UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER'S THESIS

EFFECTS OF WORK FROM HOME ON EMPLOYEES' WORK PRODUCTIVITY ACROSS SEVERAL SLOVENIAN INDUSTRIES

Ljubljana, November 2022 POLONA AZAROV

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned Polona Azarov, a student at the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, (hereafter: SEB LU), author of this written final work of studies with the title Effects of work from home on employees' work productivity across several Slovenian industries, prepared under supervision of Tamara Pavasović Trošt, PhD

D E C L A R E

1. this written final work of studies to be based on the results of my own research;

2. the printed form of this written final work of studies to be identical to its electronic form;

3. the text of this written final work of studies to be language-edited and technically in adherence with the SEB LU's Technical Guidelines for Written Works, which means that I cited and / or quoted works and opinions of other authors in this written final work of studies in accordance with the SEB LU's Technical Guidelines for Written Works;

4. to be aware of the fact that plagiarism (in written or graphical form) is a criminal offence and can be prosecuted in accordance with the Criminal Code of the Republic of Slovenia;

5. to be aware of the consequences a proven plagiarism charge based on the this written final work could have for my status at the SEB LU in accordance with the relevant SEB LU Rules;

6. to have obtained all the necessary permits to use the data and works of other authors which are (in written or graphical form) referred to in this written final work of studies and to have clearly marked them;

7. to have acted in accordance with ethical principles during the preparation of this written final work of studies and to have, where necessary, obtained permission of the Ethics Committee;

8. my consent to use the electronic form of this written final work of studies for the detection of content similarity with other written works, using similarity detection software that is connected with the SEB LU Study Information System;

9. to transfer to the University of Ljubljana free of charge, non-exclusively, geographically and time-wise unlimited the right of saving this written final work of studies in the electronic form, the right of its reproduction, as well as the right of making this written final work of studies available to the public on the World Wide Web via the Repository of the University of Ljubljana;

10. my consent to publication of my personal data that are included in this written final work of studies and in this declaration, when this written final work of studies is published.

Ljubljana, _____   Author's signature: _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

sl. – Slovene

EU – (sl. Evropska unija); European Union

EIB – (sl. Evropska investicijska banka); European Investment Bank

INTRODUCTION

Since March 2020, the way we view work from home has shifted tremendously. Before the first lockdown stopped the world almost overnight, only a small fraction of people were even allowed to work from home and even a smaller percentage used the option every day. Since one of the main instructions to follow at the beginning of the pandemic was to social distance from each other, it only made sense that companies tried to quickly shift from working in the office to working from home for all those for whom it was possible. The surge of those working from home in only a couple of months (from February to May 2020) was more staggering than ever before. One study shows that the share of the employed population who worked entirely from home jumped from 8.2% to 35.2 in the period from February to May 2020, while another shows that the weekly commuting trips to work decreased by more than 50% (Bick, Blandin & Mertens, 2021).

Albeit an immense rise in the implementation of work from home, it existed before the COVID-19 epidemic as well. It was an option some companies offered to their employees and appropriate legislation was in place for some time before the beginning of the pandemic, but it was implemented rarely and only in several industries.

Some spheres of work – retail, the service industry, and several others which require in-person contact with the client – simply cannot be done from home. An interesting fact is that the percentage of jobs that can be done remotely varies greatly between countries; for example, in Luxembourg, more than 50% of all jobs can be done remotely, while in Turkey, this percentage is much lower and stands at 21% (OECD, 2020). When taking a closer look at the sectors that have a better ability to work from home, the highest-ranking ones are "management, business, and financial occupation" at 86.6 %, "financial activities" at 77.9 %, and "information" at 71.2 % of positions that can be teleworked. On the other hand, "farming, fishing, and forestry occupations" and "construction and extraction occupations" both have 0.0 % of possible remote work, while "transportation and material moving occupations" have 0.3 %.

The share of people working remotely varies based on economic and demographic factors, such as education levels and the level of economic development in the countries (Dey, Frazis, Loewenstein & Sun, 2020). Big differences in remote work can also be seen between the countries of the European Union (EU). Based on the data from 2019, countries with the highest share of people working from home were The Netherlands and Finland (14.1%), followed by Luxembourg and Austria, while Bulgaria and Romania only had 0.5% and 0.8% remote workers respectively (Eurostat, 2021).

After the first lockdown and especially since the vaccine, the world is slowly going back to what it used to be. Nonetheless, studies show that the way people perceive their optimal environment might be changed forever, as more than half of the employed population desires

to keep working from home or based on a hybrid model (i.e., dividing working hours between the office and remote work). According to a US-based study published in September 2021, 72% of people would prefer to work remotely (Rubin, Nikolaeva, Nello-Deaking & te Brömmelstroet, 2020). This enables them to engage also in other activities during their breaks, such as exercising or even taking a nap. To some, the benefit of teleworking is also the fact they can use some sort of entertainment (whether it be music, podcasts, or even TV) while they work, which is not an option in a lot of offices where the rules tend to be stricter. Other factors that influence the workers to prefer remote works are also less effort to look a certain way which is desired in the office and spending more time with their families and pets. However, the main two reasons why people want to work from home are to take care of their children and to save time on the commute. (Digital.com, 2020) A different study by the University of Amsterdam shows that people who shifted swiftly from working in an office to 100% remote work, reported some disadvantages compared to office work. More than half (56%) claimed to be less productive than before, while even a higher percentage of people (61%) claimed to be enjoying work less than before (Rubin, Nikolaeva, Nello-Deaking & te Brömmelstroet, 2020).

When discussing the effects of remote work, there are several viewpoints which can be used to assess it. It can be analysed from the aspect of how it affects the perception of home, how it can encourage or discourage slacking, whether it affects the work-life balance of people who work from home…

When considering the effect of WFH, you can consider several different factors that play a role in one's performance: organizational factors, job characteristics, individual work styles, and household characteristics and these categories can be further subdivided. This shows how complex the phenomenon of WFH is and that either one of those factors can influence the outcome and performance (Daniels, Lamond & Standen, 2001).

Even though there certainly are plenty of benefits to working from home, there are several drawbacks as well, such as increased coordination costs, less interaction with co-workers and consequently, less collaboration between them (Williamson, Colley & Hanna-Osbourne, 2020). These factors can hence lead to a decrease in productivity which can vary based on the nature of work, country culture, and personal characteristics. There was a noted decrease in productivity of 30 – 40% in a study based on Japanese workers (Morikawa, 2020), but this is not necessarily always true, as studies show that the decrease or increase of productivity varies based on a few factors (education level, wages, and industry of work being among them). Sridhar and Bhattacharya state that adjustments to the WFH environment can lead to better results of remote work, but preparing a home office with no distractions can be a challenge due to noise, children and inadequate equipment (Sridhar & Bhattacharya, 2020).

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic probably wasn't the last severe disease that is going to happen in the world, also in our lifetime. Due to several different factors, we

are more exposed to the quick spread of disease now than in the past, and WFH offers a chance to lower some of this risk and also enables part of all occupations to run smoothly even if this situation arises and the world goes into isolation again. There are however some limitations to the amount of work that can be done from work. It is almost impossible to find jobs that require zero physical presence at the original workspace, and same the goes the other way; there are very few jobs that require the workers to be physically present for every single work task that is included in their occupation (Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh, 2022).

Besides WFH enabling workers to perform regular work obligations in uncertain times, it is also a good opportunity to lower emissions and take a step towards being more sustainable. There are estimations that if more people worked from home, the number of daily trips could be reduced by almost a third (Fuhr & Pociask, 2011) and CO_2 gas emissions could be reduced drastically if the people who can work from home would do so on most days (Cerquiera, Motte-Baumvol, Chevallier & Bonin, 2020).

With the removal of restrictions due to vaccines for COVID-19, more and more corporations are now encouraging the return to the office. Multiple studies show that WFH can be just as productive as working from the office, while other studies show opposing opinions. In this thesis, I would like to understand the opinions of those who play a big role in allowing and organising WFH – the managers in Slovenia.

The main purpose of my research is to find the answer to the question of whether managers should be encouraging work from home, how remote work affects worker productivity, and whether these effects are different depending on which industry their company is working in. In particular, I will explore the situation in Slovenia, where not much research exists on this topic. This information can help managers more appropriately assess the effects of remote work policies on employee productivity and equip them with the knowledge to make better decisions regarding remote work in their companies.

The goals of the theoretical part of the thesis are:

- To analyse the different factors that play part in the effectiveness of remote work,
- To discuss the benefits and challenges of working on productivity, and
- To identify whether there are industry-specific trends in the relationship between remote work and worker productivity.

The goals of the empirical part of the thesis are:

- To collect data from the interviews with different managers working in different industries,
- To identify managers' opinions on how remote work and return to the office have affected their companies' productivity,

- To determine whether there are differences in managers' opinions on this relationship across several Slovenian industries
- To propose recommendations for an ideal working arrangement from a productivity perspective.

For the empirical part of this thesis, I conducted interviews with 4 individuals and gathered mostly qualitative data. I decided to opt for qualitative data collection as it is "more open and "more involved" than other research strategies that work with large quantities and are strictly standardized, and therefore more objective than other methods and normative concepts (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie & Manning, 2016). Since one of the main goals of the thesis is to explore managers' opinions on working from home in two different industries, I conducted in-depth interviews with four managers working in different Slovenian industries. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (TA) because it enables a coherent and logical interpretation of qualitative data. It also allows identification patterns in a data set, which will allow me to conclude what are the points on which interviewees agree and disagree (Crosley, 2021) My sample includes both female and male managers with different management levels.

1 WORKING FROM HOME BEFORE AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Work from home is defined as a work arrangement in which employees work from home instead of commuting and working on-site. It is a flexible arrangement that enables workers to perform all their usual work tasks with the help of information and telecommunication technology that allow instant communication anytime and anywhere (Heery & Noon, 2008). Working from home (or telecommuting) was first introduced by Nilles (1973), who was a NASA engineer. He thought of the expression which then became a phenomenon among work arrangements. The first widely used example of working from home was a call centre which owed their workers to do as they were only reliant on a telephone to be able to perform their jobs (Mokhtarian, 1991).

Before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, there were only a few occupations in which working from home was an accepted and common practice. Among those, the most common were workers in IT and other communication services, while manufacturing had the lowest percentage (European Commission, 2021). More high-skilled professionals were working remotely, while technicians and clerk-level workers almost had no experience with remote work. It was also found that junior professionals were also not permitted to work from home as much as their senior co-workers, even though they performed very similar work tasks. In the remainder of this chapter, the main trends in WFH are reviewed.

In Slovenia, the legal basis for signing a contract of employment from home was set in the Labour Relations Act (Zakon o delovnih razmerjih, Uradni list RS, št. 21/13, 78/13, 52/16,

81/19) in 2013. The act recognizes work from home as a form of employment relation which can be contracted for full or part-time and for a definite or indefinite period. The main difference between this and the "traditional" type of employment is, of course, the place where work is done – the shift is made from working in the office to working from one's home (Šukljan, 2021).

1.1 Extent of work from home before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic

When thinking about working from home it is hard not to divide the time into two periods separated by the outbreak of one of the biggest pandemics of the last century – the SARS-CoV-2, or the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those working remotely even smaller percentage of employees worked from home full-time, while the majority used remote work only part-time. In 2019, only 5.4% of employees in the 27 countries of the European Union (EU) worked from home, and this number faced minimal fluctuation in the preceding decade as well. However, there has been a slight increase in the number of people working from home only part-time, as the share of those increased from 5.2 to 9% in the years 2009-2019. The percentage of self-employed who took advantage of remote work was higher, to begin with, but the share increased linearly with those who are not self-employed (European Commission, 2021).

For the workers who were before working in the offices, the easiest way to adapt to new conditions was to shift to work from home. The increase in the number of employees working from home was astonishing and incomparable to anything seen before. As previously mentioned, the number of people working remotely jumped from 8.2% in February 2020 to 35.2% in May of the same year (data for the USA). Considering that only non-essential businesses even have the option of remote work, an estimate was made that more than 70% of those who were able to telework, did so. Before COVID struck, the majority of people who worked exclusively remotely were older workers aged from 50 to 64 and those without children. People with higher education and income were more likely to work from home (Bick, Blandin, Mertens, 2020).

There was a model adopted that showed how working from home can be a consequence of the pandemic that is based on two different channels – substitution and adoption. The substitution channel describes how the workers substitute working at their original workplace for working from home when they already had a pre-existing contract allowing WFH before the pandemic started. The authors of the theory, Bick, Blandin and Mertens claim that this is due to the fact workers found WFH less productive than working from their original workspace, as they would otherwise choose the WFH option before the pandemic as well. The second one is the adoption channel which means that WFH was added to the work arrangement once the pandemic started and the authors argue that this channel proves many more workers could be working from home before the pandemic but their employer

did not offer them the chance to do so due to adoption laws, social norms and passivity of the workforce who did not demand WFH to be recognized (Bick, Blandin, Mertens, 2021).

The workers did however claim in the majority (63.6%) that they were commuting to work every day because the employer required them to do so and not because they would perceive working from the original workplace as superior (Novianto et al., 2021). The total share of people who had a work arrangement which included the WFH option increased from 33.3% in February 2020 to 43.8% (Bick, Blandin & Mertens, 2021).

O*NET estimates that in the USA, 63% of all jobs needed so much physical presence in the workspace that WFH would not be a viable option and thus only the remaining 37% could benefit from this arrangement. The majority of those who would be able to work in the such way however did not choose the option to do so – only around 11% actually worked from home before the pandemic and probably the fraction would not be much higher now if it weren't for the COVID-19 pandemic. The research also states that it is more feasible for people from metropolitan areas to WFH compared to rural areas population, but does not elaborate further on why this is such (Dey, Frazis, Loewenstein & Sun, 2020).

Albeit several different reasons why WFH could be a better choice for those who were not restricted by the nature of their occupation, there was not much movement in the direction of applying it widely before the COVID-19 pandemic (Dey, Frazis, Loewenstein & Sun, 2020).

1.2   Extent of work from home after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic

As mentioned above, there was a higher chance for people with higher education levels to work from home. Interestingly enough, these differences further increased after COVID restrictions were lifted. The share of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher that worked from home rose from 8.5% in February 2020 to almost 50% in 2020 and was persisting at about 33.2% at the end of 2020 when many restrictions were already lifted. However, the share of workers who only had a high school diploma or less only grew from 6.4% in February 2020 to 14.2% in May but decreased again to 8.6% until the end of the year (Bick, Baldwin & Mertens, 2021). There is also an interesting piece of data that showed that there were many more of those who were able to retain a WFH agreement than those who got the option of WFH if transferred to another job. The share of workers who remained working from home after some of the restrictions were lifted varied greatly. Low-educated and younger workers mostly returned to work, as well as Hispanic and black employees. The highest percentage (24.7%) of those who remained working from home 10 months after the pandemic began were highly educated workers, followed by older employees and those who have no kids (Bick, Blandin & Martens, 2021).

Many predict that work will permanently be perceived differently after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is considered to be a big driving force of Industry 4.0 – digital transformation.

