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Abstract

Digital nomadism is a phenomenon growing in popularity, especially among the younger generation of knowledge workers. Digital nomads are digital workers who enjoy freedom and global mobility. Due to the nature of their work, they can live and work from anywhere in the world. This is made possible by technological advances and favourable global economic conditions. Digital nomads are prime examples of people and workers who take advantage of the technological advances and innovative digital possibilities. In the increasingly dynamic and global business world, the demand for other types of workers than traditional employees is rising. Digital nomads are a modern type of workforce that companies can leverage to their advantage.

This thesis is conducted by literature review about the current academic knowledge about digital nomadism coupled with empirical research, in which five Finnish digital nomads were interviewed. The aim of this research is to construct a more thorough understanding of the digital nomadism phenomenon. This thesis aims to answer the questions of why people are increasingly working as digital nomads, what motivates them, how do they operate and run their businesses, and what kind of challenges and risks are there in digital nomadism.

As a result, it is found in this thesis that digital nomads are motivated by the desire for freedom and new experiences, increased flexibility regarding the time and place of work, utilizing the value of their work by advancing their own businesses, and an independent lifestyle as an alternative to traditional employment. Digital nomads are passionate about what they do, they are able to manage themselves and sell their services to potential clients. They are digitally skilled people, and their business relies heavily on digital solutions. For organizations, hiring a digital nomad can often be a more cost-efficient way than hiring a permanent employee, especially for project-like assignments. As a dynamic type of lifestyle, there are naturally challenges as well in digital nomadism. The work is highly uncertain and insecure, digital nomads are solely responsible for running their businesses and delivering their services, they need to tolerate constant risk and a lonely working environment and maintain a favourable work-life balance.

Key words	Digital nomad, Digital work, Digitalization, Remote work
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Tiivistelmä

Digital nomads, vapaasti suomennettuna diginomadit, ovat paikkariippumattomasti töitä tekeviä ja digitaalisia ratkaisuja käyttäviä henkilöitä. Tämä tutkielma on rajattu yrittäjinä toimiviin diginomadeihin. Diginomadina työskentely on ilmiö, joka on kasvattanut suosiotaan etenkin nuoremman sukupolven asiantuntijatyötä tekevien ihmisten keskuudessa. Diginomadit nauttivat työssään vapaudesta ja globaalista liikkuvuudesta. Digitaalisen työn luonteen vuoksi, he voivat elää ja työskennellä missä tahansa omista preferensseistään riippuen. Tämä on mahdollista teknologisen kehityksen ja suotuisan globaalien markkinatilanteen myötä. Diginomadit ovat erinomainen esimerkki työtä tekevästä ihmisistä, jotka käyttävät edukseen teknologista kehitystä ja digitaalisten innovaatioiden suomia mahdollisuuksia. Nopeasti muuttuvassa, dynaamisessa ja globaalissa liike-elämässä kysyntä muunlaisellekin työvoimalle, kuin perinteiselle vakituiselle palkkatyölle, on kasvavaa. Diginomadit ovat vaihtoehtoinen työvoima, jota yritykset voivat käyttää edukseen.

Tämä tutkielma koostuu kirjallisuuskatsauksesta sekä empiirisestä tutkimuksesta, johon on haastateltu viittä suomalaista diginomadia. Tutkielman tavoite on luoda syvempi ymmärrys diginomadeista. Erityiset kiinnostuksen kohteet tutkielmassa ovat syyt, miksi ihmiset enenevässä määrin työskentelevät diginomadeina, mikä heitä motivoi, kuinka he toimivat ja edistävät liiketoimintaansa ja millaisia haasteita diginomadien elämässä on.

Tutkielman tuloksena voidaan todeta, että diginomadeja motivoi erityisesti vapauden ja uusien kokemusten halu, lisääntynyt joustavuus koskien työn aikaa ja paikkaa, mahdollisuudet hyödyntää oman työnsä arvoa edistämällä omaa liiketoimintaa ja itsenäinen elämäntyyli vaihtoehtona perinteiselle palkkatyölle. Diginomadit ovat intohimoisia työtään kohtaan, kykenevät hallitsemaan omaa työtään ja myymään palveluitaan potentiaalisille asiakkaille. He ovat digitaalisesti lahjakkaita ja heidän toimintansa nojaa vahvasti digitaalisiin ratkaisuihin. Yrityksille diginomadilta työn tilaaminen voi olla kustannustehokkaampi ratkaisu kuin vakituisen työntekijän palkkaaminen erityisesti projektiluontoisiin tehtäviin. Diginomadit kohtaavat työelämässään myös haasteita. Heidän työtilanteensa on epävarma ja turvaton, he ovat yksin vastuussa liiketoiminnastaan ja tarvittavien töiden tekemisestä, heidän tulee kyetä sietämään riskejä ja yksinäisyyttä sekä ylläpitämään suotuisaa työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoa.

Avainsanat	Diginomadi, Digitaalinen työ, Digitalisaatio, Etätyö
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Economics

DIGITAL NOMADS

the rising workforce of the digital era

Master's Thesis
in Information Systems Science

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The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The business world is globalized and rapidly changing, so organizations have pressure to become more dynamic and flexible to survive. One possibility to respond to this challenge is to provide employees with a more dynamic environment, which allows work to be done mostly regardless of time and space. Employees can often effectively perform their work activities remotely using digital solutions from a suitable place that best fits their individual needs and interests outside of the traditional working place. (Richter & Richter, 2019.) Especially knowledge workers entering the job market often prefer the option to flexibly work remotely or nomadically (Ens, Stein, & Jensen, 2018). Rapidly advancing technologies and digital solutions, such as cloud services, mobile internet, artificial intelligence, and other online applications and platforms make workplace flexibility and especially remote working arrangements possible (Prester, Cecez-Kecmanovic, & Schlagwein, 2019).

The digital competencies that are transforming work practices and workplaces will continue to develop further, which gives organizations a wealth of possibilities to increase efficiency. Furthermore, many work activities that an organization needs to get done, do not necessarily require a permanent employee or an employee stationed at the office. Many activities can be done digitally and remotely in a project-based manner, for example, by a digital nomad. (Reichenberger, 2018.) Most of the digital nomads are self-employed, but not all self-employed are digital nomads. There are also digital nomads who work for a particular organization remotely over the internet from a location far from the organization's headquarters. (Thompson, 2018.)

There is a notable shift happening in the thinking of how the term 'work' is to be defined. Increasingly work is seen more as a practice, meaning that it matters more what is done, not how it is done. This idea is replacing the traditional notion of work to be restricted to be something that happens from nine-to-five at a particular place. There are not as much attention and importance given to the exact time and place of where the work takes place anymore. (Richter & Richter, 2019; Ens et al., 2018.) Furthermore, many academic studies report that work practices are increasingly being disrupted by continuous advances in digital technologies (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Digital work practices, virtual collaboration, and other new ways of work impact the definition of

‘work’, how people view their work-life balance in a sociocultural context, and the overall work practices in society in ways we cannot yet fully understand in the long term. (Richter & Richter, 2019.)

The transforming labour market combined with socioeconomic changes, constant new innovations in wireless communication technologies, and more affordable global transportation possibilities have initiated new types of employment in the modern digital economy (Orel, 2019). Digital nomadism, which means a mobile lifestyle of working location-independently by using technological solutions, is emerging as a new technological advance that is changing how people work and how societies and economies organize. Those practising digital nomadism are known as digital nomads. (Lee et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019; Thompson, 2019; Reichenberger, 2018.) Digital nomadism is a growing phenomenon as a form of mobile digital work (Prester et al., 2019). It is predicted that the number of digital nomads and other kinds of mobile workers will continue growing. For this growth in population to happen, information and communication technologies (ICT) are playing an important part. (Nelson, Jarrahi, & Thomson, 2017.)

There is an increasing interest in academic research regarding this subject overall implying that there is a demand for understanding digital nomads better (Aroles, Granter, & de Vaujany, 2020; Wang et al., 2018). Furthermore, the growing prominence of digital nomads is reflected as well in an increasing amount of non-academic news, articles, and other publications regarding digital nomadism (Hall et al., 2019). This thesis examines what digital nomadism is and what kind of different developments have led to the rise of it in the society. Furthermore, this thesis aims to explain the implications of digital nomadism for the modern economy, changing work practices, and the individuals who practice digital nomadism. The point of this study is not to advertise or glorify digital nomadism, nor does it suggest that anyone should become a digital nomad. This is an objective and critical study of the digital nomadism phenomenon with the aim of understanding it better.

