where and when you work?

#### The MNC context

7. How do you typically share knowledge or information with colleagues in other units or countries?
8. How does the geographic distance affect your ability to share knowledge with colleagues in other locations?
9. Have you experienced any cultural or language differences affecting knowledge sharing with others working in different countries?

#### Facilitators

10. What digital tools or platforms does your organization use to support knowledge sharing? How well do they work in hybrid settings?
11. How does your organization document and store knowledge so it can be accessed from other locations (e.g. Home)?
12. How does trust between colleagues and management influence your willingness to share knowledge in hybrid settings?
13. How do office days support knowledge sharing compared to home days?
14. How would you digitalize "Kahvitauko" (Finnish coffee break)?

#### Barriers

15. Has hybrid work affected the spontaneous or informal interactions you have with your colleagues?
16. Is there knowledge or skills that you find harder to share when working remotely?
17. Do you feel like important decisions or information is sometimes shared informally in the office in a way that doesn't reach remote colleagues?
18. Has hybrid work affected how comfortable you are reaching out to colleagues you don't work with on a daily basis?

19. Has hybrid work changed how connected you are with people in your organization outside your team?

**Final question**

20. Can you think of a specific time recently when a piece of information didn't reach you because of the hybrid set up? What happened?

**Optional questions for managers**

1. How do you encourage knowledge sharing across your team when employees follow different hybrid schedules?
2. How do you ensure that knowledge is shared equally between employees working from the office and those who are working from home?