Due to businesses shifting to a "digital workforce mindset", it is required for all employees to be able to understand the true power of technology and use it to their advantage. The most important factors of the digital transformation workforce are digital and technical knowledge, personal development, engagement, remote work, and digital ethics (Savić, 2020). Delventhal argues that WFH should be a widely accepted form of work also after all restrictions end due to the conclusion that there were more benefits for those workers who were able to stay working from home (due to saving commute time and having the ability to move to less expensive neighbourhoods), but there were also some benefits of WFH for those who returned working on-site – lower commute times, more available jobs and a drop in real estate prices due to the reason mentioned before (Delventhal, Kwon &Parkhomenko, 2022).

1.3   Differences across industries

Important distinctions are also in the sectors of work, as clearly some occupations have better predispositions to be done remotely than others. Figure 1 below depicts the share of teleworking employees in each sector across the EU countries in 2018.

Figure 1: Prevalence of telework by sector in EU27
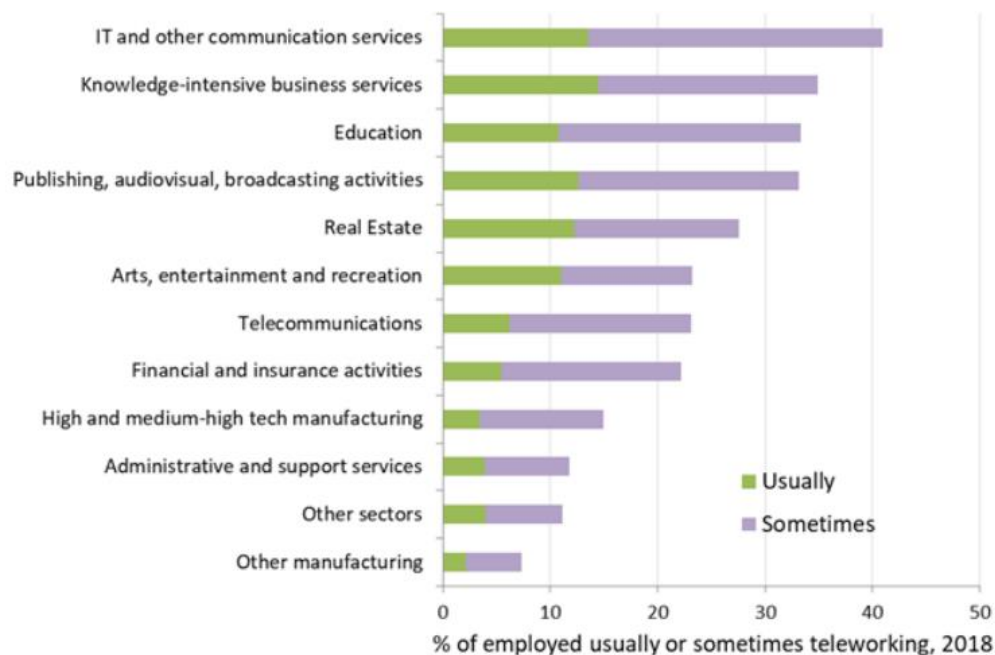
Source: European Commission (2020).

As seen in the graph above, the sector with the highest share of employees working remotely is informational technologies (IT) and other communication services, followed by knowledge-intensive business services, which is a common name for Legal and Accounting Activities, Activities of Head Offices, Management Consultancy Activities, Architectural, and Engineering Activities, Technical Testing and Analysis, Scientific Research and

Development, Advertising and Market Research, and Other Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities. At the bottom of the list are the sectors with the lowest percentage of people working remotely the manufacturing sectors (European Commission, 2020).

For comparison between continents, Figure 2 shows similar information by sector for the USA to compare with the one regarding the EU data.

Figure 2: Share of time spent working remotely by sector in the USA
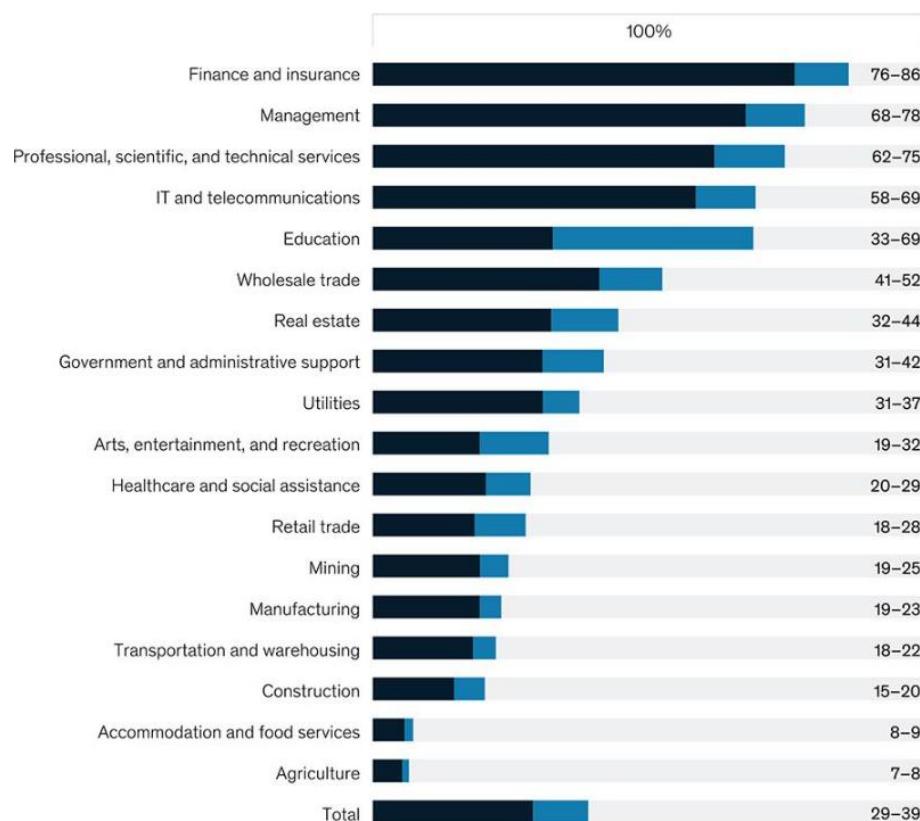
Source: Consultancy EU (2020).

Although the occupations are divided into sectors a bit differently in the graph for the USA compared to the one for the EU, we can see that majority of the same industries/occupations are at the top and the bottom of the lists. In both cases, among the highest up are IT and telecommunications and education. In both studies, manufacturing was among the sectors which were the least likely to be performed from home, which is of course a logical consequence of in-house mass manufacturing which is common in most companies.

Due to several factors, occupations vary greatly in their ability to be done remotely. Those occupations that have a lot of interpersonal contacts, such as retail workers, hair stylists, manufacturing workers, construction workers, post office clerks, and many others, due to their core nature are impossible to be done any other than the traditional way. This is also the reason why different countries, due to different prevalence of occupations, vary greatly in the percentage of employees who were working remotely before the beginning of the

pandemic. More rural or less developed countries can't have the same level of jobs done remotely because they focus more on agricultural and service occupations.

In Canada, the "telework capacity" (possibility of a job being done remotely) is 38.9% - meaning that around 4 in every 10 workers can be done from home. Out of those, the workers with the lowest telework capacity are those of lower education – a worker with a high school diploma has a 25% possibility of working at a remote job, while a worker with less than a high school diploma has only a 13% chance. On the other hand, workers with Bachelor's degrees or higher and workers with university certificates below Bachelor's have a 60% and 47% chance, respectively (Deng, Morissette, Messacar, 2020).

1.4 Differences across countries

As already mentioned in the introduction, a country with the highest level of jobs that can be done remotely is Luxembourg, with more than half of all jobs (53.4% to be precise) that can be done remotely. Other countries, such as Romania or the European part of Turkey, are at a remarkably lower rate of these jobs and as such were unable to provide their employees with the same conditions once the COVID pandemic hit. Unfortunately, those countries that were struck the hardest once the pandemic started were also those that have more people employed in the fields unable to adapt to teleworking. For example, in Sweden and the Netherlands, there are more than 60% of people are employed in knowledge-intensive business services (see the top of the page), while in Italy, the share of those is under 30%.

Although there are differences in countries concerning jobs that can be done from home, there were vast differences in the share of people who considered doing them remotely in the first place. In two different countries, the same job was somewhere done majorly from home, while in other countries the same job was considered normal to be done from the office. A good example of this is information communications technology (ICT) occupations – in 2018, more than 70% of those employed in this were working remotely in the Netherlands, while only 11% did so in Italy, although the job description doesn't vary much from one country to another (Milasi, Gonzales-Vasquez & Fernandez-Macias, 2021).

Culture in different countries can also be reflected in the share of people who are willing to adapt to the change which is remote work. While the majority of Western countries (the USA and members of the EU) embraced the possibility of working from home or a hybrid model, this is not the case for the French, who are traditionally known as people who are reluctant to change and prefer things to remain as they have known them. The reluctance to change is also reflected in a study where only 29% of the French stated that they work remotely at least once a week. This is a substantially lower share than in other European countries – for example, in Germany, Italy, Britain, and Spain, this share was 51%, 50%, 42%, and 36%, respectively (Redmond, & McGuinness (2020).

In some countries, in this particular case, Ethiopia, the number of small businesses plummeted by 22% in only two months (comparing February to April), which resulted in a sharp decrease in hours worked: in small businesses, the decrease was 29%, while across corporations, this decrease was smaller at 20%, which is nonetheless substantial. In the United States of America (the USA), which is among the strongest economies worldwide, 43% of retail businesses were temporarily closed in this period, with employment lowering by 40% - a disappointing statistic that was comparable only to the Great Depression in the 1930s (Engidaw, 2020).

1.5   Can all jobs be done from home?

A different study by Abi Adams-Prassl, Teodora Boneva, Marta Golin, and Christopher Rauh discusses the differences across and within occupations and industries. After an extensive study, combining answers from almost 25,000 workers, the authors discovered that working from home is a very heterogeneous phenomenon. It is estimated that in the next 100 years, there is a 20% chance the world will be hit with 4 or more pandemics such as the COVID-19 one in 2020 (Gulland, 2016). This proves that the possibility to work remotely will soon be more of a necessity than a luxury if the companies don't want to take a plunge to lower their profits.

In the USA, 42% of work tasks could be completed from home, while this share was only a tad smaller in the UK at 39%. However, the answers were also at 0% or 100%, which proves the heterogeneity, although a vast majority of people stated that they were able to perform more than 0% and less than 100% of their work tasks from home (Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh, 2021).

Interestingly, there were very big differences among different occupations when it comes to the amount of work that employees stated can be done remotely. For example, "Architecture and Engineering" turned out to be one of the industries in which the answers are distributed in adherence to the normal distribution, while in others, such as "Office and Administrative Support", the answers formed a bi-polar distribution; a big share of workers claimed they were able to do almost all the tasks from home, while other stated that the share was incredibly low. Another interesting piece of data is that there are no occupations in which the average worker can do absolutely all tasks or none at all while working from home. This combats the idea which is nowadays often believed to be true which is that almost half of all occupations are thought to have 0% possibility of doing remotely.

The paper also discusses the characteristics of workers who are more likely to work from home – even after controlling occupation and industry fixed effects, male workers and those with university degrees have significantly more jobs that can be done remotely than others.

Figure 3: Measures of ability to work from home by occupations

Occupation	Mean	SD	Median	Ones	Zeros
Management	56.07	32.63	61	.09	.07
Business and Financial Operations	63.35	29.8	68	.14	.05
Computer and Mathematical	67.61	27.6	72	.16	.02
Architecture and Engineering	54.5	27.73	56	.06	.04
Life, Physical, and Social Science	43.65	32.59	46	.06	.13
Community and Social Service	45.25	35.22	50	.07	.19
Legal	54.15	31.08	53	.06	.07
Educational Instruction and Library	35.06	32.78	27	.06	.16
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	49.14	36.93	51	.13	.16
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical occ.	25.18	32.38	6	.04	.36
Healthcare Support	29.14	35.88	4.5	.07	.33
Protective Service	22.73	31.11	2	.03	.44
Food Preparation and Serving	13.71	25.83	0	.02	.53
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	23.92	32.82	1	.04	.42
Personal Care and Service	21.13	32.72	1	.05	.47
Sales and Related Occupations	26.57	35	2	.05	.4
Office and Administrative Support	53.68	38.4	60	.16	.16
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	25.22	33.68	6	.07	.27
Construction and Extraction	30.85	33.92	15	.03	.29
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	29.4	33.59	10	.03	.3
Production	24.74	33.48	2	.04	.42
Transportation and Material Moving	21.39	31.82	1	.03	.45
Military Specific Occupations	36.16	30.06	34	.04	.15

Source: Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh (2020).

Figure 3 above shows different occupations and the mean, standard deviation, and median of the ability to work from home, and are shown in percentages, while 'ones' is the share of respondents reporting 100% and 'zeros' are the share of respondents reporting 0%.

As expected, the highest share of tasks can be completed remotely in the industries which are those in computer and mathematical jobs, as well as those working in an office and administrative support or management. On the other hand, the lowest percentage of tasks can be performed remotely by those working in food preparation and serving, personal care and service, and transportation and material moving. The data from both countries examined (the UK and USA) had an extremely high correlation of 0.96.

As mentioned above, there was a certain percentage of respondents within every occupation who claimed that they were able to finish either 0% or 100% of their work tasks from home. If we look at occupations, the lowest share claiming the possibility of finishing all of their work tasks remotely were in "Food Preparation and Serving" at 2% and the highest at "Office and Administrative Support" and "Computer and Mathematical" at 16%. The difference in these shares is much bigger on the other end of the spectrum; only 2% of workers employed in "Computer and Mathematical" are unable to do any of their work tasks from home, while this share is a staggering (but logical) 53% for "Food Preparation and Serving".

The authors also researched what socio-economic factors influence the ability to work remotely, and the results showed that in both the USA and the UK workers with higher incomes tend to have a higher ability to finish more of their work tasks from home, which can be seen below in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Tasks that can be done from home by gross labour income
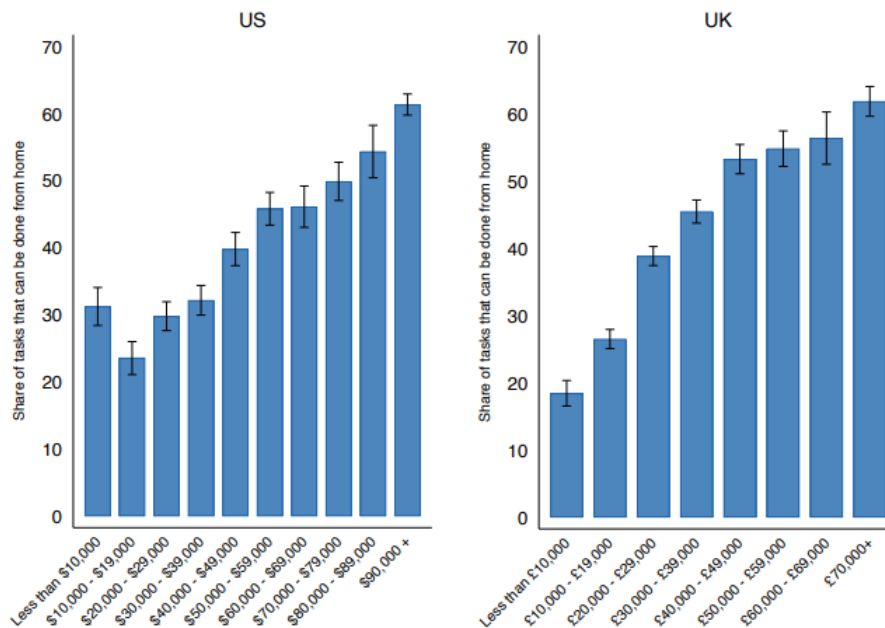
Source: Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh (2020).