From the perspective of individuals, digital nomadism provides an alternative work-life definition differing greatly from the traditional way of how work is seen. Digital nomads work location-independently and are highly motivated by the desire to escape the traditional nine-to-five office work life. (Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018.) This rising movement of digital nomadism is made possible, for example, by improved access to different information infrastructures, easier global mobility, technological innovations,

better connectivity, more flexible ways to arrange work, and the desire for adventure especially among the knowledge workers of younger generation (Jarrahi et al., 2019). Digital nomads operate often in the gig economy, which means conducting one-time jobs in a project-based manner and possibly to multiple different clients simultaneously. This can be a win-win for the client organization and the worker alike, as it provides flexibility for both as well as more freedom for the individual, and less responsibilities for the organization. (Thompson, 2019.)

Despite technology playing a major role in digital nomadism, digital nomads are not only technically skilled information and communication technology specialists. They can also be knowledge workers from any area of expertise, such as engineers, artists, researchers, teachers, and media professionals. The majority of digital nomads, however, appear to operate as developers, programmers, online marketers, graphic designers, or various kinds of content creators. Typically, those who are developers or programmers have their careers in software engineering or web development. Operating in the other end of the career spectrum, there are also digital nomads working as bloggers, translators, and consultants. All in all, there is a variety of different careers that a digital nomad might have. (Thompson, 2019; Nash et al., 2018.)

Kingma (2019) highlights some of the most noteworthy changes in work logics. For example, workplace has changed from office-based to activity-based. This means that the workplace is chosen depending on the activity that is to be done. Used time is not as defining factor of work performance as it has traditionally been, since the reward system is shifting from time-based to output-based. These changes in work logics are more prevalent in the fields of creative knowledge work. Kingma (2019) continues that time regarding working hours is also changing from fixed nine-to-five to flexible working time that varies depending on the individual preferences and the nature of the activity. Hence, also supervision has naturally shifted from strict controlling to trusting.

It is important to note that there are also negative aspects and certain challenges in digital nomadism to be highlighted in this thesis. There are a lot of uncertainties regarding the work as a digital nomad, and these aspects become even more prevalent during times of crisis and turmoil. As Prester et al. (2019) note, in addition to opportunities there are risks regarding digital nomadism, such as a sudden loss of income, uncertainty, and difficulties in managing yourself.

1.2 Research gap and research questions

There are studies about the lifestyle and values of digital nomads (see, e.g., Thompson, 2019; Thompson, 2018; De Carvalho, Ciolfi, & Gray, 2017; Dobrinskaya, 2016; Kuzheleva-Sagan & Nosova, 2014), but there is a notable research gap in the more economic side of the topic. Only a few researchers have addressed the organizational and governmental points of view. Furthermore, there is hardly any academic literature about how digital nomads work with corporations. The previous academic literature seems to focus more on the personal lifestyles of digital nomads and their motivation to travel. This study, however, focuses more on what their main motivations and characteristics are, how do digital nomads work and digitally operate, how does digital nomadism relate to businesses and economy, and what are the possible implications of digital nomadism for the future of work.

According to Aroles et al. (2020), digital nomadism has not been relatively well researched in the organizational studies and sociology of work literature. Furthermore, Nash et al. (2018) argue that despite being a popular topic in the media and the surge in numbers of people becoming digital nomads, there is still not much academic research that examines, for example, the work arrangements of digital nomads, their ties with organizations, and the role of technology for them. Prester et al. (2019) and Schlagwein (2018b) state that the trend of digital nomadism has been relatively neglected overall by academic researchers so far. Hall et al. (2019) find that there are still surprisingly few academic research papers about digital nomads, despite their growth in numbers and their significant impact in international business and ways of work.

According to Nash et al. (2018), digital nomadism has been generating considerable interest in recent years as a trendy lifestyle that challenges old-fashioned work contexts. Nash et al. (2018) find digital nomadism as a particularly interesting research subject, because it emphasizes the dynamics between people, information, and ICT. According to Schlagwein (2018b), to form a comprehensive theoretical understanding of digital nomadism, the technological and economic aspects need to be jointly examined with the sociological and anthropological aspects as well. Digital nomadism is a regularly presented topic in the media, while being only an emerging academic topic still gaining more interest. Although, in the media it is often depicted in a rather oversimplistic way. There it is often portrayed as an alternative and attractive way of living consisting of personal fulfilment, freedom, and glamour as an opposite to the monotone office work

life. (Aroles et al., 2020.) However, the life of a digital nomad may not be as glamorous and simple as the media represents (Hall et al., 2019). In this study, the topic of digital nomadism is studied deeper with the aim of understanding it better and more thoroughly than what the media represents or what the common conceptions are.

Digital nomadism can be rationalized to be a relevant research topic for Information Systems Science since information systems and technological advances are at the very core of digital nomadism. It is the technological solutions, various digital systems and digital infrastructure that make it possible for a knowledge worker to perform work activities remotely, flexibly, and efficiently as a digital nomad. The popularity of digital nomadism has grown alongside digitalization. The topic is inherently future-oriented, as it examines a way of digital work that is estimated to keep on growing in significance in the near future as well. In addition, digital nomadism is relevant from the broader viewpoint of global economics, as it is becoming an increasingly viable option for knowledge workers to make a living outside of traditional organizational boundaries. Moreover, digital nomadism is an important topic from the sociological viewpoint as well, since it signals the shift happening in employment practices which impacts especially millennials and the following generations (Thompson, 2019). According to Aroles et al. (2020), digital nomadism is an economic activity that is becoming more institutionalized and professionalized. They continue that digital nomadism is not an alternative to capitalist logics, but rather a modern extension to them. Thus, it is also studied in this thesis how digital nomads participate in and influence the market economy.

Overall, the topic of remote working and performing work activities digitally from anywhere in the world is extremely timely due to the state of the world currently. In the light of recent events in the world, particularly regarding the Covid-19¹ pandemic, remote work and digital work solutions have become more relevant than ever. More and more people are becoming familiar with working remotely and using digital tools to perform work activities while the popularity of digital nomadism keeps rising. It seems that digital nomads are playing an increasingly important role in the future of work. Therefore, the aim of this research is to construct a more thorough understanding of the digital nomadism phenomenon by calling into question:

¹ Covid-19 is a worldwide pandemic, which resulted in a lockdown and other restrictions in many countries during 2020.

Why are people increasingly working as digital nomads?

To answer the main research question properly, it is divided into smaller research questions:

- What motivates digital nomads?
- How do digital nomads operate?
- How do digital nomads run their businesses?
- What are the challenges and risks of digital nomadism?

The definitions of digital nomads vary. In some definitions employees who work remotely for their employer organization are also digital nomads. Due to the pandemic and lockdowns, there are much more people working remotely now than before, even though it may not be voluntarily. These workers are not to be studied in this thesis. Digital nomads in this thesis include digital entrepreneurs and freelancers who operate online location-independently. It is important that they regard themselves as digital nomads and see themselves as a part of the digital nomad community. In the literature review the focus is to examine the current knowledge of digital nomads, their motivations as individuals, and what role does technology play in their lives. Later in the literature review the focus shifts to the implications of digital nomadism to the larger market economy and what kind of challenges there have been noted about digital nomadism regarding themselves as individuals and the organizations they do business with.

1.3 Literature Review

Literature review is an essential part of any viable academic research in all fields. Literature review can be an integral part of wider research or even constitute a research publication fully on its own (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). In this study, the literature review is an important and integral part of the research as a whole and is critical in studying the phenomenon at hand thoroughly. This literature review presents the current understanding of digital nomadism in the academic literature.

This study including the literature review about digital nomads is done by using a hermeneutic approach, opposed to a structural one. Structural literature review aims to a perfectly unbiased, complete, and reproducible review. It could be a reasonable choice in medical literature research papers and in similar fields. (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic 2010.) In this thesis, however, a hermeneutic approach was chosen with the implication

that it would be unpractical to aim for a perfectly structured and unbiased result as this research deals with a complex social phenomenon. In this case it is more fitting to use a hermeneutic approach towards the research area, as it is evident that no perfect understanding of this particular topic will be achieved, but by continually reinterpreting and combining multiple different viewpoints of different publications it is possible to gain a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the complex topic. As the topic is of social and economic nature, as well as a rather new and developing one, it is especially suitable to view the literature review process as an open-ended, continuing, and somewhat open to interpretation, not as an ultimate truth.