Other factors that have an influence are:

- Age: the higher the age, the lower the number of tasks that can be done remotely
- Gender: women have on average stated a 6.3 percentage points lower number of tasks that can be done remotely
- Education level: employees with university degrees have a 19.4% point more tasks that can be done remotely (Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh, 2020).

According to World Economic Forum in 2018 (even before the COVID-19 outbreak), it was estimated that more than half of all employees will have to reskill and upskill due to new challenges which they will be presented with. This poses a significant challenge to organizations and managers, especially since it is expected that 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 don't exist yet (Dell Technologies, 2018).

1.6 Remote work in Slovenia

Work from home in Slovenia is as mentioned before, legally defined since 2013. As of 2019, 7% of people were actively working from home. For an employee to shift from working at the headquarters to remote work, a new contract must be signed (or at least an annexe). Usually, the contract is made up of these components (Pripelji srečo v službo, 2021).

- Agreement on the extent of work which is done remotely: full-time, part-time, or whether it is a matter of current agreement
- Agreement on reporting method of the employee on the use of working time
- Agreement on monitoring the assigned work tasks and the results
- The employee must know which days and hours he must be available for contact with the employer
- Employer must enable the employee a safe connection to the employer's network
- Agreement on the request-making method (such as vacation or sick days)
- Definition of work material provided by employer and employee
- Definition of conditions that enable safe work from home

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, only a small percentage of people were working from home. During the first wave of the epidemic, which in Slovenia lasted from 13th March 2020 to 15th May, only 30% of employed people were working from the workplace. During the second wave, which began in October 2020 and lasted until April 2021, the situation has already changed a lot; then, 65% of employees were working at their workplace and only 35% worked from home all the time (Breznik & Lužar, 2021). The share of people working at their workplace can be then subdivided into three sections: those working from the workplace all the time (51%), those working in equal part remotely and at their workplace (7%), and those working from home for the majority of the time, but still working at their workplace to some extent (7%).

Strict lockdowns made a negative impact on the work-life balance of Slovenian workers, with 21% of them stating they had to work in their free time as well to combat all their work tasks. This is above the European average of 17.5% (Breznik & Lužar, 2021).

2 BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF WORKING FROM HOME

Remote work can be a lot different to working on-site. It can have an array of different effects on people. Factors that can influence one's experience of WFH are:

- Level of technical knowledge,
- Personality traits,
- Nature of work (feasibility of WFH),
- Situation at home (number of children, availability of working space…).

The shift from working on-site to working from home can be demanding for both employees and their managers. However, after the successful implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic when WFH was in many countries obligatory to all those capable of doing so, many firms plan to continue with this model due to the reasons which will be discussed in the following chapter.

WFH can be an optimal solution because it enables people to save time on their commute and arrange their tasks better. They need to have more developed internal (self) control, as it is almost impossible to ensure the same level of external control as when working from the office near their superiors. But if the employees at the company are responsible enough, working from home can be a great alternative which can prove itself to be more affordable for the employer and less stressful and more comfortable for the workers.

2.1 Factors influencing the success of work from home

There was a very extensive study made on which factors affect the success of WFH written by Daniels, Lamond, and Standen (2001), which explores different clusters of factors, which contribute to the successful implementation of WFH.

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

1. Management culture: it can be more rule-bound and hierarchical (traditional) or more supportive (refers to openness and power-sharing). There are arguments supporting both types, but history teaches that a management culture that is keener to adapt to changing environmental factors tends to fester higher productivity. In terms of WFH, evidence suggests that supportive management culture should be a more desirable choice.
2. Technical support: can be somewhat easily connected to WFH – better technical support reduces stress in remote work and is likely to have a positive correlation to job productivity and satisfaction.
3. Manager's trust: remote workers who are under strict supervision from their superiors tend to feel suffocated and unappreciated, leading to lower job satisfaction. A study written by Daniels, Lamond, and Standen (2001) shows that remote work is more frequently implemented in workplaces where manager trusts their employees more.
4. Human resource support, which can be a challenging task for different reasons – it is more difficult for HR to socialize a new employee at the beginning of their cooperation with the company since there is no physical contact with co-workers.
5. Financial support from the employer. Working from home can reduce personal costs for the employer, but these should in no way simply be shifted from them to employees (Baruch, 2000).
6. Training for working from home is of high importance for people who have never before worked from home are given certain training, such as technology use,

occupational health, and safety, and also less obvious, such as organizational communication and how to make sure one's home office is organized and equipped in a way that promotes peaceful and optimal work.

JOB CHARACTERISTICS

I previously discussed how different job characteristics play a role in their ability to be performed remotely, but in this study, four other characteristics were applied.

The first one is task identity, meaning whether within a job a whole piece of work is done. It was proven that jobs with higher task identity are more suited for remote work because they are more motivating for the person executing them. The second one is feedback – this can mean two things; whether a task itself provides information on whether it was performed correctly or not and whether managers provide feedback on how well the task was completed, providing praise or advice on how to do better. The last characteristic considered was "dealing with others", with the hypothesis being that jobs involving more teamwork are less likely to be successfully performed from home.

INDIVIDUAL WORK STYLE

In this area, another 4 characteristics are assessed. The first one is planning – the people who plan their days more tend to have better results when working from home and are also more successful in keeping the right work-life balance. One of the biggest problems when working from home is that people who aren't skilled at setting boundaries might overwork and this can result in them quitting the remote job, so the other hypothesis claims that people who have less difficulty laying off work for the day will be more successful and satisfied with the remote job.

Another way one can make their work more productive and enjoyable is by separating the tasks they do at home and the ones they do while in the workplace. It typically proves more effective to do more concentration-demanding tasks when working remotely while taking time for meetings and interactions with colleagues when spending time in the workplace (Kraut, 1988). The last idea presented in this part of the research was that isolating oneself in a separate room while working can increase productivity, while communication with family members can decrease it.

HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

Lastly, the article touched upon household characteristics. Although it might be perceived as less important, that is not the case, since it was then proven in the study that fewer people present at home while one person is trying to work remotely typically provide better results. This also applies to other factors, such as the number of children in the household and the overall number of people living with remotely working employees.

2.2   Work from home and sustainability

Sustainability is currently a very important topic and, in the future, it will become an even more demanding issue as the whole world is working towards a greener way of living that would enable us to enjoy our life comfortably but without disabling the future generations enjoy these same commodities (Scoones, 2007).

We can view possible steps into sustainability of WFH from at least two perspectives – first one being the decrease of greenhouse gas emissions which were proven to be extremely harmful to the environment, and the second one being lowering the need to provide electricity and other energy twice – at home as well as at the offices. Since offices tend to have higher temperatures in the winter and lower in the summer, the resources wasted on regulating the temperatures of the office spaces can be even more than double compared to the levels employees would use if they were only working from home.

European Union's plan for greener economies poses limitations on greenhouse emissions with a promise to be CO_2[1] neutral by 2050 (Rosa, Sanchez & Mazzotti, 2021), which will demand all of us to rethink a lot of behaviours which were not considered as harmful a few decades ago. Transportation is the number one cause of greenhouse emissions by fossil fuels, accounting for 33% of all energy consumption and energy-related greenhouse emissions in the USA (US Environmental Protection Agency).

There are several possible ways of lowering greenhouse emissions and also lowering the use of fossil fuels; carpooling, use of public transportation, lowering consumption of cars that run on gasoline and increased production of electric cars play a part in solving the issue of our overheating planet (Cerquiera, Motte-Baumvol, Chevallier & Bonin, 2020).

But working from home offers another alternative. Most of the population has to drive to work and back home every day, which causes everyday traffic jams in the morning and afternoon, resulting in people having to leave their homes much sooner and come back much later than they would if the roads were not as occupied.

An American study in 2016 discussed America's commuting choices, and Figure 5 below shows their most commonly used mode of commuting in the year 2016. A great majority (76%) used their car to commute and also drove alone, while only 9% of people carpooled and another 5% used public transportation. It can be seen in the picture below that working from home was offered as an alternative to commuting and in 2016, the same number of employees worked from home and used public transportation.

---

[1] CO_2 accounts for about 82% of all greenhouse emissions.

Figure 5: Share of all commuters by mode in 2016

Share of all commuters by mode, 2016

Source: Brookings analysis of 1-Year ACS estimates.
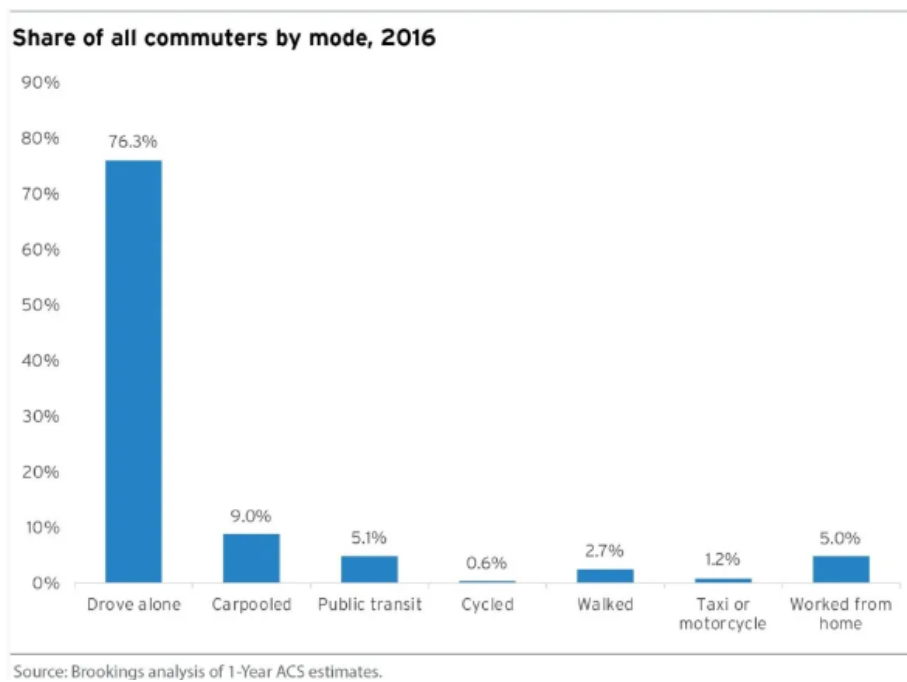
Source: Cerquiera, Motte-Baumvol, Chevallier & Bonin (2020).

In the European Union, commuting is the main reason for daily travel – in Germany, the average percentage of overall total distance which was due to commuting was 27% and in Croatia even 47% (Eurostat, 2021). In theory, this means that if everyone was working from home the CO2 gas emissions would decrease by approximately 37% throughout the EU. It was already established that this is not possible, however, there would certainly be advantages to sustainability if more people were to work from home or at least work in a hybrid model. Another important thing to stress here is that people who currently commute to work tend to make necessary stops on the way to or from work, such as grocery shops or drop off/pick up their children from school. These trips would still be necessary. Nonetheless, there are estimations that around 45% of American employees would be able to at least partly work from home, which could reduce daily trips from 77% to 51% (Fuhr & Pociask, 2011).

A study was conducted that researched how WFH affected the trip distance and travel time before, during, and after the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that the average trip of WFH workers was longer by 4.4 km compared to trips of workers who did not WFH. There was a logical decrease in trips for both groups during the lockdown, but after the lockdown ended, the average trip distance for WFH workers decreased by a fourth, while the trips of those workers who worked on-site did not shorten significantly. This means that WFH workers were able to lower their average trips, meaning l.ess fossil fuel usage and CO2 and other harmful emissions (Huang, Loo & Axhausen, 2022)

Moving different meetings, conferences and other activities into the online environment can provide an environment with relief and offers help to society, the economy, and ecosystem sustainability (Nagalakshmi & Kumar, 2020).

2.3   Effect on productivity

As discussed already at the beginning of the paper, several different factors influence one's ability to work from home as productively as from the default workplace. It is therefore a rather ungrateful task to measure the overall impact on productivity, as it's hard for researchers to consider every occupational and personal distinction which can skew the perception of the respondents.

2.3.1   Smart working

An article published by Bolisani, Scarso, Ipsen, Kirchner, and Hansen (2020) discusses different lessons learned during the quick shift to working from home. They also implemented a new expression for remote work – smart working - which puts a rather positive connotation to the expression. The adjective "smart" is used to stress the belief that even in a remote work arrangement, the employees can achieve "maximum value" and be "more productive" (Fragouli & Ilia, 2019), to have better "spatial and temporal flexibility" (Fogarty, 2011), better working conditions (Kim & Oh, 2015), and improved creativity and stimulate change (Kang & Kwong, 2016).

The article explains the findings of a survey the authors conducted in Italy between March and May 2020, which was answered by almost 1000 respondents of different education levels, genders, and occupations. Here I would like to stress that although the respondents had a wide array of education levels (ranging from a doctorate education to less than high school), two-thirds (67%) had at least a Bachelor's degree, which can be connected to a higher possibility of successful remote work (Baker, Avery & Crawford, 2007). Before the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, 80.5% claimed to have little to no experience with working from home and only 13% already experienced remote work to the extent of 4 or more days per week. This shows just how unprecedented the situation really was and how big the adjustment was, however, the results of those who had already been working from home were not much different to those who had not been. Since the survey was conducted during a lockdown, 85% of the respondents said that they were ordered to do so.

When discussing the hours worked, more than half of the respondents claimed to be working more hours than when not working from home, but only 13% stated that they are less productive when working from home (meaning they get less work done). The most polarizing question was whether the respondents find working from home more or less demanding, as there was almost the same number of people who claimed that they find it "more demanding" and "less demanding", thus further proving the complexity of working

from home. There was however much less disagreement when it came to the question of how remote work affected relationships with co-workers – the authors found that 77% of the respondent claimed that the relationships were unaffected or even improved.

The article also divided the respondents into 4 clusters based on how difficult they found the transition to remote work. There were 26% of respondents were put in cluster 1, meaning that they did not experience much difficulty and were able to keep working the same as before and also kept good relationships with co-workers. In Cluster 2, some people were still able to finish all their work tasks, but by working for more hours than before and it comprised 27% of responders. In the next cluster, people were less prepared and worked less than before, resulting in less work done. Their relationships with co-workers also took a hit; in this cluster, 12% of the responders were included. In the third cluster, we can predict that overall productivity levels took the biggest hit, while in Cluster 1, the productivity levels remained the same or possibly even increased. The last cluster was made out of people who found work from home much more demanding than "normal" work due to more hours done for the same results and their relationship with co-workers worsened slightly as well. This cluster was the biggest with 35% of respondents fitting into it. We can presume that the productivity in this cluster also lowered, but not as much as in Cluster 3.

At the end of the research, the authors collected responses about what their most and least favourite aspects of working from home are. A few of the most appreciated aspects are "saving transportation time" (which 93% of responders agreed or strongly agreed with), "possibility to eat and drink own food" (77%), and "focusing on work without interruptions" (69%) and to be "close to family" (66%). One-third of the respondents stated that working in a more comfortable atmosphere and avoiding overly long meetings are also very important. Interestingly, not many people stated that having no close control over them was an important benefit to them (only 12%). From this we can conclude that people mostly didn't slack during WFH and that they had enough internal motivation to finish all their tasks even though their managers or bosses couldn't implement the same level of control as they had before, but it could also mean that they had a trusting relationship witht them beforehand as well and that not much actually changed once they transitioned from working on-site to WFH.

Figure 6 below graphically depicts different benefits that were perceived by the respondents and their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements.

Figure 6: Perceived benefits of work from home
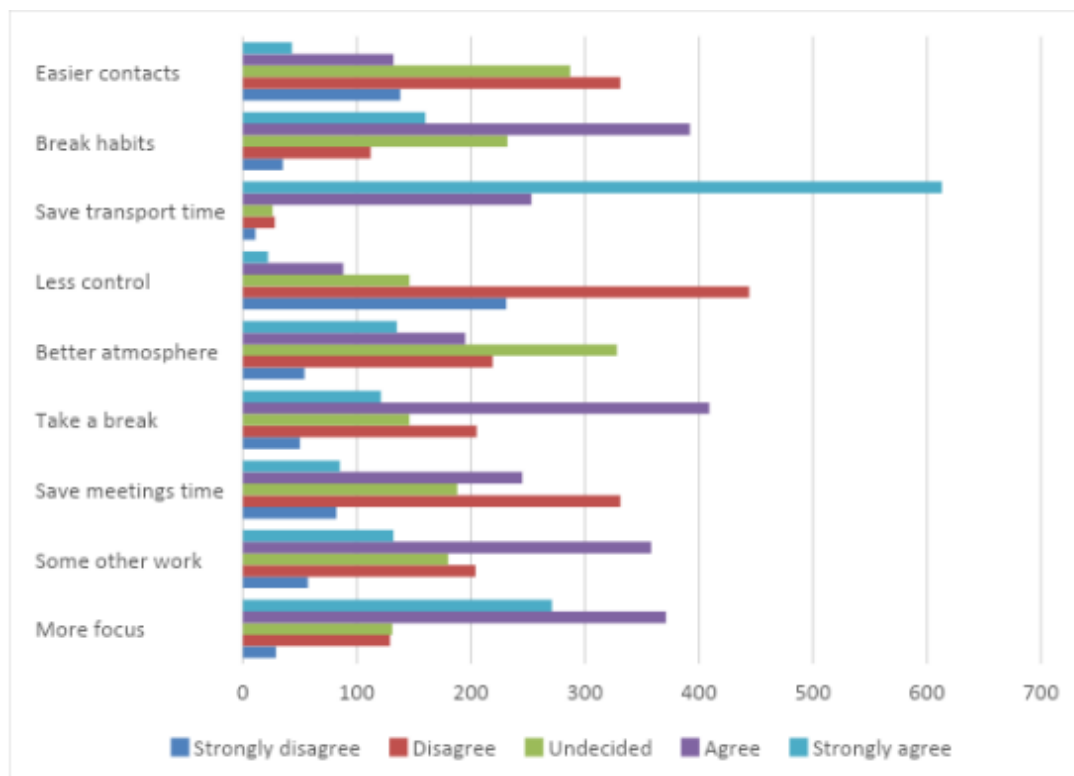
Source: Bolisani, Scarso, Ipsen, Kirchner & Hansen (2020).

Negative factors were overall perceived as less significant than benefits, proving that people who answered the survey found that benefits overruled the negatives. The negatives are depicted below in Figure 7. Among the most negative aspects were increased time behind the computer (45% of respondents perceived this as a strong or very strong issue), "difficulty seeing colleagues and other people" (37%), "missing physical equipment" (25%), and worrying that all tasks can't be completed from home.

If we take a look at the research above about differences among occupations and industries in relation to remote work, we can see that the last one is still pretty important, since we discovered that there is no single occupation in which absolutely all tasks can be performed remotely. Overall, 33% of respondents stated that the sudden transition and completely remote work were more challenging than usual work, another 31% said it was less challenging than normal and the biggest share, 36% that it was just as challenging as before.

Here, we have to take into consideration that this drawbacks would probably be perceived differently if the transition was made in a step-by-step, slower manner which would be much more optimal if the transition wasn't due to the sudden arrival of the pandemic.

These perceived drawbacks can be observed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Perceived drawbacks of work from home
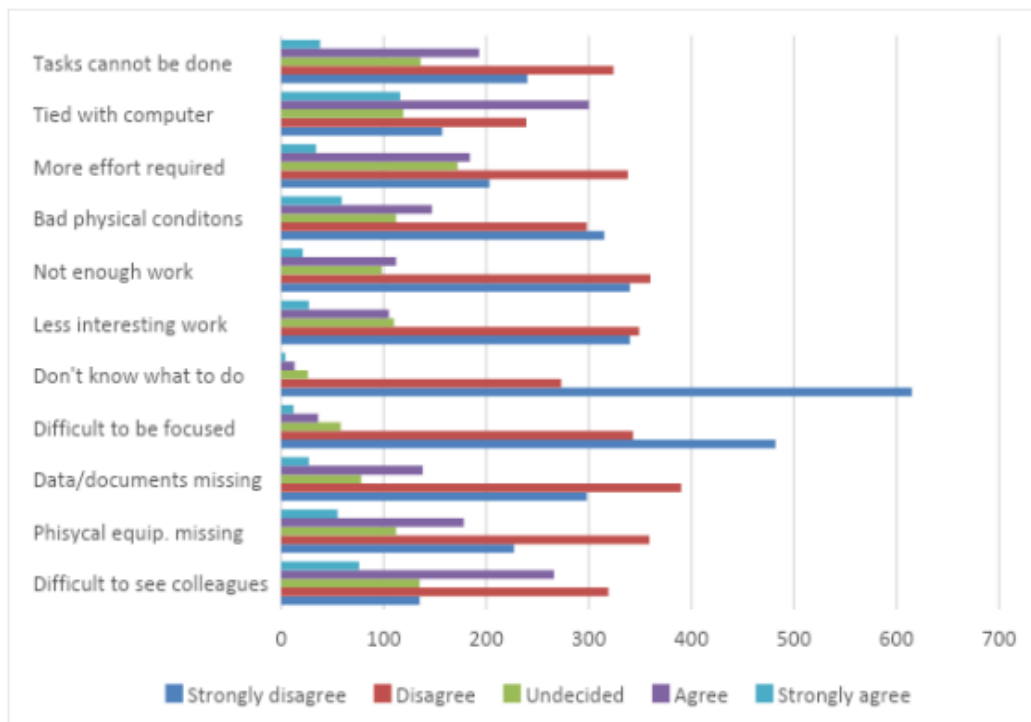
Source: Bolisani, Scarso, Ipsen, Kirchner & Hansen (2020).

2.3.2   Working from home and possible health issues

Several pieces of research also linked overall health levels to productivity and as expected, healthier people are linked to better work output and more productive behaviour while working (Lener et al., 2003). Increased sedentary time while working from home can result in decreased productivity, so it is crucial to take measures which will ensure the employees keep up their mental and physical fitness. The mental health aspect, as well as the question of proper home office equipment, was worsened in the 2020 shift to WFH due to its abruptness, which didn't allow much preparation time. This led to additional stress for the employees which could be avoided if the transition was conducted more peacefully and with more time to adjust (Moretti et al., 2020).

It is also crucial for the productivity of working from home to create a workspace that is separated from the rest of the living space in which you spend your free time. Workers who created an optimal physical setup with proper ergonomics had less trouble adjusting to working from home and also achieved better results. This separation of work and living space also acts as a signal to other members of the household when someone is working so that they should then not be bothered. (Lopez-Leon, Forero & Ruiz-Diaz, 2020) Here I would however like to stress that to some, creating a separate workspace inside their home was impossible and that it requests a separate part of the house/apartment which is of course not attainable for all due to their living situation. In research by Suart et al. (2020), it was found

that less than half of employees who worked from home (48.6%) had a dedicated workspace, another 31% were sharing the workspace with other members of their household and the remaining 20.4% did not have a dedicated workspace at home and simply worked wherever there was the most comfortable for them at the time. Several other pieces of research were conducted on the topic and the results were opposing each other.

A paper by Kim, Candido, Thomas, and de Dear (2016) concluded that having a dedicated workspace is beneficial to productivity, while a different one by Rudnicka, Newbold, Cook, and Cecchinato discovered that the opposite stands – for many people, moving around different areas of their home while working can be stimulating and helps with focus and consequentially, their productivity.

In a paper written by Awada, Lucas, Becerik-Gerber, and Rolf (2021), they discuss the results of research they conducted which was meant to clarify whether workers' demographic and their physical and mental health affect productivity, what workspace characteristics play a role in productivity, and how do work conditions affect productivity when workers are working from home.

They found that female workers, older workers, and those with higher income levels tended to be more productive while working from home during the lockdown. As we discussed before, this was a surprising discovery that there is a higher chance of working from home for male workers, yet literature and other research by Cardoso, Guimaraes, and Varejao (2021) that women perceive more benefits of working from home than men and therefore achieve better results than men. Since men have been contributing more to taking care of the household than before (Carlson, Miller, Sassler & Hanson, 2016), it allows female workers to focus more on their jobs.

The research by Awada, Lucas, Becerik-Gerber & Rolf (2021) also discussed the occupations which struggled less with the transition to working from home and the results here were very similar to those that can be found in other literature as well; "scientist, engineering and architecture, computer sciences and mathematics" had the best productivity while working from home compared to other occupations such as "healthcare and social services" or "education and arts". It was an interesting finding that older workers became more productive while working from home while in lockdown, as many perceive older people to be less tech-savvy. It would therefore be sensible to expect younger employees to struggle less with the transition to relying almost completely on computers and other technical gear. One of the possible reasons for this is that older workers usually also have older children – their effect on productivity will be discussed more in the following paragraph.

Among other worker characteristics that played a role was health – as mentioned above, physically and mentally healthier people struggled less with the transition to remote work and achieved better results.

2.3.3 Maintaining a good work-life balance

The ability to maintain a proper work-life balance is another factor of remote work which can be rather challenging for certain people. Setting boundaries and separating job and family life can be problematic even for people who had a slow transition into remote work, and since the COVID-19 pandemic struck abruptly, such was also the transition of a high percentage of workers who have not yet had any experience with remote working. It was already established that many people started working longer hours after shifting to working from home (DeFilippis, Impink, Dingell, Polzer & Sadun, 2020), while others had to schedule their working hours around their responsibilities at home (taking care of the children, walking the dog, chores…).

Another possible aspect of why more people struggled with finding the right work-life balance is that they found the managers increased their expectations of what should be achieved once their employees shifted to work from home (Peasley, 2020). With increased expectations and novelty of the new work arrangement, longer working hours and increased stress are to be expected (Goetzel et a., 2004).

According to another article, children can have either positive or negative effects on their parents' working productivity, based on their age. Workers with infants turned out to have lower productivity, resulting from kindergartens being closed due to the pandemic. Infants require almost undivided attention and if both parents worked from home and divide the caregiving between them, it was still difficult to maintain the same level of productivity. Having older children (teenagers), on the other hand, proved to be beneficial to parents' productivity, as they are already more independent and can take upon themselves some chores which would otherwise have to be done by parents, hence enabling the parents to focus more on their work tasks and completing them faster and more focused (Awada, Lucas, Becerik-Gerber & Rolf, 2021).

2.3.4 Benefits and drawbacks

The heterogeneity of workers can affect their overall performance when working from home and also affects how stressful they find the situation. Gibbs, Mengel, and Siemroth discovered that the employees who worked in the company for a long time before shifting to work from home had less trouble adapting, performed better and also spend fewer hours working than those with shorter careers in the company (Gibbs, Mengel & Siemroth, 2021).

 Another article was published discussing similar issues by Ipsen, Hansen, van Veldhoven, and Kirchner (2021). They published a survey online which got over 5000 responses from Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Sweden. Again, I would like to stress here that 75.2% of respondents had a university degree. The goal of the research was to find out which advantages and disadvantages people working from home identified, using a Likert scale survey. Among the highest-rated advantages were lowering the possibility to contract

COVID-19 (the survey was conducted in spring 2020, during the first lockdown), saving time on commuting, and higher flexibility with working hours and breaks. The biggest disadvantages on the other hand were missing colleagues and getting out of the apartment, and worse physical work conditions in the work office compared to the regular workspace.

Figure 8: Advantages versus disadvantages - working from home experience scores
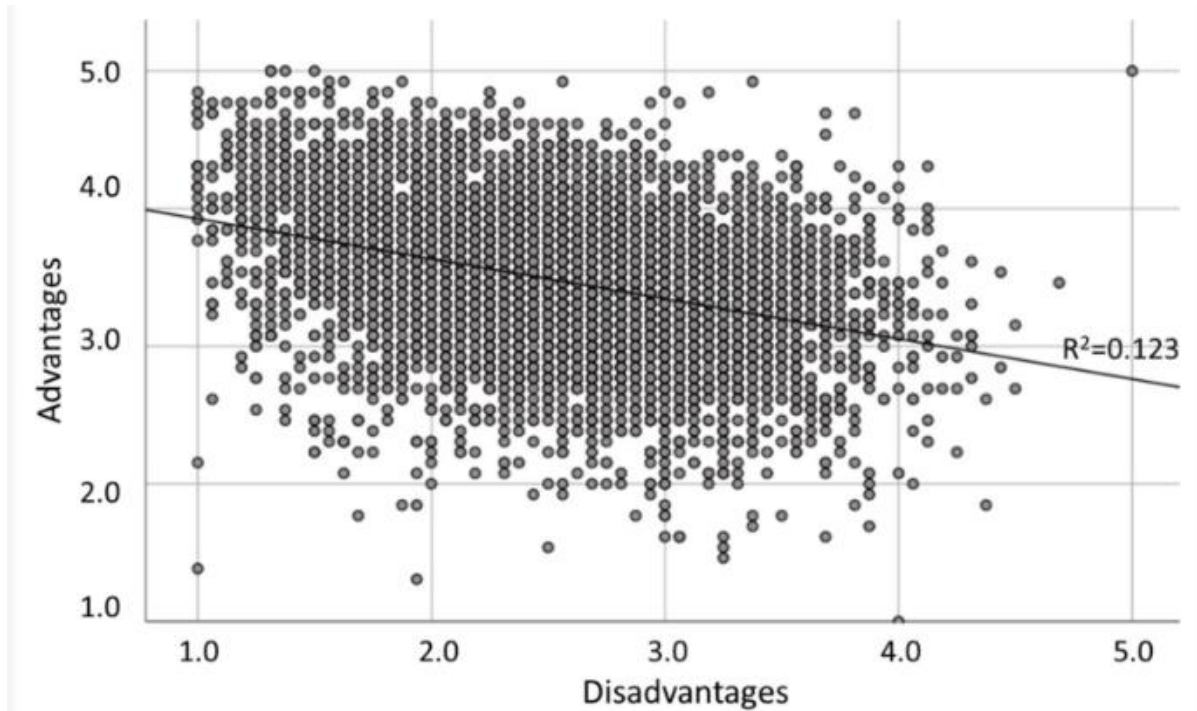
Source: Ipsen, van Veldhovem, Kirschner (2020).