For the literature review, the relevant publications were searched using professional literature research databases, such as Volter², Scopus³, and ScienceDirect⁴. Most importantly, the main articles to be used in the literature review were searched using the key term “digital nomad” with the aim of finding research papers from several different perspectives regarding digital nomadism. Then, after finding relevant and useful publications about the key topic, their citations were tracked to find more articles regarding the concept. In the process of finding and selecting relevant publications, the aim was to prefer the more recent publications and give them more weighting in the literature review. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the exact term “digital nomad” has only established itself better during the recent decade (Schlagwein, 2018a). For example, the term ‘nomad’ has been used in organizational studies with totally eliding the term ‘digital’ from in front of it, while still describing a very similar work-life situation than that of digital nomads (see, e.g., De Carvalho, Ciolfi, & Gray, 2011; Ciolfi, Bartolucci, & Murphy, 2005).

There exists academic literature regarding the concept of digital nomadism with terms close to it, such as ‘teleworking’ (see, e.g., Golden, 2009), while not meaning the same. Terms such as ‘remote work’, ‘mobile work’, ‘digital entrepreneurship’, ‘freelancing’, and ‘digital work’ have been used in the context of digital nomadism and are closely linked to it. Often, but not always, terms ‘teleworker’, ‘remote worker’, and ‘mobile worker’ refer to travelling employees. (Aroles et al., 2020.) This research focuses on digital nomads operating digitally as entrepreneurs, not employees. Furthermore, this

² Volter is a database that contains all the material that University of Turku has access to.

³ Scopus is the largest database of peer-reviewed literature, such as scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings.

⁴ ScienceDirect is a database of peer-reviewed scientific research.

research is about digital nomads, who work as digital nomads voluntarily, not out of necessity. The usage of different terms in the academic literature has been critically evaluated case by case to find what exactly is meant with the terms and their relation to digital nomadism as a form of entrepreneurship.

After collecting and inspecting material for the literature review, the scope of this research was set to focus especially on digital nomads as individuals and as participants in the market economy. Technology plays an essential role in the life of a digital nomad, so technological advances and the ways digital nomads digitally operate are an integral part of the whole research as well. The literature review is divided into three sections. In the first section, digital nomads are defined, described, and examined as individuals and digital nomadism as a phenomenon is explained by analysing the recent advances in technology as well. In the second section, the implications of digital nomadism to the broader market economy are researched, including organizational and governmental viewpoints. The third section describes the challenges and risks that have been identified in digital nomadism regarding their personal lifestyle and relations with client organizations.

After the literature review, the study focuses on empirical research about digital nomads. The empirical research is conducted by interviewing digital nomads in order to find out what they have to say about digital nomadism in their own words. The interviews are based on the themes and topics discussed in the literature review. The goal of the empirical research is to discover similarities and differences between what has been discussed in the existing literature and what do the digital nomads of today tell themselves. The main areas of focus of the empirical research are the motivations, values, and characteristics of digital nomadism, working and running a business as a digital nomad, and the challenges and risks of digital nomadism. The interviews provide additional and timely insight on top of the topics discussed in the literature review.

2 DIGITAL NOMADS

2.1 Definition of digital nomads

The definition of a ‘digital nomad’ varies among researchers and there seems to be no exact general definition in the literature (Hemsley et al., 2020). Jarrahi et al. (2019) note that despite the variation of definitions, most of them agree that a digital nomad engages in digital work and relies mainly on digital tools and technologies to perform work activities. Also, a digital nomad does not operate in a traditional stationary office work environment but appears to combine work with travelling (Hemsley et al., 2020; Mancinelli, 2020). Richter and Richter (2019) add that digital nomads redefine working life by aiming for employment options that allow mobile location-independent work and flexibility in work hours. Aroles et al. (2020) define digital nomads as individuals, “whose work does not tie them to any specific place and who therefore travel while working”. Moravec (2013) describes nomadic workers as innovative people with creativity, imagination, and the ability to work wherever, whenever, and with almost anybody. Digital nomads use information systems and information technology to work digitally, and their primary employment and work take place on the internet (Schlagwein, 2018b; Thompson, 2018).

According to several researchers (see, e.g., Aroles et al., 2020; Orel, 2019; Thompson, 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Schlagwein, 2018a), digital nomadism reached the so-called conceptual maturity in 1997. That is when Makimoto and Manners accurately predicted in their book called “*Digital Nomad*” that “with the ability to tap into every worldwide public information source from anywhere on the globe, and the ability to talk to anyone via a video link, humans are going to be given the opportunity, if they want it, of being global nomads”. The authors visioned in the book how technology has the potential to revolutionize our lives, especially by reimagining the work-life balance. No more tedious commuting day after day since people could disperse around the world and work where and when they want using their computers. Since then, digital nomads have evolved from more of a theoretical fictional figure into an actual and considerable character of today’s working life and market economy.

In their research, Lyytinen and Yoo (2002) explained the upcoming rise of digital nomadism as a result of digitalization. The term the authors used was ‘nomadic information environment’, which means “a heterogeneous assemblage of interconnected

technological and organizational elements, which enables the physical and social mobility of computing and communication services between organizational actors both within and across organizational borders”. Lyytinen and Yoo (2002) researched the fundamental drivers towards nomadic information environments. They defined these drivers as mobility, digital convergence, mass scale, and infrastructures and services. Regarding mobility, the authors mean that services will come to the users from wherever and to wherever they are needed, no matter the location. Digital convergence means that digitalization and open standards make it possible to process all forms of data across various carriers using different devices, hence enabling easier information sharing and seamless interoperability when providing digital services. Mass scale refers to the accelerating increase of internet users, mobile devices, and data usage as well as digital service volume, types, and demand at a global level. Infrastructures and services mean the underlying global information infrastructures, services, protocols, and standards that make further technological advances possible. Although the term ‘digital nomadism’ established more firmly later, the descriptions regarding the subject by Lyytinen and Yoo (2002) are still valid, and their research has been a basis for many future papers about digital nomadism.

When looking through history, there can be found parallels to the digital nomads of today. This is not the first time in history when we see a rapid mobilization of workers enabled by technology. For example, in Medieval Europe there were young tradespeople, the equivalent of technology workers of that era, travelling from town to town even for multiple years performing tasks, learning new crafts, and enhancing their tools and skills while being free of expected responsibilities and attachments such as marriage. These people were established as part of the merchant class and often began as apprentices for experienced craftspeople. There can be seen noticeable resemblances between these wandering merchants and today’s digital nomads, who are mostly young and have a profession and skills that enable or even encourage travelling. They also value their freedom greatly and lack strict attachments to any particular area. (Wang et al., 2018.)

In many academic articles addressing nomadism in a professional context the term ‘nomadic worker’ means roughly the same as ‘remote worker’ or ‘teleworker’ (Aroles et al., 2020). Nash et al. (2018) highlight that even though the explanations and portrayals of digital nomads often refer to remote workers and freelancers, digital nomadism is not a synonym but differs from them to a degree. For example, nomadic workers tend to travel a lot *for* their work, unlike digital nomads who travel *while* they work. Digital nomads

choose where to work from; the work itself does not typically determine their location. A specifically key aspect of digital nomadism is the usage of a vast digital ecosystem, including digital tools, infrastructures, and new technological innovations. Prester et al. (2019) add that the aspect that clearly set digital nomads apart from the other remote workers and teleworkers is that they are generally completely independent of traditional organizations. Schlagwein (2018b) adds that digital nomads differ from teleworkers, especially in terms of their motivations and justifications. According to Mancinelli (2020), what differentiates digital nomads from other remote workers is that they aim to experience various living arrangements and to gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

The development and implications of digital nomadism can be examined on an individual and organizational level, both facilitated by technological advances, as illustrated in Figure 1.