Figure 8 above shows how the respondents reported positive and negative experiences during their work from home. As we can see from the scatterplot, the point cloud is towards the top left, which tells us that respondents did in the end report more positive than negative experiences. In this survey, however, men stated higher work efficiency than women, while women reported having higher home office constraints (Ipsen, Hanse, Kirschner & van Veldhoven, 2020).

When we are discussing different articles and their findings, we can see that there is a lot of inconsistency due to different samples and even the wording of the questions. There are also factors such as personality characteristics that influence the experience of remote work. It is also crucial to understand that the experience is much different when the transition is voluntary and paced, in contrast to what happened at the beginning of the pandemic.

If we take a look at the research conducted by Nicholas Bloom, where 1000 employees of a Chinese travel company shifted to work from home, the results were spectacular – there was a 13% increase in performance over the 9-month trial period, and the employee turnover rate

almost halved. The results were so positive that the entire company shifted to working from home (Bloom, Liang, Ying & Roberts, 2015).

Bloom however claims that this situation is completely different to what was going on during the massive shift to working from home at the beginning of the pandemic. The employees at the Chinese company were only allowed to work from home if they had the space there to create a home office for themselves, which had to be separated from the bedroom. Also, no one else was allowed in that room during working hours except the employee. As we already discussed, many workers had suboptimal conditions while working from home, which made Bloom think that productivity would take a severe hit due to prevailing work from home. He also stresses the importance of consent or desire to work from home – considering the Chinese experiment again, around half of the first 1000 employees requested to return to the office after the experiment ended, although working from home spared them 40 minutes of commute on average each way. This percentage of employees was approximately the same as at the beginning of the experiment (only around 50% of the people volunteered to work from home).

This desire to return to the office was due to the employees feeling isolated, lonely, and depressed while working from home, which resulted in lower productivity and less innovative thinking (Gorlick, 2020) Bloom (2015) however is not completely dismissive of working from home, but it is however of utmost importance to remember that different people have different priorities, characteristics and household limitations which can affect their remote work negatively or positively.

3   METHODOLOGY

In addition to the theoretical part in which I discussed the literature done by others, I also conducted my research by conducting primary data collection, involving semi-structured in-depth interviews with 4 managers, which were analysed using thematic analysis.

3.1   Primary data collection: in-depth interviews

My goal was to identify what is the managers' view on working from home – did their subordinates (and themselves) shifted to work from home once the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic started? Did they find the transition challenging, if they were able to shift? I want to identify their perceived advantages and disadvantages and, in the end, see what they believe is the future of work: do they think remote work is the logical next step or do they still find the "traditional" work arrangement to be more efficient?

The goals of the interviews are:

- To collect data from the interviews with different managers working in different industries;
- To identify managers' opinions on how remote work and return to the office have affected their companies' productivity;
- To determine whether the opinion of managers varies among industries;
- To propose an ideal working arrangement from a productivity perspective

The decision to use in-depth interviews was made because there are plenty of articles written based on the results of surveys which were responded to by employees of different companies and countries, whereas wanted to gain a better insight into managers' perspectives of working from home. Implementing this type of research allows us to add another dimension to the complexity of working from home and can perform also as a benchmark for employees to understand the other side of the situation.

In-depth interviewing enables the researcher to observe responses and situations which would not be feasible with a simple observation. Some methodological advantages of in-depth interviews include:

- encouraging attention to research design, such as situations, groups of people and contexts;
- allowing the combination of deep understanding and systematic, or analytical, research design, which provides a firm basis for answering theoretical questions;
- revealing emotional states within social experiences that cannot be evident solely by observing subjects' behaviour;
- probing different settings, social contexts and institutional situations to prove their accuracy (Lamont & Swidler, 2014).

The interview process started in June 2022 and was done in September of the same year. They lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted over the phone.

During this time, I contacted the possible interviewees after considering several possible options, finished the theoretical part and in the meantime continuously deliberated upon which questions would cover my topic the best.

3.2   Sample description

My data collection relied on a combination of convenience and purposive sampling.

In choosing my candidates, I opted for people who are well-established in their companies but did not want to interview chief executive officers, as they don't tend to have a lot of one-on-one communication with their subordinates. Instead, I chose several individuals whom I know in person, which made it possible for them to be more relaxed and honest during the

interview. For the sake of their anonymity, I will refrain from using their names and the actual names of the companies they work for.

When deciding which people to interview, I wanted to make sure that the interviewees possess different personal and professional qualities, such as age, gender, the industry of their company, their merit in the company etc.

Sadly, I did not manage to interview people from different parts of the country and therefore they were all living in the capital city Ljubljana and its surrounding cities for majority of their lives. Ideally, I would also be able to interview someone coming from rural areas of Slovenia as well.

The interviewees' average age was 41 years and I interviewed two women and two men. Due to their age difference and also different levels of education and different industries they work in, I deduced that they will allow me to grasp a deeper understanding of their perception from different perspectives which they certainly have due to their differences.

My interviewees include:

Respondent A: chief informatics officer at a meat processing firm in Slovenia. He has been working in this company for 20 years, of which 15 are in his current position. He is 56 years old with over 30 years of working in IT services. He heads the IT department in this company but also delegates for IT workers in other firms that the main one acquired.

Respondent B: Bachelor of Economics, and partner leader at a quickly developing company offering business informatics solutions to other companies. She has been working in the company since March 2020 and got her current position in January 2021. She graduated from the School of Business and Economics in Ljubljana in 2021. She has been working remotely for some time from another EU country.

Respondent C: Senior product manager at an international automotive company, based in France. He has a rather short tenure at the company in this position but was working as a junior product manager at the company beforehand as a student. He was also working at another company in the meantime but he did not have any subordinates at that time.

Respondent D: A PhD in sociology and medicine as a general practitioner. Currently holds a position at the National institute of public health as a senior consultant doctor primary. Works also as a part-time professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ljubljana.

Table 1: Sample description

	Age	**Gender**	**Position/job title**	**Industry**	**Education**
Respondent 1	56	Male	Chief informatics officer	Meat processing	Engineer in Computer and Informatic Sciences
Respondent 2	25	Female	Partner leader	Information technology solutions (Business Informatics)	Bachelor of Business and Economics
Respondent 3	26	Male	Senior product manager	Automotive	Bachelor of Administrative Sciences
Respondent 4	55	Female	Senior consultant doctor primary	Public health	PhD in medicine and sociology.

Source: own work.

As seen in Table 1, half of the interviewees are male and the other half are female. I also wanted to include people of different ages and tenures at the companies. The number of people they are managing varies from 2 to more than 50 and they all work in companies operating in dissimilar industries, as I want to see whether their responses are also correlated to the industry they operate within.

3.3 Interview Questions

The main goal of the research is to discover what managers think of working from home and what are the biggest advantages and drawbacks of these alternative work arrangements. I also want to discuss whether a hybrid work arrangement (meaning working partly from the workplace and partly from home) seems like a good solution to them.

The questions that the respondents were asked included a few objective questions for me to be able to understand how the company they work for combated the pandemic the world was suddenly battling. The majority of the questions were however more open for the interviewees to be able to express their subjective thoughts, beliefs, and opinions.

- What was the working arrangement during the spike of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Was there any training provided by the company?
- Did you find it more or less stressful for WFH?
- Do you believe WFH affects productivity?
- What do you think are the biggest advantages and disadvantages of WFH?

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (TA) because it enables a coherent and logical interpretation of qualitative data. It also allows identification patterns in a data set, which will allow me to conclude what are the points on which interviewees agree and disagree (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Thematic analysis is considered to be the fundamental method of qualitative research. It is great to use due to its flexibility and it enables us to describe our data in more detail than other methods of research (Boyatzis, 1998). A requirement to conduct TA is to have a rich description of the data set which enables the researcher to gain a strong understanding of the data and makes it possible to detect patterns and topics which occur in it.

After collecting data, I follow the typical procedure for thematic analysis: first, I familiarize myself with the data set, which I did by reading the interview transcripts carefully and underlining possible themes. The sole task of data transcription allowed me to think more about the answers which my interviewees gave me.

Afterwards, I started creating initial codes and grouping the data within the codes. In this step, I tried to eliminate unnecessary information from the interviews so what is left is the most important information. Then, I combine the codes into topics to easily identify trends and patterns. When using this type of analysis, the researcher must make sure that topics are distinct and ensure each one of the topics has enough data to support it. If this is not the case, topics should either be merged if they are too similar or removed if there is not enough data. When naming the topics, I try to find a superscript which helps identify most of the information which is covered within a certain topic. The last step of the analysis is to write

a narrative, which also contains subjective thoughts and opinions. The point of thematic analysis is to go beyond just stating the facts. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

4   TOPICS

When analysing the in-depth interview responses, the following topics emerged:

- Work arrangement before the COVID-19 pandemic
- Were the companies prepared to shift from the office to work from home?
- Level of control during work from home
- Struggles and benefits of working from home as a manager
- Effect on productivity
- Differences in WFH feasibility across industries

4.1   Work arrangements before the COVID-19 pandemic

I first inquired about the working arrangement their company was allowing before the COVID pandemic struck and the answers varied, which was to be expected.

"Because I just joined the company in the recent month, I can say for certain if that kind of a policy was in place before the Covid-19 pandemic. But working from home was a possibility at my former job, which was also very encouraged by the management and human resources in general. A 3-2 working scenario was implemented for the employees which had to drive 1+ hours a day just to get to work and were not physically linked to the production. This allowed me for example to work two days from home, which was a huge deal because I could put in the extra 2 hours of work, which I lost the other three days just by driving to work and back. The (automotive) company I work for now however allowed only terrain workers to work remotely, otherwise, you had to present very good arguments to be able to work remotely on a given day." (Interviewee 3)

The answer above shows well how to many, a hybrid system was the desired possibility even before we were forced to work from home. As the respondent lived rather far from the place of work and had to commute from a Ljubljana neighbouring town to Velenje on the days they couldn't work from home, it was a big waste of time and also quite a high expense.

"I joined the company just a bit before COVID started and we have been using the hybrid model also before. As a tech company, we don't need much physical equipment other than our computer so we did not need to be present in the office all the time. It was however desired to come at least once a week." (Interviewee 2)

"Within our agency, we are employing terrain workers who of course had to work from outside the office to be able to do their job properly. Other than that, it was not common to work from home within some sort of justification." (Interviewee 4)

The fourth interviewee stated that it was not common for the employees in the company they work at to work from home, only on terrain, when it was necessary.

"Work from home was used more as an emergency instrument when there was some sort of immediate intervention needed, or if someone was working on a special project. In some cases, it was also used if someone was recovering from an illness or injury that didn't lower their ability to do their job, but it was difficult for them to move around or be present at his primary work location." (Interviewee 1)

4.2 Were the companies prepared to shift from offices to work from home?

As the interviews started, I asked the respondents about how well they believed their company was prepared for the shift and whether there was any struggle when making the sudden transition to work from home.

First, they answered if they and their co-workers started working from home once the pandemic started.

"Yes, we split into critical teams, not to be all together. Most of my colleagues worked in the company. In my case, I worked from home for only a few weeks altogether since I have my own office and everyone in the building was able to respect social distancing." (Interviewee 1)

This was the only answer of my respondents to claim that the majority of the employees did not shift to working from home. The rest of them claimed that everyone who was able to work from home did so, while the only workers who remained in their primary working space were those who physically can't do their job from elsewhere; such as production workers or repairmen.

"Well, in our institute, there was only some percentage of people who performed terrain tasks. In their cases, they had to stay home for a while if their job wasn't vital for the company to function, and after a certain period they continued with their work but under special measures put in place to ensure everyone's safety." (Interviewee 4)

Another answered that although all of the employees started working from home, they did not have to work from home the entire time. During the first lockdown, until May 2020, they were asked to stay at home all the time, but afterwards, they were offered several different arrangements and were given the choice to pick the optimal one for them (with some limitations).

"Every department got the chance to pick a so-called WFH scheme in which they chose how many days they would spend in the office and how many days at home: the options were: four days at the office, one from home; two days at home and three in the office, or; three days at home and two in the office. Of course, HR had its bright ideas and for those who

have picked working from home one or two days a week, Mondays and Fridays were off-limits. This was unfortunate as it took away the possibility to work from elsewhere (say weekend homes) and also meant we were stuck in the traffic on the days it's usually the worst." (Interviewee 3)

My last respondent stated that although their team in the company was familiar with working partly from home before the pandemic, every employee had to shift completely to work from home for the first few months of the pandemic.

It was concerning that out of 4 interviewees, only one confirmed that they had some training organised by the company to make the transition to working from home. The only one who had the training was respondent 4 who worked in the medical industry. As they are working in this field, it was to be expected that they would take better precautions to ensure their employees get the necessary knowledge on optimal home office organisation and ergonomically appropriate equipment.

"We did get some training regarding maintaining work-life balance and about equipping the optimal workspace at home. As we had a really big increase in the workload when the pandemic started, it was really important for us to know how to set boundaries on our work as we could otherwise work around the clock. But we didn't receive any additional training as most of us had some previous experience with working from home." (Interviewee 4)

Others were not so lucky, but it posed a bigger problem to some than to others.

"As I work in a tech company, the majority of the employees are tech-savvy and as such didn't need any training when it came to how to use the equipment. A lot of my co-workers were able to work partly from home also before the COVID pandemic so they were already kind of used to it." (Interviewee 2)

There was also a good point made by one of the interviewees who pointed out that their company did not offer any training, but did however help them otherwise.

"As soon as we shifted to work from home, we were all provided with very good equipment; fast laptops, noise-cancelling headphones etc. We were also allowed to take other equipment from the office if it was necessary for us to work efficiently (within reason, of course)." (Interviewee 2)

It was refreshing to hear that everyone was satisfied with the equipment their company provided for them when they started working from home. As it was already a very stressful situation with many unknowns, one pointed out that not having to worry about electronic equipment, made it at least a little easier.

"Our company's policy is that each employee gets their work laptop and other equipment needed to work efficiently also from remote locations, so luckily, we didn't struggle with

familiarization with the equipment, as there was enough stress already with the whole process of transitioning to remote work. I am very happy the company implemented this policy beforehand as I can't imagine the havoc there would be if we would each only had desktop computers at the company when the pandemic started." (Interviewee 3)

"Each employee receives a laptop upon his or her arrival to the firm or even a mobile phone, giving the position you fill in the company itself. There was an additional possibility of borrowing a computer screen from the company which you could have used at home if needed." (Interviewee 2)

As most of the employees in the offices use more than one screen, providing an additional one was perceived as a big benefit for employees.

"We were all provided with all the equipment which was almost necessary as a lot of us use less capable equipment in our homes which would be a problem once we tried working from home using it. Also, a lot of my co-workers have children and they needed to use the computer they had at home. It would be unacceptable in my opinion to expect people to use their personal computers in a time where everything was happening online." (Interviewee 4)

I also asked the sub-question to Respondent 4 who had the bigger team that they were leading out of all my respondents whether it was difficult for people to get in touch with one another and whether there were any new communication systems installed to make communication easier. They said that although they already were working with some internal system for communication, they also tried implementing Microsoft Teams but it was unsuccessful as the people did not seem to enjoy using the programme. However, Teams were a common practice in the company of Respondent 3 even before the pandemic began and therefore employees were already used to it and gladly used it while working from home.

4.3   Level of control during work from home

This topic somewhat relates to the end of the previous one – how the people communicated and whether there were special instruments for the managers to check how well the people in their team were performing.

Respondent 2, who was the most used to working from home stated that they did not feel like their team needed any additional control as all their subordinates were used to fulfilling their tasks from home.

"We didn't feel like any additional control was needed. They knew when the meetings were and they attended those prepared and the results were great, considering the whole world came to a halt out of nowhere. I would say that posing some strict controlling systems could even be considered offensive to the employees who work hard and don't search for the easy way out. Luckily, I picked a group of people whom I can trust and who did their jobs just as amazing as they would if they were sitting in the office with me." (Interviewee 2)

Another respondent said that they didn't feel the need to control exactly when his team started or finished working, as it was important for them that the tasks were complete and not that the people were sitting behind their computer for the entirety of 8 hours if they completed the workload faster.

"Each morning I set up a meeting with my team where we discussed our goals for the day. Everyone knew what their job was after the meeting so I didn't feel the need to constantly check up on them and their progress, as long as the job was finished by the agreed-upon deadline. It is true however that our company uses the Microsoft Teams programme so in case I needed to reach someone quickly, I immediately saw whether they were available or not. However, no special reports or check-ins during the day were needed just because we were working from home." (Interviewee 3)

Overall, the managers all stated that also the leadership of the companies (e.g., the executive director) did not require their employees to send in any additional proof of their working hours, however, it was necessary that they were all present and participating in scheduled meetings and that they were finishing their work tasks in the allotted period.

"For me, it was very stressful when I organized a meeting and everybody had their camera turned off. Personal contact is important to me and I want to see how the people in my team react to my ideas, questions and suggestions. I asked them to turn on the camera every time but some refused to do so because of one reason or another. I think this is understandable only when someone can't have a separate workspace and they join the meeting from a common space, but of course, I couldn't just force someone to turn on their camera if they refused. Luckily over time, more people felt comfortable using the camera so I didn't have to talk to a bunch of black squares anymore. It wasn't about the control; it was about the human contact." (Interviewee 4)

"Building a team that you can trust as a manager is extremely important. Of course. you can't expect them to work without a break for 8 hours and think about how much idle time there is in the office with chatting, grabbing coffees and such. None of us can be concentrated for more than a few hours without a break and working from home enables the employees to spend their breaks more productively." (Interviewee 3)

4.4 Challenges of working from home as a manager

As my thesis is focused on managers' opinions about working from home, it was very important for me to get their thorough input about their perceptions. My main question was an open one just asking them to list and describe the upsides and downsides of working from home that they believe have the biggest impact on workers, but I did ask some sub-questions as I wanted to explore different opinions they might have.

"The biggest challenge was getting the answers you need from the right people. As our company grew quite quickly it was hard to know who outside of our team is responsible for

which tasks and even harder to get the needed answers fast. In the office, it's easy to just walk up to a person and get the answers you need, while online you need to rely on messaging platforms such as Slack, where it can sometimes take hours, days or even weeks to get the answer." (Interviewee 2)

This answer was not the only one that pointed out our trouble in communication.

"As working from home tends to be more flexible, it can be challenging to get in touch with someone when you need some answers quickly. When working from the office, the majority of the people take breaks at the same time which makes it easier to know when you expect them to answer quickly or even be available for a short debate if you need their opinion on something." (Interviewee 3)

"I found that using Teams simply isn't as efficient as working in a group at the workplace. I felt like those working from home didn't perform as well as those working from the office and I had to lower their workload." (Interviewee 1)

"It was quite difficult for me, in the beginning, to reach out to my subordinates when I needed something. I felt like I was too pushy and gave them the impression I don't trust them even when I only needed something to get my work done. Instead of just asking them directly in the office where they sit across from me, I had to give them a call for any minor thing which made me feel like I was violating their peace and private space while working from home. They assured me they didn't feel this way though."

One respondent specifically mentioned how getting to and from work helped her get some exercise in without additional hassle or expenses.

"I always walked or rode my bike to my job. This offered me a great opportunity to wake up in the morning before getting to work and also relax before coming back home. It also calmed me down and offered me some time to myself without having to be stuck in traffic during rush hours. When we had to work from home it was really difficult for me to get used to waking up and starting working right away. Luckily now with no restrictions, I work from my weekend home at the seaside a lot of times. This offers me a whole different array of options for exercising in the morning before I start working." (Interviewee 4)

Another issue that was stated was also that it was harder for them to stay focused while working from home because of all the distractions.

"In the office, I know what my main job is. That is, to work. But at home, there were many different distractions. Before I started working, I threw in laundry to wash and of course, after two hours, the laundry was done. Hearing the beeping of the machine threw me off and I couldn't concentrate until this was done. This is just an example as there are so many different things that were distracting before I got used to them." (Interviewee 3)

"I live in an apartment building with suboptimal soundproofing. The start of the lockdown aspired many to start their home renovation on their own I had a lot of noise distractions during the first lockdown as my downstairs neighbour was renovating his bathroom and the noise was disabling me from having any type of meetings." (Interviewee 2)

The two respondents with children stated that they were not living with them at the start of the pandemic as they are already adults. However, one of the respondents mentioned that it was difficult for people with children to maintain a proper work-life balance.

"We had to get used to being at home all the time overnight, so it was already a really stressful situation. But my co-workers who had little children at home stated that it was often overwhelming for them and also didn't deny that their productivity took a big hit in the beginning. After a while, things stabilized as the kids got used to their parents being at home all the time and understanding that this doesn't mean it's playtime all the time." (Interviewee 4)

"I think it's necessary to divide the situations where all of us were working from home at the same time the children were schooling from home and now where our lives went back to normal and the children go to their school or kindergarten and employees have the apartment/house to themselves." (Interviewee 3)

Another drawback emphasized by one of them is the loss of social interaction. As people are social creatures who enjoy the company of others and are moulded by our interactions and relationships with others, it is not our desire to interact with others almost exclusively over communication systems and not in person (Yu, Lau & Lau, 2022).

"It was a big struggle for me to not be able to chat like normal with my co-workers. I really enjoyed unwinding during the lunch break or even grabbing a drink on a Friday afternoon. I was really lucky to have co-workers whom I also consider friends and I missed them when we were working from home." (Interviewee 4)

"Since our company allowed work from home before COVID as well, we were already used to a system of regular work lunches which often led to discussions and deeply personal conversations and are a real bonding time. However, in a time when socializing was forbidden, it was all about work. When you are in a meeting, you typically only discuss work-related stuff and can easily feel more distant from your co-workers. Luckily, as the restrictions had lifted, we went back to this tradition." (Interviewee 2)

4.5   Benefits of working from home as a manager

Although the managers expressed some very reasonable downsides to working from home, they also found a lot of benefits in this working arrangement.

All four of them stated that working from home was less stressful than working from the office. They said that the commute, getting ready in the morning and wasted time were more nerve-wracking than the possible struggles mentioned above.

Wasting time on commute was a big factor with all of my interviewees.

"The biggest benefit I see is getting time back. We're always very busy, working overtime to meet the deadlines, so getting that extra time that we would have otherwise spent commuting to and from work is very valuable for a healthy life-work balance." (Interviewee 2)

"Time efficiency is one of the best gifts you can receive in today's hectic world and working from home certainly can increase it. If you have the right conditions so you can work without external distracting factors, it is a blessing to sometimes just sit in your home office in informal clothes and start your day more relaxing." (Interviewee 1)

"The main benefits are that we do not lose time we need to get ready in the morning and drive to work. Also, it allows us to work in an environment we feel at ease and at peace which can boost our productivity. We can manage more tasks at once and finish a task later in the day because we have time to finish other home-related responsibilities as well." (Interviewee 4)

The flexibility of work was another factor but was only mentioned by two of the respondents, them being the younger two. Possible reasons for this will be discussed in the summary of the findings.

"Another benefit is the flexibility of work, at least in our case. If you are sitting in the office, you will usually work the hours and run errands, exercise or socialize after you leave the office. Working from home allows you to incorporate those activities in your day, so you can, for example, enjoy some sun during the day in the winter and work the hours that fit you better." (Interviewee 2)

"As I mentioned, I don't want my team to be working 4 hours on something if they can do it in 2 if the result, in the end, is equally good. I encourage them to work as efficiently as possible because they are then able to have more free time during the day to do things they enjoy (or finish some chores and can have a free afternoon once they finish working)." (Interviewee 3)

Flexibility with location is another phenomenon which was unimaginable before the implementation of work-from-home.

"For some part of my last year, I worked from a different EU country. My bosses didn't mind as long as everything in my team was running smoothly, and I was given an amazing

opportunity to work for the same company but in a different environment. I consider myself very lucky to be able to do so." (Interviewee 2)

"Working from my weekend house on the seaside definitely makes work easier. Breathing the fresh air and working when knowing I can jump in the sea right after I'm done has a tremendously positive impact on my mood and I believe I do my best work while relaxed and excited." (Interviewee 4)

I was pleased to see that besides how it affects themselves and their team, the managers also thought about how WFH affects the environment.

"Just imagine how many cars can stay at home with us. The traffic would be so much lighter during rush hours if every day, 20% of people would work from home. Of course, some people like me never take their car to work and ride the bus in the worst-case scenario, but I know that this is not the case for the majority of people. Carpooling would also be an option but I don't see this to be a feasible one shortly. So, letting the Earth take some rest while we work from home from time to time is certainly very beneficial." (Interviewee 4)

"I think that in the offices we tend to be more wasteful than at home. Just off the top of my head, I would point out the number of plastic cups we waste each day for water and coffee, not to mention the takeaway packaging and plastic cutlery. I don't know anybody who would use plastic cups or cutlery at home, especially multiple per day. It seems like a minor thing, but I think it adds up. Also, often in our offices, the heating in the winter is so strong that I can easily be wearing short sleeves, while in the summer, the air conditioning makes it so cold I feel like I need a blanket to keep warm. I think that majority of the people are more rational with temperature settings at home which saves a lot of energy. Also, you have to keep your house warm or cold anyway, so you working from home doesn't incur any additional usage of the resources." (Interviewee 2)

Another mentioned benefit was the lower number of social interactions with co-workers who although are nice, can become overbearing and hurt their productivity. As some people are less busy than others but have to spend the same amount of time in the office, they can act distractive to their co-workers, so working from home eliminates this.

4.6   Effect on productivity

The last identified topic was how the interviewees perceived working from home affected their and their team's productivity. It was an extremely important topic as one of the main goals of my research was to recognize whether managers believe that WFH can be an equally effective form of employment as working from the office.

"I understand why people say that working from home lowers productivity - there is less control, so there are more temptations. But I don't see it that way. Yes, at home you might

spend more time cooking or walking your dog, but I think people don't realize how much time in the office is spent just chatting with co-workers, being interrupted for questions and just generally losing focus because of the constant chatter, noise and movement around you. Taking this into account, working from home allows you to be more productive." (Interviewee 2)

"I believe that people are in majority more productive while working from home. Of course, you have some people who will slack and will try to use your trust but I feel like many more people respond positively to the trust the employer expresses and more freedom that comes with the ability to work from home." (Interviewee 3)

There was also another phenomenon mentioned in the interviews which I believe could be revolutionary to the way employers evaluate productivity and define work. Two of the interviewees said that work efficiency should not be evaluated by the hours worked but rather by the tasks completed.

"Each day I assign my team their work tasks for the day. I want those tasks done by a deadline and I expect them to be completed in the best possible way. But that doesn't mean it will take my team the whole day to complete them. Some finish them sooner, some later. I find that requiring everyone to stay at the workplace even though they could finish in less time is counter-productive and unnecessary." (Interviewee 3)

"In some special areas, productivity is equal to being physically present, such as repairs or upkeeping, but the majority of corporate jobs can easily be done from anywhere and therefore should not be restricted by the employer. In my opinion, developers and other workers with high levels of independence should be paid based on their effect and not by the hour. Their effect can be easily measured and it can't be half done so hurrying is impossible. I think that this would be the new, modern way of looking at things." (Interviewee 1)

Another respondent answered that they believe in a learning curve with working from home and that the period since the beginning of COVID-19 can be perceived as some sort of test period.

"I don't think working from home hurts the overall performance of the employees, but the productivity of course can dive the start of the changed arrangements. I find this logical as it is a big change and people of course need to adapt. We don't expect new employees to perform brilliantly in the first month of their onboarding, why would we expect that from the employees who only started working from home?" (Interviewee 2)

One also emphasized that working from home tends to be more productive for those who have easily measurable results from their work.

"Technical jobs always have been and probably always will be easier to be done from home. IT personnel usually has very straightforward tasks which enable their employer to measure

their effect without any additional control. It is not the same for many others who have more person-to-person contact during their workdays and who don't have to complete "project" but rather several different tasks continuously every day." (Interviewee 1)

"I am lucky to be working in an industry where WFH can be implemented very easily. Working in my field enables me to do the majority of my work from wherever and I only need to get in contact with my co-workers now and then. I am very content in choosing a career in this area as both my parents work in companies which require them to be physically present all the time and I feel my way of working is much more freeing." (Interviewee 2)

5   FINDINGS

The main goal of this thesis is to find out whether the data on the effect of working from home on productivity correlates to managers' opinions.

In this chapter, I will discuss the answers my respondents gave me during our interviews and try to answer the research questions I identified at the beginning of the thesis. In the second part, I will draw some practical implications and lastly identify limitations and possible suggestions for future research.

5.1   Summary of the main findings

In the following text, I summarized the main findings by topics that emerged while researching the data I collected through the interviews.

5.1.1   What was your company's policy on working from home before the COVID-19 pandemic?

From their answers, we can conclude that companies were not very open to the possibility of enabling their employees to work from home. Even though none of my interviewees had to be physically in the office to be able to efficiently finish the majority of their work tasks, only one was allowed to do so without justification of having to commute over a certain amount of time or just being able to WFH under special circumstances.

In one case working from home was also allowed if someone had to urgently finish some business but was ill or injured and therefore was unable to commute to the workplace. This can be a possible negative consequence of working from home as setting the boundary of when you are too ill to work can become blurred due to the fact you can work from the comfort of your home.

Three out of four managers work in a company where some workers have to work on terrain due to the nature of their work but the majority of people were still required to commute to work every day. These responses were consistent with the literature I reviewed where it was

emphasized that although many would be able to complete a major part of their tasks from home, rarely were allowed to do so.

5.1.2   Were the companies prepared to shift from offices to work from home?

Here the responses were mixed but none of them was very negative. Although the shift was forced and sudden, the managers stated that it was rather well organised in all their cases and that the companies were willing to carry the expenses incurred with the transition.

All but one company started working in shifts as soon as working from home was not obligated anymore and, in this way, try to limit the number of people who were present in the office. With fewer people there, they were able to provide them all with the necessary precautions to ensure the minimal risk of disease being spread. However, I believe that the interchanging fixed teams of people who shift from working in the office to WFH are a suboptimal arrangement.