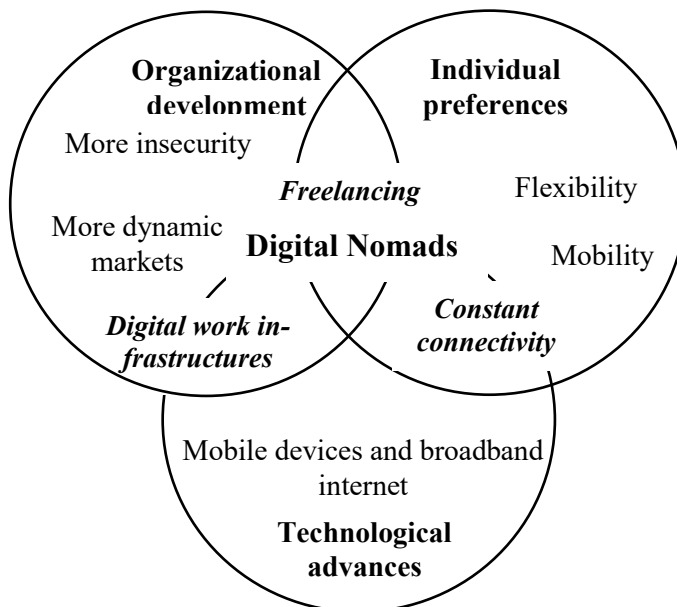


Figure 1 Digital nomadism as the interface of individual preferences, organizational development and technological advances (Richter & Richter, 2019).

As Figure 1 visualizes, digital nomads can be considered to act in the intersection of organizational development, individual preferences, and technological advances (Richter & Richter, 2019). On an individual level, digital nomads prefer and strive for a flexible and mobile lifestyle. Digital nomads are portrayed as goal-oriented professionals with an innate ability to effectively manage and reconfigure their work themselves. (Reichenberger, 2018; Richter et al., 2018.) From an organizational point of view, digital work and digital nomads can play an increasingly important role in a more uncertain and

dynamic environment. To embrace this potential, it is suggested that an open and collaborative organizational leadership is more suitable than management based on command and control. For digital nomads particularly, leading their work by focusing on the outcomes, not on the methods, is generally preferred. The livelihood of digital nomads is based on technological advances, including various digital tools and platforms, internet connection, mobile devices, and digital work infrastructures. (Richter & Richter, 2019.) However, being autonomous and completely relying on technology may lead to professional life and personal life being merged when constantly connected, which could lead to increased stress, work-life conflict and even burnout (Ayyagari, Grover, & Purvis, 2011). This phenomenon is called an “autonomy-paradox”, which could be very prevalent in the life of a digital nomad (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013).

2.2 Digital work

The work itself is changing towards a more digital nature (Dittes et al., 2019). In the recent decades, the role of digitalization in the workplace has also evolved. A traditional workplace and its operations were at first enhanced by digital technologies, whereas the work environment today is predominantly digital. (Richter et al., 2018.) For many, digital work has become the new normal (Ens et al., 2018), especially since Covid-19 (Richter, 2020). This will be discussed in more detail in the 3rd section. To be a digital nomad, one must be able to perform digital work as an economic activity (Wang et al., 2018). To understand digital nomadism as a form of digital work, the term ‘digital work’ needs to be defined first. Orlikowski and Scott (2016) rationalize that digital work refers to performing work activities with digitally reconfigured work practices. Ens et al. (2018) define it simply that the centrality of digital elements is what differentiates digital work from other work types. Wang et al. (2018) explain that in digital work digital tools are used to produce digital goods. In comparison to traditional work and workplace, in digital work the focus is on how and what is done, rather than where and when the work is done. Digital work happens anywhere and anytime without being inherently restricted to a specific time and place. (Dittes et al., 2019.) The usage of digital resources provides digital workers more autonomy and flexibility (Ens et al., 2018; Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016).

It is proposed that digital work is in essence knowledge work, which suggests that digital nomadism is also a form of knowledge work (Hemsley et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018). Knowledge workers are people who use their personal knowledge to create value

rather than, for example, produce physical products to sell (Moravec, 2013). In knowledge work, knowledge is created or transferred, and it is of intellectual or creative nature (Nelson et al., 2017). Most of the traditional office work and knowledge work is nowadays digital work. For example, engineers and consultants of today rely mainly on digital technologies (Ens et al., 2018). Digital nomads, being knowledge workers, have many opportunities in the current economy, which is more and more based on knowledge work and digitalization (Moravec, 2013).

According to Nash et al. (2018), digital work is in the very essence of digital nomadism since it enables digital nomads to produce and make a living using entirely digital solutions also while being on the move. There are currently many traditional work practices being reconfigured to digital work, which is made possible by the rapid technological advances over the last decade (Prester et al., 2019). According to Wang et al. (2018), work is defined by three factors of production: labour, subject matter, and instruments. Labour means the human effort, subject matter means the materials applied to the work, and instruments mean the assets that are reusable and of assistance during the work. This is based on the ‘factors of production’ introduced by Smith (1776). The three factors of production were initially introduced to describe work as we traditionally know it, but the same factors can be used to explain digital work as well. Regarding digital work, the factors are altered by digitalization. As in the case of digital nomads, labour is performed using digital systems and applications. (Nash et al., 2018.) Subject matter is digital in the form of data, documents, video, and audio. Lastly, instruments of digital work are the hardware and software that provide the ability and assistance in performing the actual work. (Wang et al., 2018.) Orlikowski and Scott (2016) argue that nowadays it is rare if none of the three factors are altered by digitalization. According to Nash et al. (2018), the main difference between traditional and digital work is that digital work liberates workers from fixed workplaces.

2.3 The main characteristics of digital nomads

The recent years have seen a rise of digital workers, who enjoy location-independent work and lifestyle. Digital nomads are strongly unified by their desire for travel and adventure, and they move from one workspace to another quite regularly. They are often not bound to a particular place for a long period of time as they are motivated to live and work nomadically from anywhere in the world. Digital nomads are able to travel lightly and relocate themselves frequently because their primary means of production are digital.

They do not have to worry about physical machinery or supplies either as they are not manufacturing physical products. Overall, they often choose to carry minimal gear while travelling and still be able to complete work tasks. Turning digital inputs into digital outputs can be done from anywhere if there are electric power and internet connection. (Jarrahi et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017.) Prester et al. (2019) add that location itself is a relatively unimportant factor in relation to what types of work digital nomads generally do.

Jarrahi et al. (2019) outline that digital nomads represent a remote workers community, who mixes work and travel. They further describe digital nomads to have extreme mobility and organizational independence. A lifestyle of perpetual international travel characterizes digital nomadism (Mancinelli, 2020; Schlagwein, 2018a). According to Prester et al. (2019), they may entirely abandon the idea of fixed working space. As an example, one day a digital nomad could work from a coffee shop in Bali and in the next month from co-working space in Berlin. To maintain and fund this lifestyle of constant travel, they digitally work by creating digital goods using digital means. (Nash et al., 2018.) Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) highlight that the age and profession of digital nomads vary, as well as the length of their travels and the length of time living as a digital nomad itself.

The capitalist economy has shifted its focus from production to more on consumption during the last decades (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In the lifestyle of a digital nomad, it is typical that production and consumption are entwined. In some cases, consuming is directly enabling the production, especially when a digital nomad works in some form of journalism. Some common examples of this are reviewing restaurants, travel blogging, and vlogging (videoblogging). (Nash et al., 2018.) These “prosumers” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) integrate consumption activities into the production of content. For example, they may use consumer electronics as instruments of production, such as mobile phones or platforms like Facebook for both business and personal activities. They can also adapt their leisure as the subject matter of their work, for example, by vlogging online about travelling. (Wang et al., 2018; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010.)

In the traditional work environment, the typical norm is often that an employee agrees to be managed and instructed directly what to do in exchange for a fixed monthly salary from the employer as agreed beforehand. What can be seen as a distinctive factor between the traditional employed workforce and digital nomads is not only their willingness but also their ability and skills to be self-managed. (Richter & Richter, 2019.) Digital nomads

enjoy the choice of workplace and flexibility in working times. They are not generally governed by managerial control mechanisms at least in the same way as traditional office employees. Digital nomads focus more on the actual output of work and on productivity. They have enough autonomy to decide when and for how long they work and, for example, choose to work a few long days in order to take a few days off later and go explore their surrounding environment. (Prester et al., 2019.) To be able to take advantage of the opportunities there are, digital nomads aim to perform with high productivity, and to operate effectively they leverage digital tools and applications (Nash et al., 2018).

Nomadism allows digital nomads to have various experiences that differ greatly from a regular routine and gain freedom from the corporate environment. On the other hand, living nomadically requires them to organize their work and workspaces themselves, as there is no possibility to rely on stable and easier office environments. In principle, digital nomads choose to have the freedom and responsibility of themselves rather than be in a stable bureaucratic environment provided and managed by another entity. (Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018.) Mancinelli (2020) states that the life of a digital nomad is dominated by uncertainty, risk, and individualism.

De Carvalho et al. (2017, 2) list that digital nomads generally enjoy and look for “space, time, privacy, silence and other people” in order to perform their work. Many digital nomads feel that they need a comfortable workspace to get their work done. According to Prester et al. (2019), digital nomads are typically creative and innovative problem solvers, and to perform well on their work they sometimes need so-called creative stimulus, such as inspirational locations or perspectives of other cultures. They do not only frequently move from city or country to another but also constantly switch workplaces within cities.

The possibility to work and earn a living in this individually preferred way is facilitated by the improved global access to information and online infrastructures, which make more flexible work arrangements possible among knowledge workers. These advances require expertise and knowledge from the user. Digital nomads are known to typically be skilful and familiar with digital tools and to have a significant level of knowledge for information technology. They are confident in choosing, learning, or even developing the needed digital tools to perform work and solve problems. (Richter & Richter, 2019; Nash et al., 2018.) Technological advances that make digital nomadism possible and increasingly available are examined more deeply later in this section.

2.3.1 Preferences and values

The rise of freelancing work and not living in the same locations for long times are motivated by the desire to live in a way that challenges the traditional work-life balance. It is a dream of many not to be strictly tied to a certain work location for certain periods of time that are given by a higher authority, which means, for example, going to the same office place every weekday from nine-to-five to get paid. Digital nomads are motivated by the desire to escape this typical way of work and life. There is the eagerness to seek adventure, especially among the younger knowledge workers, who want and can work flexibly anytime and anywhere out of the traditional boundaries in a way they individually prefer. (Mancinelli, 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019; Nash et al., 2018.)

Digital nomads rarely follow traditional fixed working hours, but rather enjoy the increased flexibility by organizing their work activities according to their personal preferences and professional needs. Digital nomads often blur and balance their professional and personal lives as they best see fit. No matter the profession, nomadic lifestyle is what digital nomads commonly share. (Jarrahi et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018.) It is not yet fully understood how committed digital nomads usually are to a nomadic lifestyle. Some may be committed to that kind of lifestyle for the rest of their lives, while other digital nomads presumably prefer a shorter term of digital nomadism lifestyle before settling down and accepting more traditional way of life. (Wang et al., 2018; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017.)

In the case of digital nomads, mobility does not only mean changing locations, but also mobility in starting and dropping tasks, switching between online and offline spaces, and having an ad-hoc mindset regarding activities (Ens et al., 2018). Mobility also means mingling smoothly between professional and personal roles (Nelson et al., 2017). According to the research by Reichenberger (2018), digital nomads highly value and seek a balanced and holistic lifestyle, in which both professional work and personal leisure time contribute to their feeling of identity and self-worth in an equal way. The research found that the happiest were those who were intrinsically motivated and fulfilled by both their professional and personal lives, with the freedom to greatly influence the way they live and work.

Digital nomads often share a similar set of values (Kong et al., 2020). Most clearly, they value flexibility and autonomy. They enjoy personal freedom while pursuing their professional goals. (Lee et al., 2019; Reichenberger, 2018.) They also tend to value

diversity and be accepting toward differences, since their mobile lifestyle allows them to experience varying environments, people, and cultures. A digital nomad should ideally demonstrate certain work values, such as trustworthiness and transparency. This is because the client cannot physically oversee the work activities. Honest and clear communication is key to build trust. To further establish trust, one can explain the digital tools and resources that are to be used and provide proof from case studies of their usability and effectiveness. Accountability and keeping promises are also important especially regarding future references. Digital nomads need to have a strong sense of responsibility over themselves and their actions to succeed. (Kong et al., 2020.) Some values of a digital nomad are represented in Figure 2 as well, which illustrates the identity of a digital nomad.

2.3.2 Identity emergence of digital nomads

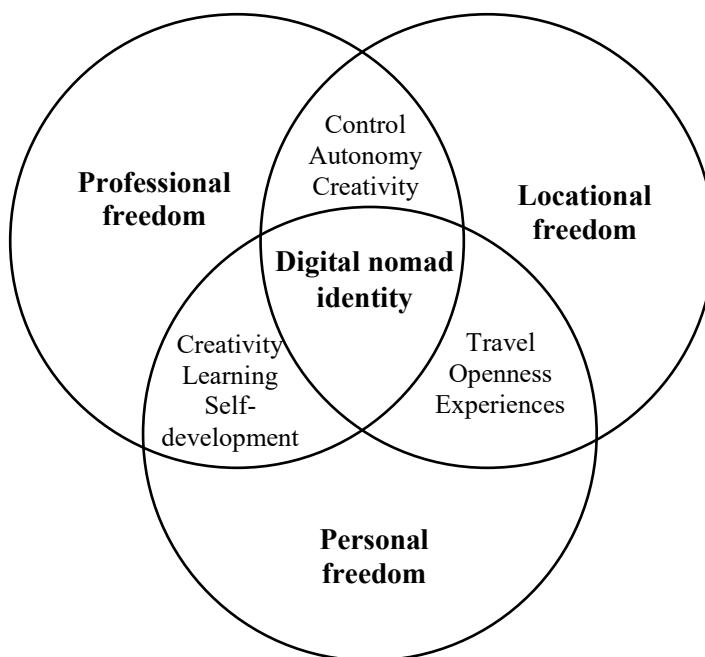


Figure 2 Identity of a digital nomad (Reichenberger, 2018).

According to the research by Reichenberger (2018), the main three motivations of the digital nomad identity creation are professional freedom, locational freedom, and personal freedom, as illustrated in Figure 2. These motivations are inseparably connected, as one cannot be truly fulfilled without the others. Seeking freedom on these aspects is a part of many digital nomads' identity. They aim to create comprehensive freedom on all

of them. Having professional freedom refers to the ability to choose and organize work-related activities in a self-imposed way. The locational freedom is mostly motivated by the desire to learn about and experience different ways of life, cultures, norms, values, and lifestyles. This is achieved by living and working in various places through travel and mobility. The perception of personal freedom is affected by, or even the consequence of, having professional and locational freedom. Having personal freedom is especially beneficial regarding creativity, learning, and self-development. (Reichenberger, 2018.)

In the context of digital work and especially digital nomadism it is important to understand work-related identities (Prester et al., 2019). According to Barley et al. (2017), the identity of a person can be strongly tied to the organization they work for, and their work is often one of the main sources of meaning in their lives. For digital nomads, their extreme mobility and independent working style detached from organizations may make it difficult to fathom what work means to them and how they define themselves as workers (Prester et al., 2019). The literature about work identities has recognized that there are professional and organizational identities related to work activities and roles (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

While the work identity has historically been seen to be rather stable, the more recent studies have noticed the more changing nature of work identities. Workers tend to more dynamically build, maintain, and give up work identities nowadays. Digital nomads are pushing this kind of identity construction to new limits. Technology has a significant role in identity creation especially with workers, such as digital nomads, that pursue digital, independent, and often multiple careers simultaneously. As different kinds of technologies are an integral part of every aspect of digital nomads' work, it can be assumed that the identity of a worker does not solely construe within person but is affected by the surrounding technologies as well. (Prester et al., 2019.) According to Colbert et al. (2016), the strong presence of digital technologies in a worker's life can alter the development of identity and even limit the possibilities of developing deep self-awareness. Stein, Galliers, and Markus (2013) suggest that IT can directly influence the identity creation and act as an extension of one's identity.

According to the research done by Prester et al. (2019), about the work identities of digital nomads, a digital nomad generally constructs a work identity in relation to gaining professional freedom and maintaining self-ensured stability. Their work identities emerge dynamically from these practices of autonomy and stability. The research findings by Prester et al. (2019) suggest that a work identity is indeed more of a continuous and

unstable process rather than a stable state, at least in the case of digital nomads. Even though they lack tight organization ties and roles, digital nomads are noticed to develop their own work identities as self-sufficient, mobile, and flexible workers. They construe the meaning of their professional roles themselves.

One part of professional autonomy is overcoming the traditional concept of working time. Employees traditionally come into office at nine and work until five, with limited exceptions. Digital nomads do not necessarily have this kind of working time given by higher authorities. Some digital nomads refer to the fixed working hours as the illusion of work time that limits their actual productivity and creativity. People are at their most productive states at different times of day, and they are not always equally productive and energetic at the same times from day to day. Digital nomads aim to understand their own most productive and non-productive times of day personally and use their professional autonomy to their advantage to organize their work accordingly in order to be as productive as possible. Indeed, every day of work is often different for a digital nomad. (Prester et al., 2019.) Ideally, digital nomads aim to create themselves a work-life, in which they can perceive their work as intrinsically fulfilling, not as an enforced obligation. (Reichenberger, 2018.)