When dividing people into teams the management enforces them to always only work in person with certain people and rarely enable in-person contact with the other team. This can cause problems inside the team as cliques could be formed and new employees would not have the same chance to meet all of their co-workers. Two of the managers agreed that it makes more sense to offer employees different schemes from which the employees choose the one that is most suited for them and their needs. With this arrangement, employees pick themselves which days they will work from home and which days they will be present in the office and in this way, lower the chance of them always working with the same group of people.

If in the future WFH will become a more standard practice (which my interviewees believe it will) it would be feasible to provide employees with some sort of training to ensure their work-life balance does not suffer while working from home. Another important course in my opinion would be work safety and equipping the optimal home office to ensure the same level of comfort and space organisation that would be provided at the original workspace as well. Another topic in this topic was also equipment and although all of my respondents stated all necessary equipment was provided by the company, this is still not the case in every company and some require some or all employees to use their equipment. Even if they compensate them for using their personal equipment, I still think it would be optimal for the company to provide it because this can blur the work-personal line further and also disables anyone else, such as children or spouses, to use the personal computer during work hours.

5.1.3   Level of control during work from home

The third topic that emerged from the respondents' answers was how they went upon establishing control when people started working from home and whether additional control

was needed. This is a topic very closely related to workers' loyalty and managers' trust and is significant when discussing whether WHF can be a substitute for traditional work arrangements.

Employers can execute control using a different mechanism, such as whether you are present on different communication channels (a good example of this is Microsoft Teams), requiring different types of reports or daily check-in meetings where the employees report on their progress and finished work tasks.

The managers I interviewed all stated that these additional mechanisms were unnecessary due to different factors, among those being that they trust their employees but also that the employees all know exactly what their job is and they exactly what their tasks are and when they have to be completed. Three managers said that they had a daily meeting at the beginning of the day not to endorse further control but to explain what the plan is and also to keep in touch with their team during the time they were unable to do so in person. Regular meetings are in my opinion the optimal solution because they don't require employees to spend additional time working on reports and also because they are the quickest way to divide the tasks and update each other on things that need to be completed. It is also easier to have informal conversations during the meetings via emails or Teams as it can better resemble a face-to-face conversation.

They also pointed out the importance of having a good team on which the managers and co-workers can rely. Although it might take longer to find the right people and to develop the right dynamics inside a team, everything will run much smoother if the whole team works together as one and no team member is slacking and doing the bare minimum. External control will never be as efficient as internal motivation and loyalty to the company and the team.

I think that the needed level of control can also be related to the age of the workers. Many older workers were used to having a more hands-on type of management than the younger workforce.

5.1.4   Downsides of working from home

This and the next topics were probably the most discussed during our interviews as it also eased us in on their opinion on how WFH affects productivity.

As the biggest issue which was pointed out by the managers was difficult communication, it can be expected that in the future instant communication channels such as Microsoft Teams will be of vital importance and that companies will try to do more for educating their employees on the proper use of these channels. I think that with time, this issue will become less significant as employees will familiarize themselves better with these channels and I would suggest that companies use these means of communication even in times when not

everyone is required to work from home – instead of requiring all employees to come physically to a meeting, arrange it online and people will over time become much more accustomed to it.

Another issue which all of them mentioned was the lack of human contact. As people are social creatures, it can be harmful to their mental health if they don't have enough in-person contact with others, their colleagues and co-workers included. This is however an issue which can be resolved by implementing a hybrid work model when people shift from working at home to working at the office and back. This allows employees to individually decide how much they want to work from home and thus the lack of human contact should not be a big drawback anymore.

Probably the issue on which employees and the companies have the least impact is distractions. One sadly can't choose one's neighbours and even though the children go to school or kindergarten there can still be many distractions in the home environment which simply can't be eliminated. As one of the managers pointed out, the best thing a company can do is provide proper equipment such as noise-cancelling headphones and powerful computers. But I believe the distractions will remain more or less problematic always since not everyone has the space to prepare a proper home office and children, neighbours and the rest of society don't always comply with your wants and needs.

5.1.5   Benefits of working from home

The managers I interviewed shared the belief that as with everything else, there is a learning curve also when it comes to WFH. Some still equal it with the restrictions which were put upon us amid the pandemic which is of course not the case and there is much more freedom now within this work arrangement than there was during the pandemic. However, all managers agreed that there were more upsides to WFH.

The possibility of more flexible hours, fewer small talk conversations with co-workers and being able to attend to personal matters during breaks were all perceived as very beneficial for workers' ability to perform more efficiently and all the managers agreed this work arrangement was less stressful. Since in today's day and age, there is a lot of talk about mental health and stress-related diseases, working (even partly) from home can be seen as a positive alternative which lowers the overall stress level of workdays which attests to at least 8 hours each day for the majority of people.

Besides other benefits, there was also a point being made about how WFH saves time, which is another crucial part when it comes to modern employees who tend to be stretched thin among all their chores and responsibilities.

With the increase of WFH, there is also a decrease in traffic during the busiest hours in the morning and afternoon, which results in shorter travels also for those employees who don't

have the option of WFH. Fewer cars on the road also result in fewer emissions, hence the argument was pointed out that this represents also a more sustainable way of working and enables us to reduce the impact on the environment without making big sacrifices.

5.1. 6 Effect on productivity

This was the most important topic of my thesis and I wanted to grasp the respondents' opinions on it. As it turns out, similar to my predictions, the two younger managers were keener on WFH, but all of them stated that they found it to be a good substitution with a positive impact on productivity in most cases. The interviewees agreed that in the long term, productivity will only increase as more people will get used to it from the beginning of their careers.

Another important factor which may talk in favour of WFH and productivity is that more and more people are gaining better technical knowledge and skills and therefore the employees who transfer to WFH will not have as much work with setting up their home office equipment as older generations might have.

Together with other factors, productivity also tends to increase after a worker gets more use to a new work arrangement, so my respondents also believed that although these negative sides of WFH can decrease productivity momentarily, it will probably increase back after the worker gets used to it and learns how to combat or eliminate distractions.

Overall, all my respondents were positive that WFH will increase in the future. They were however more in favour of hybrid work than a complete transfer to WFH, as this enables the workers to stay in touch at least partly from face to face and increases the chances of connecting on a more personal level. As the majority of businesses still need to have some kind of office space, it makes more sense for it to be at least somewhat full of employees. A hybrid work arrangement also enables the workers to adapt WFH to their needs and wants and provides the optimal level of independence.

In Table 2 below, all topics are presented with some of the main themes that occurred withing them. These were the topics that emerged while breaking down the data collected through in-depth interviews with the managers.

Table 2: Overview of the main themes occurring within topics

TOPIC	MAIN THEMES
Company's WFH policy before the COVID-19 pandemic	• Company's level of WFH implementation
Company's preparedness for WFH	• Importance of proper equipment for employee's home use

	• Training of the employees • Utility expenses
Level of control during WFH	• Reporting • Focus on tasks rather than time
Downsides of WFH	• Lower communication and cooperation • Distractions at home (neighbours, children…)
Benefits of WFH	• Flexibility • Less stressful Environmental factors
Effect on productivity	• Learning curve • Best possible arrangement
Industry-specific effects	• Ability of companies to implement WFH

Source: Own work.

5.2   Practical implications

After reviewing all the answers of my respondents, I concluded that all of them perceive WFH as an adequate alternative to working from the original workplace, but not for everyone and not all the time.

Technical occupations which demand more individual work which can be easily measured are more fitting for WFH and a majority of the people who already had a WFH agreement before the COVID-19 pandemic was working in technical or IT industries. Some occupations can perform such a small percentage of their work tasks from outside the workplace that it perhaps doesn't make sense for them to do so at all because it can only complicate their life instead of making them easier.

But for the majority of the workforce who work in an office, there are not many arguments which would support the notion that only working from the office can be productive enough. After the sharp increase of workers who transferred to WFH almost overnight due to the pandemic in 2020, we could see that the companies that didn't have to close due to restrictions didn't suffer from a lack of completed work. Now, two and a half years later, WFH became a much more widely used arrangement and several big companies in Slovenia

(such as Novartis, Grand Auto, BMW etc.) allow their workers to choose a hybrid model that suits them the most, while some other companies (Zebra BI, B2 BI) allow their workers to work completely remotely but enables them to come to the office as well when needed.

Due to the rushed transfer of many people, the legislation in this area still has some loopholes which have to be corrected to enable safe and secure work for those who opt for an alternative arrangement. There are still some uncertainties that enable the companies to exploit them in their favour. All the rights and obligations of both parties need to be very clearly defined and there should not be any ambiguities if we want the workers and the companies to continuously improve working conditions and productivity.

5.3   Limitations and future research

Before concluding my thesis, I want to discuss the limitations of my research.

The first limitation is that although discussing deeply with the respondents, there was still a relatively low count of them and there is a possibility I would get many different responses if I chose a different set of people. The four of my respondents could be grouped into two categories; the generation who just recently finished their studies and the generation of their parents (although none of them was related to one another). Perhaps the sample would be more balanced and more diverse if I chose managers each completely a different age; a person in their 20s, one in their 30s, perhaps even one in their 60s who is close to retirement.

Perhaps another limitation would be the managers' place of living. All of my managers lived in Ljubljana (or very close to it) for most of their life, and if some of them would live a more rural area, they might perceive some additional benefits (such as no commuting time as rural workers usually must drive to bigger cities) but also some different downsides (such as worse internet connection than in the cities).

The last limitation that I would point out is that none of the managers works in an industry where WFH is almost impossible to do (such as retail or restaurants), because I am sure that if some of them would live in more rural areas, their view on WFH would be much different to that of my interviewees who all worked and managed office workers.

I believe that WFH will become an even hotter topic in the future and more research will be done on it. As more and more production lines are equipped with automatic machines, there is a prediction that the demand for low-skilled workers will decrease in the future and the demand for technically skilled workers will increase.

With that, the possibility of WFH will be open to even more workers who are now bound to the production line. It would be interesting to interview another set of respondents in, for example, 10 years, and see how the perception of WFH transformed during this time.

Another good idea for further research would be to interview a bigger number of respondents who came from different regions and had bigger age differences among themselves. This would provide a bigger array of answers which would offer more ground for debate upon the best possible arrangement as time goes on.

CONCLUSION

The world nowadays is facing more rapid changes than ever before. Technology is progressing at a level which was impossible to imagine not long ago and we also can't predict exactly how far it will come shortly. The progression of technology is certainly a factor which correlates with the availability of WFH to more people because it enables companies to assure their employees have all the equipment and accesses that they would have in their offices as well. Another factor which can be seen as a pushing force for wider WFH implementation is also the technical skills that younger generations possess far more than older ones who are currently still active in the workforce.

With the world population rapidly increasing, it is necessary to consider the possibility of more pandemics such as COVID-19 hitting us and as was seen in 2020, the world can come to a halt overnight if this happens. It is hence necessary for governments, as well as companies, to consider what can be done in order to prevent such drastic falls in output as we had seen during the latest pandemic. Work from home is certainly a beneficial tool to use in these times, and with wider implementation, the economic damage could be reduced in case a similar pandemic occurs again.

With more technically skilled workers, there would be less work for technical support to help the workers set up their technical equipment. There is a lot of discussion in the world about what steps we can take as a society to try to diminish the environmental impact of our way of life and WFH offers a positive change in this direction. With the decrease in commuting, lowering the need to regulate the temperatures in giant offices, and forcing people with weekend houses to drive back and forth only for the weekend, we can achieve a big difference with little to no sacrifices on our part.

Although WFH can be seen as a negative thing in terms of lowering the loyalty to the company and a means of allowing slacking at work, there are plenty of successful companies that prove that it does not have to be this way. A good atmosphere in the company can be achieved also using different approaches, such as organizing regular team-building activities and scheduling regular meetings that allow the free flow of information and opinions.

I believe that working from the original workplace will remain a standard practice which will be commonly used for many professions which don't offer the option to WFH for more than a very few work tasks. Machines will probably never be able to completely replace the human workforce also in production, retail, and services and thus some part of the work will forever be done from the original workplace. However, with more experience and

knowledge on how to train workers to work efficiently from home as well as the office, a conclusion can be drawn that work from home and the hybrid working arrangement will establish themselves to be a positive change to many workers and that the pandemic of COVID-19 which transformed the world permanently also left a stamp on the way future generations will work.

REFERENCE LIST

1. Adams-Prassl, A., Boneva, T., Golin, M., & Rauh, C. (2022). Work that can be done from home: Evidence on variation within and across occupations and industries. *Labour Economics*, 74, 1-13.

2. Awada, M., Lucas, G., Becerik-Gerber, B., & Roll, S. (2021). Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impact on office worker productivity and work experience. *Work*, (Preprint), 1-19.

3. Baker, E., Avery, G. C., & Crawford, J. (2007). Satisfaction and perceived productivity when professionals work from home. *Research and practice in human resource management*, *15*(1), 37-62.

4. Baruch, Y. (2000). Teleworking: benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers. *New technology, work and employment*, *15*(1), 34-49.

5. Bick, A., Blandin, A., & Mertens, K. (2021). *Work from home before and after the Covid-19 outbreak.* Retrieved November 17, 2022 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343038714_Work_from_Home_After _the_COVID-19_Outbreak

6. Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J., & Ying, Z. J. (2015). Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *130*(1), 165-218.

7. Bolisani, E., Scarso, E., Ipsen, C., Kirchner, K., & Hansen, J. P. (2020). Working from home during COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and issues. *Management & Marketing,* 15(s1), 458-476.

8. Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

9. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

10. Breznik, M. & Lužnik, B. (2021). *Slovenia: Working life in the COVID.19 pandemic 2020*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

11. Cardoso, A. R., Guimarães, P., & Varejão, J. (2011). Are older workers worthy of their pay? An empirical investigation of age-productivity and age-wage nexuses. *De Economist*, *159*(2), 95-111.

12. Carlson, D. L., Miller, A. J., Sassler, S., & Hanson, S. (2016). The gendered division of housework and couples' sexual relationships: A reexamination. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *78*(4), 975-995.

13. Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds? *Currents in pharmacy teaching and learning*, *10*(6), 807-815.

14. Cerqueira, E. D. V., Motte-Baumvol, B., Chevallier, L. B., & Bonin, O. (2020). Does working from home reduce CO2 emissions? An analysis of travel patterns as dictated by workplaces. *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, *83*, 102338.

15. Consultancy.eu (2020). *One-third of work in Europe could be remote post-pandemic*. Retrieved November 8 2022 from https://www.consultancy.eu/news/5436/one-third-of-work-in-europe-could-be-remote-post-pandemic.

16. Crosley, J., & Rautenbach, E. (2021). *What (Exactly) Is Thematic Analysis? Simple definition + Examples.* Retrieved January 5 2022 from https://gradcoach.com/what-is-thematic-analysis/.

17. Daniels, K., Lamond, D., & Standen, P. (2001). Teleworking: frameworks for organizational research. *Journal of management studies*, *38*(8), 1151-1185.