Gaining professional autonomy and having independence on many levels is a typical goal for digital nomads. Technology and digital tools play a major part in gaining autonomy, as different tools can handle many different activities of a business, and some can even be automated. Especially when building their own companies and running their start-ups, IT is not only a supportive tool for digital nomads but often used to fully automate certain activities to gain further autonomy. Technology offers digital nomads not only locational flexibility but also added autonomy due to automation of routine activities. (Prester et al., 2019; Reichenberger, 2018.)

Digital nomads operate outside of the externally imposed procedures and structures, such as given working times, locational dependency, and restricted free time. (Prester et al., 2019.) Consequently, they lack organizational support that traditional employees have, so they need to develop stabilizing practices themselves, such as using different digital tools, setting up workspaces, and structuring timetables and working hours. Hence, they have the ability to tailor their work-life based on their personal preferences. However, they are solely responsible for structuring and maintaining their work-life balance in order. (Reichenberger, 2018.) Furthermore, having operational autonomy as a

digital nomad often means there is no access to colleagues or peers for support and knowledge sharing within the immediate proximity (Ens et al., 2018).

For some digital nomads, the creation of routines helps them to increase and maintain stability in their lives. Routines are something that they hold on to regardless of the location where they are at any time. Digital nomads with a set of effective routines are more able to keep up productivity and not get easily distracted. Despite being able to independently and flexibly choose their working conditions regarding time and place, most digital nomads think that it is of utmost importance to strictly plan the working day and have disciplined time management. They need to keep their productivity at the levels needed and be able to critically reflect on their own work and performance themselves. Technology provides stability to their personal lives as digital applications help them to stay connected with their friends and family, which helps them to cope with constantly changing work environments. (Prester et al., 2019.) Digital nomads often strive for a balance between professional and personal lives in a way that both aspects contribute to their self-actualization (Reichenberger, 2018; Nelson et al., 2017).

There is literature about digital nomadism that frame it as a cultural phenomenon. Digital nomadism represents such subcultures as, for example, self-actualization, minimalism (Nash et al., 2018), and lifehacking. Digital nomads have a quite unique position within cultures, and it is yet to be seen in the long run how that affects the way they do business. When taking into consideration the particular contexts of culture in which digital nomads act and how, for example, work-life balance and work ethics are interpreted within these typical cultural contexts, it is likely beneficial to aim for a better and deeper understanding of digital nomads from a cultural perspective for the decision-makers of companies and governments too. (Wang et al., 2018.)

Lifehacking is closely linked with digital nomadism. Lifehacking, in short, is emerging especially in industrialized countries with the viewpoint that the challenges of life can be solved using similar techniques as with hacking into computers. According to Thomas (2015), lifehackers are characterized by features such as independence, proactivity, self-actualization, and competent technical skills. Therefore, digital nomads, who are often characterized by such features, are closely associated with the subculture of lifehacking. (Wang et al., 2018.)

To be considered as a lifehacker, there must be something to challenge, or “hack”, in one’s life. In the context of lifehacking, digital nomads can indeed be seen as challengers to many established institutions. They are often in opposition to the bureaucratic and

hierarchical structures of business practices that originate from the times of the industrial revolution and they are also, in general, challenging the traditional structure of the market economy. The aim is to “hack” their way out of the traditional bureaucratic work life, to find a way to earn their living and live their lives in an alternative way. (Wang et al., 2018.)

2.4 Technological advances

Digital nomadism is framed as a new technology-enabled form of work in many academic studies (see, e.g., Aroles et al., 2020; Kong et al., 2020; Ens et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2018). Digital nomadism is inherently enabled by technology and technological solutions, such as global access to information and improved information infrastructures (Nash et al., 2018.) In this section digital nomadism is examined regarding the meaning of technology for digital nomads and the underlying technological infrastructure in their operations. Nash et al. (2018) state that digital nomads employ various technological platforms and applications to conduct their digital work and produce digital products or services. On the other hand, according to Wang et al. (2018), present digital infrastructure has not yet fully enabled digital nomadism as well as possible and the digital communication methods that digital nomads use in their activities have sometimes been found inadequate. However, Wang et al. (2018) note that technological advances thus far have reduced regional inequalities and made possible fully digital ways of working. There continues to be new advances and innovations that challenge existing methods, and which could benefit not only digital nomads, but other businesses and governments as well.

New ways to perform work, such as working remotely are made possible by technological developments. Digital nomads are continually connected, and their work relies on sharing information digitally through networks. Thus, they can be described as digital workers. Mobile devices, internet connection, and ICT in general are essential components for them to perform work activities. These technological advances allow digital nomads to have constant connectivity. (Richter & Richter, 2019; Ens et al., 2018.) According to Nash et al. (2018), the digital technologies that digital nomads use are both profession-specific applications and general tools. Profession specific applications are used in a specific area of digital work, for example, a programmer using GitHub for writing and sharing code. Then there are general tools that are used more universally by digital nomads regardless of their profession, such as communication applications like

Slack. According to Prester et al. (2019), for some digital nomads the very existence of their business depends on digital tools and technologies.

The same devices that are used for professional activities are often used for personal purposes too. Especially for digital nomads they may be the only way to be in contact with their family and friends from anywhere in the world. This further blurs the boundaries of the professional and private lives of digital nomads. (Mancinelli, 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019; Colbert et al., 2016.) Technology is essential for digital nomads not only for doing business but also for staying socially connected in their personal lives (Prester et al., 2019). Some digital nomads use, for example, Facebook to connect with other digital nomads in order to find travel companions and housing from a certain location or other advice (Hall et al., 2019). Some may want to travel with someone to reduce costs by sharing rooms together or just to have company. There are other online communities specifically for digital nomads, such as Nomad List, a Slack channel named #digitalnomad, and a Reddit page r/digitalnomad. Through these kinds of channels digital nomads connect with each other and share important information and advice, such as cost of living, interesting places to visit, and quality of internet connection among other aspects of different places. (Nash et al., 2018).

Digital nomads effectively adopt new technologies to be used in their work practices (Lee et al., 2019). There are no upper management or organizational policies that dictate which specific computer, software, applications, and such are to be used. Digital nomads can easily try out and switch between different digital solutions as they individually prefer. In larger organizations, there are often legacy systems that hinder the adoption of modern solutions. Compared to that, digital nomads are agile to learn and adopt new technologies. (Nelson et al., 2017.)

2.4.1 Internet connection

One vital component of digital work, which is in common between all the applications, is internet connection, on which digital nomads rely heavily (Nash et al., 2018). The rapid increase of internet users and growing possibilities to get access to internet across the globe have enabled digital nomads to basically connect from anywhere on the planet to anywhere else when needed. The speed and reliability of internet connection are crucial for digital nomads because problems with connection cripple all three factors of production. (Wang et al., 2018.) An internet outage may make the labour itself impossible, it can prevent the digital subject matter from transferring to intended

recipients or it may make the digital instruments of work unusable, for example, if the work depends on cloud services. To accomplish their work, digital nomads need an internet connection to get and maintain access to all the needed information from emails, websites, online documents, and social networks. (Nelson et al., 2017.)

Many digital nomads make decisions about from where to work depending on the availability and quality of internet connection. Often digital nomads inquire from like-minded people in online forums about the best ways to get internet connection in different places. When choosing internet connection to use for work, there are factors such as accessibility, security, price, and whether to use Wi-Fi or mobile data to be taken into consideration. (Nash et al., 2018.) Having quick access to internet is not, however, self-evident as it is not always and consistently available. Digital nomads are known to travel to exotic places, where the internet access might not be as stable or accessible as it is in more industrialized countries. The infrastructure for stable internet connections requires considerable investments from governments and companies, which may not be possible in poorer countries. Digital nomads often use wireless connections due to their mobility, but wireless connections are usually slower than wired ones. Hence, there exist certain working spaces for digital nomads, so-called hot spots, which have better internet connections to offer. This implies that the original vision from 1997 by Makimoto and Manners about global digital nomadism has not yet been fully fulfilled. (Wang et al., 2018.)

2.4.2 Digital communication and work organizing

Organizing the labour has often been seen as the most difficult task for digital work regarding the three factors of production, as it is complex and requires functional communication and collaboration (Wang et al., 2018). According to Boell, Cecez-Kecmanovic, and Campbell (2016), this is especially true when organizing the labour needs collaboration in decision-making process or active sharing of information and advice. In the case of digital nomads, they communicate with their clients often entirely using digital means. It is especially interesting question nowadays that whether remote communication and collaboration are effective enough or are they too problematic to be a preferred option. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, we have seen a surge in the usage of digital remote collaboration tools out of necessity (Richter, 2020). According to Wang et al. (2018), there is no consensus in the literature about the efficiency of remote collaboration arrangements. Due to the advances in digital collaboration tools, there is no

need for participants to be physically present in a particular place. They highlight that there are still persistent claims in the literature that digital presence is inferior to physical presence and face-to-face communication. It will be interesting to see how people and academics will view remote collaboration in the near future, and will the digital presence even become a more preferred option compared to physical presence, if possible.

It is important to note that even though literature often claims that digital or virtual collaboration is problematic compared to physical, this is often regarding traditional working environment and jobs. Digital nomads, however, have been able to survive and even thrive using exclusively digital collaboration tools, despite the plausible limitations (Wang et al., 2018). Digital nomads use an extensive selection of digital tools and platforms that enable them to perform their work activities. They might use tools specific to a profession such as GitHub or Adobe products, tools for messaging and communicating such as Skype and Slack, productivity and project management tools such as Trello, online communities and sites to find more work such as LinkedIn, Upwork, and Fiverr and various social platforms for communication and assistance such as Twitter and Nomad List. (Kong et al., 2020; Prester et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2018.) The various digital tools that digital nomads use can form a functional and efficient fully digital ecosystem, in which business can be done entirely without a physical presence or face-to-face communication, even though literature has often deemed the lack of physical presence impractical and inferior (Wang et al., 2018). There are various ways for a digital nomad to find work. One quite typical way is to look for work on a third-party contracting website. (Nash et al., 2018.) There are digital labour markets online, such as Upwork (Prester et al., 2019). Although these online platforms can be effective at finding jobs for a digital nomad, the downside is that the platforms are also doing business, which means they have the authority in the platform and they take some profits from between (Wang et al., 2019). One notable downside regarding different tools is also that digital nomads may not get access to more superior technological resources, which are limited to premium enterprise users only (Nelson et al., 2017).

Digital nomads might work on a particular task using a certain online application. They often use cloud services or their digital devices to store information, and they typically send their final product or deliverable digitally. The work of digital nomads is often knowledge work and information-based, thus they must maintain a large and secure enough location for that information. Cloud services allow them to access the needed information from wherever with an internet connection. Because the needed information

substance can be accessed, maintained, and handled over the internet with digital devices, there is no need for physical packing, carrying, storing, or organizing of the subject matter of production. Using cloud services, digital nomads can share information and collaborate with their clients and peers. For many digital nomads, their smartphone can represent their whole work office environment. (Nash et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017.)

3 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF DIGITAL NOMADISM

3.1 Digital nomads in the market economy

The concept of ‘market economy’ was introduced by Smith (1776). Concisely market economy, according to Smith, means the system in which goods and services are produced and consumed based on the naturally emerging forces of supply and demand. The allocation of a society’s resources between different sectors and industries varies in relation to the forces of supply and demand. For there to be anything of value in the market economy, some work needs to happen. This work involves the three factors of production, labour, matter, and instruments. Based on these factors of production, work is described by Smith to happen when human labour is used to handle natural resources using certain equipment. As Wang et al. (2018) state, these traditional factors of production are altered by digitalization.

Digital nomadism can be seen as a product of the market economy but also as an example of resistance to the market economy. The resistance emerges, for example, in relation to typical work practices. Digital nomads reject secure employment, secure payment, and fixed hours in order to gain freedom and manage their hours themselves, as shown in Table 1. However, despite their work conditions digital nomads are still subject to the forces of the market economy. Furthermore, the clients that digital nomads have may sometimes be much more traditional than them, which is a gap they need to be able to overcome. (Wang et al., 2019.) Thus, being part of the broader economy, digital nomads need to have business and entrepreneurial skills (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). Table 1 frames digital nomads in relation to the broader market economy. The first column consists of the overall topics affecting any participant in the market economy and the rows explain digital nomads’ general attitude towards these topics, particularly the ways in which they are resistant and compliant with the topic. In the last column, there are the unique ways emerging in digital nomadism regarding that topic.

Table 1 Digital nomads in relation to the market economy (Wang et al., 2019).

	Resistant	Compliant	Emerging way
Consumption	Consumerism	Still a need to consume, e.g., services	Collaborative consumption, sharing economy, minimalism
Labour	Fixed hours from higher authority	Still a need to work long hours	Self-managed and acquired flexible work
Use of materials	Physical resources	Need for workspaces and tools, both digital and physical	Reimagining work materials
Monetary policies	Evading business cycles and regulating government	Influenced by monetary policies	Seeking suitable jurisdictions
Fiscal policies	Local taxation and borders	Still contributing and using public infrastructure	Unregulated citizenship

Digital nomads tend to resist high levels of consumption. This is not only due to the mobile lifestyle, but also a deeper craving away from the constant consumption that is typical for the market economy. Some digital nomads find more value in the nomadic life itself than in life filled with material goods. However, they may limit their consumption of physical goods, but they cannot completely stop consuming. They still need to use services such as transportation, housing, and workspaces. Obviously, they need to acquire the relevant physical products, such as computers and other electronic equipment that enable them to do their digital work. There is an emerging trend of collaboratively utilizing the same equipment and sharing facilities or workspaces, as shown in Table 1. This way it is possible only to use products or facilities that are needed for that particular moment or occasion. This creative and collaborative way reduces unnecessary consumption. (Wang et al., 2019.) Bartosik-Purgat (2018) links digital nomadism and new trends in consumer behaviour, highlighting that digital nomads often prefer to cooperate with other consumers. This kind of consumer behaviour is also known as the sharing economy (Mont et al., 2020).

Digital nomads are notably resistant towards the typical institutional routine of fixed hours. This attitude is not only because of personal freedom to arrange their work as they prefer, but it is importantly about economic productivity and human dignity as well. They much rather focus on the outcome of work rather than the amount of time used to it. For example, they see no point in staying in the office for eight hours if they did the day's

work in five hours, just because a higher authority deems it necessary to stay in the office for eight hours regardless of the actual work done. Digital nomads tend to favour the mindset of being rewarded from the work that has been done, not from the amount of time spent at the workplace. While being resistant to fixed hours, it does not mean digital nomads automatically move to just working a few hours a week expecting better results. Their work hours are not fixed, but they are not certain either. Often, digital nomads move from an employee to be a worker and an entrepreneur simultaneously. Their work becomes insecure, and they are very susceptible to market volatility. Indeed, as they work for their clients and to develop their business, their hours might well be longer than eight hours a day, sometimes including weekends. Thus, being out of the routine of given work hours, digital nomads need to be able to manage their flexible hours themselves and be responsible for the work they have or do not have. (Wang et al., 2019.)

Compared to more traditional entrepreneurs, digital nomads do not, in principle, have as high barriers to enter the market with their business. They do not need an actual office or employees necessarily. They probably do not need a warehouse or any other storing solution for large amounts of physical material either. Digital nomads find and communicate with clients online or via phone or in an occasional physical location. (Wang et al., 2019.) Direct networking, connecting, and building relationships are still important, but it happens in events or online rather than in an own office. While not needing an actual office, digital nomads often find themselves paying for coworking spaces, for example, rather than settling only for hotel desks or cafeterias. There is a rapid growth in the number of coworking spaces. These spaces are popular among digital nomads, mostly because there they can interact socially, meet like-minded people, collaborate, create a shared identity, and gain inspiration. (Orel, 2019.)

3.2 Organizational development

Today organizations seeking to thrive are under pressure to become increasingly more flexible and dynamic in the global and fast-moving business environment. One way to answer to the challenge and possibly find a competitive advantage is to provide an environment for employees that makes it possible for work to be done at least partially from anywhere at any time independently, for example, by creating virtual teams. Organizations have increasingly noticed that when given opportunity, workers are often capable to perform more efficiently from their own workspaces that are more suitable to their own needs and skills that provide more dynamic ways to work. (Richter & Richter,

2019.) Hafermalz (2020) states that nowadays especially knowledge work happens increasingly outside of the conventional office space as technology makes it possible for them to work, collaborate, and communicate from anywhere and anytime.