18. DeFilippis, E., Impink, S. M., Singell, M., Polzer, J. T., & Sadun, R. (2020). Collaborating During Coronavirus: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Nature of Work. *Harvard Business School Organizational Behavior Unit Working Paper*, (21-006), 21-006.

19. Dell Technologies (2021). *Realizing 2030: A divided vision of the future*. Retrieved on August 17 2022 from https://www.dell.com/ko-kr/perspectives/forecasting-the-future-of-work/.

20. Delventhal, M. J., Kwon, E., & Parkhomenko, A. (2022). JUE Insight: How do cities change when we work from home? *Journal of Urban Economics*, *127*, 103331.

21. Deng, Z., Morissette, R. & Messacar, D. (2020). *Running the economy remotely: Potential for working from home during and after COVID-19.* Retrieved March 21 from https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/201/301/weekly_acquisitions_list-ef/2020/20-22/publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2020/statcan/45-28/CS45-28-1-2020-24-eng.pdf.

22. Dey, M., Frazis, H., Loewenstein, M. A., & Sun, H. (2020). Ability to work from home. *Monthly Labor Review*, *143*(6), 1-19.

23. Digital.com (2021) *The real reason why people want to Work from Home: It's not all about productivity*. Retrieved March 2 2022 from https://digital.com/the-real-reasons-people-want-to-keep-working-from-home/.

24. Engidaw, A. E. (2022). Small businesses and their challenges during COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries: in the case of Ethiopia. *Journal of innovation and entrepreneurship*, *11*(1), 1-14.

25. European Commission (2021). *Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: where we were, where we head to.* Retireved March 4 from https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-06/jrc120945_policy_brief_-_covid_and_telework_final.pdf .

26. Fogarty, H., Scott, P., & Williams, S. (2011). The half-empty office: dilemmas in managing locational flexibility. *New technology, work and employment*, 26(3), 183–195.

27. Fragouli, E., & Ilia, I. (2019). "Working smart and not hard": the key to maximize Employee efficiency?. *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, *11*(2), 74-111.

28. Fuhr, J. P., & Pociask, S. (2011). Broadband and telecommuting: Helping the US environment and the economy. *Low Carbon Economy*, *2*(01), 41.

29. Galanti, T., Guidetti, G., Mazzei, E., Zappalà, S., & Toscano, F. (2021). Work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak: The impact on employees' remote work productivity, engagement, and stress. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, *63*(7), e426.

30. Gibbs, M., Mengel, F., & Siemroth, C. (2021). Work from home & productivity: Evidence from personnel & analytics data on IT professionals. The *University of Chicago, Becker Friedman Institute for Economics Working Paper*, (2021-56).

31. Goetzel, R. Z., Long, S. R., Ozminkowski, R. J., Hawkins, K., Wang, S., & Lynch, W. (2004). Health, absence, disability, and presenteeism cost estimates of certain physical and mental health conditions affecting US employers. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, *46*(4), 398-412.

32. Gorlick, A. (2020). *The productivity pitfalls of working from home in the age of COVID-19.* Retrieved March 5 from https://www.atdla.org/resources/Documents/Speaker%20Handouts/The%20productivity%20pitfalls%20of%20working%20from%20home%20in%20the%20age%20of%20COVID-19%20_%20Stanford%20News%20copy.pdf.

33. Gulland, A. (2016). *Zika virus is a global public health emergency, declares WHO*. Retrieved April 3 2022 from https://www.bmj.com/content/352/bmj.i657.long.

34. Heery, E. & Noon, M. (2017): *A dictionary of human resource management*. 3rd edition. *Oxford: Oxford University Press*

35. Huang, Z., Loo, B. P. Y., & Axhausen, K. W. (2022). Travel behaviour changes under Work-from-home (WFH) arrangements during COVID-19. *Travel Behaviour & Society*, *30*, 202-211.

36. Ipsen, C., van Veldhoven, M., Kirchner, K., & Hansen, J. P. (2021). Six key advantages and disadvantages of working from home in Europe during COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(4), 1826.

37. Kang, Y. S., & Kwon, S. D. (2016). A Study on the Influencing Factors of Smart-Work Performance. *Journal of Information Technology Applications and Management*, 23(1), 61-77.

38. Kim J, Candido C, Thomas L, de Dear R (2016). Desk ownership in the workplace: The effect of non-territorial working on employee workplace satisfaction, perceived productivity and health. *Build Environ. 103:203-14*

39. Kim, Y. Y., & Oh, S. (2015, January). What Makes Smart Work Successful? Overcoming the Constraints of Time Geography. In *Proceedings of the 2015 48th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp. 1038-1047).

40. Kraut, R., Egido, C., & Galegher, J. (1988, January). Patterns of contact and communication in scientific research collaboration. In *Proceedings of the 1988 ACM conference on Computer-supported cooperative work* (pp. 1-12).

41. Lamont, M., & Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology*, *37*(2), 153-171.

42. Lerner, D., Amick III, B. C., Lee, J. C., Rooney, T., Rogers, W. H., Chang, H., & Berndt, E. R. (2003). Relationship of employee-reported work limitations to work productivity. *Medical care*, 649-659.

43. Lopez-Leon S, Forero DA, Ruiz-Diaz P. (2020) Recommendations for working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (and beyond). *Work*. 2020 Jan 1;66(2):371-5.

44. Milasi, S., González-Vázquez, I., Fernández-Macías, E. (2021), "Telework before the COVID-19 pandemic: Trends and drivers of differences across the EU", *OECD Productivity Working Papers*, No. 21, Paris: OECD Publishing,

45. Mokhtarian, PL (1991) Defining Telecommuting. *Transportation Research Record*.

46. Moretti, A., Menna, F., Aulicino, M., Paoletta, M., Liguori, S., & Iolascon, G. (2020). Characterization of home working population during COVID-19 emergency: a cross-sectional analysis. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *17*(17), 6284.

47. Morikawa, M. (2020). Productivity of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from an employee survey. *Covid Economics*, *49*, 123-139.

48. Nagalakshmi, M., & Kumar, M. (2020). Key Tool of Sustainable Management during COVID-19: WFH and Technology. *PIMT Journal of Research*, *12*(4).

49. Nilles, J. (1975). Telecommunications and organizational decentralization. *IEEE Transactions on Communications*, *23*(10), 1142-1147.

50. Novianto, D., Hidayat, A. S., Hazrati, F. Y., Rahmavani, A. M., Fadhila, A. R., Jaya, A. M., & Koerniawan, M. D. (2021, November). Rethinking sustainability during WFH: A survey on living environment quality and energy use. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 881, No. 1, p. 012005). Bristol: IOP Publishing.

51. Peasley, M. C., Hochstein, B., Britton, B. P., Srivastava, R. V., & Stewart, G. T. (2020). Can't leave it at home? The effects of personal stress on burnout and salesperson performance. *Journal of Business Research*, *117*, 58-70.

52. Pripelji srečo v službo (2020). *Kako delo od doma zakonodaja določa v Sloveniji.* Retrieved August 2 2022 from https://www.pripeljisrecovsluzbo.si/delo-od-doma-zakonodaja/.

53. Redmond, P., & McGuinness, S. (2020). Who can work from home in Ireland. *ESRI Survey and statistical report series*, *87*. 1-17.

54. Rosa, L., Sanchez, D. L., & Mazzotti, M. (2021). Assessment of carbon dioxide removal potential via BECCS in a carbon-neutral Europe. *Energy & Environmental Science*, *14*(5), 3086-3097.

55. Rubin, O., Nikolaeva, A., Nello-Deakin, S., & te Brömmelstroet, M. (2020). *What can we learn from the COVID-19 pandemic about how people experience working from home and commuting*. Retrieved August 14 2022 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341233510_What_can_we_learn_from_the_COVID-19_pandemic_about_how_people_experience_working_from_home_and_commuting.

56. Rudnicka, A., Newbold, J. W., Cook, D., Cecchinato, M. E., Gould, S., & Cox, A. L. (2020). *Eworklife: Developing effective strategies for remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Retrieved September 4 2022 from https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/publication/eworklife-developing-effective-strategies-for-remote-working-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/.

57. Savić, D. (2020). COVID-19 and work from home: Digital transformation of the workforce. *Grey Journal (TGJ)*, *16*(2), 101-104.

58. Scoones, I. (2007). Sustainability. *Development in practice*, *17*(4-5), 589-596.

59. Sridhar, V., & Bhattacharya, S. (2020). Significant household factors that influence an IT employees' job effectiveness while on work from home. *International Journal of Innovation Science*, *13*(1), 105-117.

60. Suart, C. E., Graham, K. J., Suart, T. N., & Truant, R. (2020). Development of a knowledge translation platform for ataxia: Impact on readers and volunteer contributors. *PloS one*, *15*(9), e0238512.

61. Šukljan, M. (2021) *Delo od doma v času epidemije covid-19* (magistrsko delo*)*. Retrieved March 4 2022 from https://repozitorij.upr.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=17031&lang=slv.

62. Williamson, S., Colley, L., & Hanna-Osborne, S. (2020). Will working from home become the 'new normal'in the public sector?. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, *79*(4), 601-607.

63. Wilson, A. D., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Manning, L. P. (2016). Using paired depth interviews to collect qualitative data. *The Qualitative Report*, *21*(9), 1549.

64. Yu, Y., Lau, M., & Lau, J. T. (2022). Working from home and positive/negative experiences due to social distancing as interacting factors of depressive

symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Chinese general population. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, *57*(6), 1235-1246.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene language)

V svojem magistrskem delu sem predstavila vpliv pandemije COVID-19 na dojemanje in implementacijo dela od doma v širši javnosti. Moj cilj je bil v magitrski nalogi predstaviti različne faktorje, ki vplivajo na uspešnost dela od doma, prav tako pa sem preučila več aspektov dela od doma in kako le-te vplivajo na zaposlenega, ki je ali prostovoljno ali zaadi zunanjih vplivov primoran delati od doma, prav tako pa sem želela iz pogleda večih managerjev iz različnih slovenskih industrij ugotoviti, ali se bi po njihovem mnenju delo od doma moralo implementirati širše, ali bi ga bilo bolje čim bolj omejiti.

Čeprav je bilo delo od doma dovoljena praksa že pred nenadnim prihodom pandemije, so jo uporabljali le redki zaposleni, ki so večinoma prihajali iz iste stroke – informatika, programerji in podobni poklici, kjer je nivo indivudalnega dela med najvišjimi. Visoke so bile tudi razlike med delom od doma glede na države, saj je v nekaterih državah višji odstotek delavcev, ki delajo v storitvenih, kmetijskih ali proizvodnih panogah, pri katerih je delo od doma večinoma neizvedljivo. V svojem magistrskem delu sem med drugim preučevala tudi to, kakšne omejitve obstajajo pri implementaciji dela od doma in ali obstajajo poklici, pri katerih se niti ene delovne naloge ne da opraviti od doma in na drugi strani, ali obstajajo poklici, pri katerih prisotnost na delovnem mestu ni potrebna pri niti eni delovni nalogi.

V nadaljevanju dela sem se poglobila v različne dejavnike, na katere vpliva delo od doma, med drugim sem preučevala vpliv tega na trajnost in pa produktivnost. Vpliv na produktivnost je bil tudi eden od glavnih raziskovalnih ciljev mojega magistrskega dela, saj je ta med najpombnejšimi pri odločanju, ali je delo od doma lahko primerljiva alternativa delu iz pisarne.

Lastno raziskavo sem bazirala na pregledu literature, skozi katerega sem dobila boljši vpogled v komplekstnost dela od doma in pridobila kritično razmišljanje o konceptu, saj obstaja več raziskav z mnenji iz obeh polov – tistega, ki delo od doma priznava kot odlično in pozitivno novost in pa tistega, ki delo od doma vidi kvečjemu kot nujno zlo in nikakor ne enakovredno alternativo. Raziskovala sem različne aspekte dela od doma ter kako se njihov skupek projecira na posameznika, hkrati pa sem poskušala idenrificirati tudi karakteristike delavca, ki je bolj primeren za delo od doma, sepravi – ali spol, starost, nivo izobrazbe in podobne značilnosti vplivajo na verjetnost, da bo posameznik lažje dobil dovoljenje za delo od doma.

Sledil je empirični del raziskave, ki sem ga zasnovala v obliki kvalitativne raziskave: oblikovala sem vprašanja za intervjuje, znotraj katerih pa sem po potrebi postavljala še dodatna podvprašanja glede na posameznega intervjujanca. Intervju sem izvedla na štirih posameznikih, vsak od njih je manager v različno velikih podjetjih znotraj Slovenije. Pomembno mi je bilo, da so bili intervjujanci različne starosti ter da so se industrije, v katerih delujejo, razlikovale ena od druge. Z intervjuji sem poskušala identificirati, katere faktorje dojemajo kot morebitna tveganja ali prednosti dela od doma, kako so se njihova podjetja

soočila s pandemijo COVID-19 spomladi 2020, katera ureditev dela je po njihovem mnenju optimalna in ali se jim zdi delo iz pisarne ostanek prejšnjega časa, ki enostavno z današnjo tehnologijo ni več potreben. Govorili so tudi o trajnostnem vplivu dela od doma in smotrnosti implementacije tega za voljo lajšanja podnebnih sprememb.

Po končanih intervjujih sem rezultate analizirala s pomočjo tematske analize (angl. Thematic analysis), ki mi je omogočila razvrščanje rezultatov v več tematskih sklopov. Te teme sem potem obširneje analizirala in prišla do zaključkov. Med te zaključke spadajo: večinoma so bila podjetja precej nepripravljena na tako nenadno spremembo in svojim zaposlenim niso omogočila izobraževanj, ki bi jih verjetno bolje pripravila na prehod na delo od doma, ki je bilo mnogim še popolnoma tuje. Vseeno so se delavci večinoma počutili manj pod stresom, ko so delali od doma, za kar je bilo zaslužnih več dejavnikov. Čeprav so večinoma izpostavili več prednosti kot slabosti dela od doma, so vseeno izrazili dvom, da bi ta oblika dela lahko v kratkem nadomestila delo na prvotnem delovnem mestu, pri nekaterih poklicih pa to verjetno sploh ne bo mogoče.

V nadaljevanju dela sem podala predloge za nadaljne raziskave, izpostavila omejitve v moji raziskavi ter nalogo zaključila z mnenjem, da bo delo od doma v prihodnosti vedno bolj priznano in zaželeno tako pri delodajalcih kot pri zaposlenih, vendar pa bo vedno imelo svoje pomanjkljivosti napram delu v prvotnem delovnem okolju.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. What is your general opinion towards working from home? Are you in favour or against it?
2. Did your company offer work from home before the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, to what extent?
3. Did your company shift to work from home once the pandemic started?
4. If yes, did all departments shift to work from home?
5. Did the company offer any training to the employees who started working from home?
6. Did the company provide equipment (laptops etc.)?
7. Did you as a manager face any new challenges when your team started working from home?
8. What challenges were your subordinates met with?
9. What challenges did you face as a manager?
10. What do you perceive as the main benefits and drawbacks of work from home?
11. Do you find it more stressful to work from home?
12. What is your perceived effect on productivity when people work from home?
13. What work arrangement is implemented in your company now?
14. Do your subordinates prefer to work from home or from the office?
15. What is your preferred work arrangement as a manager - from home, from the office or as a hybrid?