There are positive aspects in remote working from the organizational point of view, such as a lesser cost of management. Organizations have begun to notice that managing based on the actual outcomes is more efficient than constantly managing and supervising, for example, the physical presence of the employees. Many organizations have taken actions to loosen some strict processes and shift away from the old-fashioned societal expectations regarding the physical presence and strict working times. This, in turn, seems to have increased loyalty and performance among their employees. (Richter & Richter, 2019.) According to the article by Lynch in *Stanford Business* (2017), people who work remotely are 13% more productive and have fewer sick leaves and are often more willing to work extra hours when necessary. Furthermore, companies can cut down their office space by encouraging employees to work at home or from wherever they prefer. The multi-locational workforce is what many technology companies are considering in order to gain a competitive advantage. (Bosch-Sijtsema et al., 2010.) Nelson et al. (2017) affirm that organizations should adopt and implement management practices and other particularities that enable and benefit remote working arrangements, which are becoming the new normal in many settings.

Remote work has been possible for decades, but the more recent technological advances, changes in the attitudes towards remote working, and the focus on the outcomes rather than the ways of work have made remote working significantly more prominent option to arrange work. The idea of that an increasing number of different kinds of work activities could be performed outside of an office has made it possible to introduce many new work modalities, such as gig work, crowd work, zero-hour contracts, online entrepreneurship, agile management methods, and new forms of nomadism, namely digital nomadism. (Aroles et al., 2020.) Most of these temporal work modalities are happening digitally, and some of them were born digital (Ens et al., 2018). Organizations are increasingly outsourcing projects or tasks to these other workers than permanent workers since that is often more inexpensive due to the lack of health insurance payments and other costs. Temporal workers are also easier to hire and fire than permanent employees. (Kong, Schlagwein, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2020; Nash et al., 2018.) In addition to possible reduced employment costs and increased flexibility, the cost of training workers is smaller. However, finding suitable gig workers or other forms of

contingent workers can also be time-consuming and more uncertain than hiring full-time workers for longer periods of time. (Barley et al., 2017.)

Organizations are increasingly developing towards digital work in order to stay competitive and to respond to the dynamic environment. However, there are notable challenges in introducing digital work. Often with increased usage of digital tools comes increased complexity. Especially in the beginning, it may be difficult for many to handle all the different tools, which could take the focus away from the actual tasks at hand. The steep learning curve of many applications can lead to longer hours worked and increased stress, so it might be difficult to motivate employees to pursue the targeted benefits of digital work. Furthermore, the attitude towards digital work may vary significantly between different employees and between different organizational cultures. Then there is the challenge for the top management to understand the changes and keeping up with the developments and possibilities of digitalization, and in the end choosing the most suitable options for their organization and implementing them successfully. Not all organizations encourage remote working for their employees or are willing to hire digital nomads. (Dittes et al., 2019.) Organizational challenges are examined in more detail in the 4th section.

The rise of digital nomads and their work practices signal the declining role of an organization and the idea of the fixed working place. This trend highlights the possibilities and capabilities of independent digital workers, who enjoy the benefit of accomplishing work activities where they choose. Digital nomadism implies changing norms of work, for example, new generations of workers having loosened ties to organizations and the desire for flexibility enabled by technology. (Barley et al., 2017.) It is now less common that teams are located in the same place, which is made possible by the increased leverage of virtual collaboration and communication tools. The younger generation, also referred to as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001), entering the workforce is competent and comfortable within this kind of technology-based business environment. Digital natives do not remember the time before the internet. They are generally familiar with digital devices and rely on technology for communication, entertainment, and learning purposes, among others. (Colbert et al., 2016.)

In addition to technological development, also globalization and economic turbulence, for example, have altered the shape of work and continue to do so (Aroles et al., 2020). More recently, Covid-19 has made it a necessity for many organizations globally to rapidly transform their ways of work and provide digital options for both their

employees and customers (Richter, 2020). To be as competitive as possible in the digital work environment, it is not enough for an organization to only implement new digital solutions but also changes in organizational culture, traditional structures, and the ways of thinking are needed (Dittes et al., 2019). Due to the technological advances, digital native workforce, global changes and turbulence, and the vast increase of remote workers in organizations caused by the Covid-19, it can be expected that the organizational development continues to be more favourable towards digital nomadism type of working.

3.3 Gig economy and institutionalization of digital nomads

Companies are increasingly hiring gig workers to work on some of their projects rather than hiring a permanent employee (Nash et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is a growing number of digital nomads who work under contracts for organizations. As the popularity of digital nomadism keeps rising, so will the number of digital nomads working together with organizations continue to grow. Organizations hire digital nomads especially to projects, which demand knowledge that is highly specialized. (Kong et al., 2020.)

The work situation of digital nomads is often reliant on gig work (Mancinelli, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). Gig economy is defined in Investopedia as follows: “In a gig economy, temporary, flexible jobs are commonplace, and companies tend toward hiring independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees.” The gig economy can be beneficial for companies, consumers, and workers by increasing flexibility and making work more adaptable to sudden changes and demands in a dynamic economy. Many digital nomads start their independent remote work by participating in the online gig economy. (Thompson, 2019.)

Doing gig work allows digital nomads to work as independent contractors for short periods of time with flexible arrangements. The amount of possible gig work to do is dependent on the current demand. Gig and digital work in combination create the opportunity of completing freelance jobs using only digital applications entirely remotely. (Nash et al., 2018.) A digital nomad working in the gig economy is an entrepreneur and therefore their own company, which includes managing a personal brand image and pursuing potential clients. It can be an unusual working arrangement from the perspective of a potential client and a digital nomad needs to build trust with the client from afar. (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017.) Completing gigs and performing well increase the likelihood of getting more quality opportunities and the possibility to charge more in the future (Thompson, 2019). Reputation is vital in the gig economy and positive feedback

enables trust. Much of the gig work that digital nomads get, come from referrals and recommendations. (Kong et al. 2020.)

As a digital nomad doing digital gig work, it does not necessarily matter where the work is done from or where the client is located. To find gig work, there must be a demand for the particular skill set that the individual possesses. The gig worker also needs to come into an agreement with the potential client about the specifics of the task. There are no fixed price levels on gig work, but the income varies greatly depending on the type of task, needed skills, difficulty, and amount of time spent doing the work. (Nash et al., 2018.) Unlike permanent employees, digital nomads that do gig work have to continuously search for new work to make a steady living. Often, they never even meet their current employer. (Barley et al., 2017.) They need to market themselves on various online sites, for example, Upwork, from where to possibly find jobs to do. Some digital nomads maintain a strong professional web presence in sites such as LinkedIn and Medium in order to promote their reliability and expertise to potential clients. Often, they need to aim to find the next project to do while there is still another ongoing. Having a suitable amount of work, not too little but not too much either, is a constant challenge. A digital nomad should also understand their own skills and limitations and stay true to them when looking for job opportunities to avoid assignments for which they lack the needed skills and resources. (Kong et al., 2020; Ens et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2018.)

3.4 Governmental viewpoint

Regarding government and their economic policies, digital nomads can be seen to be in resistance. They are known to flexibly move from different countries and economies to another, which is a challenge for a government seeking more dominance over an individual. One aspect affecting the choices of digital nomads about where to live and when is the jurisdictional environment. While being able to choose a location and look for suitable environments from jurisdictional and economic viewpoints, they are still more or less affected by market cycles and governments. (Wang et al., 2019.)

Digital nomads differentiate from a traditional resident from a governmental perspective. The significance of governments is not that great as it is said that digital nomads often see the nation state only as another provider of services, in their case namely residence and citizenship. The lesser significance can be explained by digital nomads' ability to move easily from one jurisdiction to another as they please. (Crichton, 2018.) Governments may find it more difficult to influence digital nomads even if they are

residing within a state compared to residents living there more permanently (Wang et al., 2018). According to Wang et al. (2019), one reason for the rise of digital nomadism appears to be the inability of a government to bring everyone an equal opportunity. For some, digital nomadism means escaping a failing country or government and seeking better opportunities elsewhere as a digital nomad. According to Mancinelli (2020), the digital nomads who idealize unlimited freedom resist the demands of a nation and their lifestyle of no fixed location is a challenge to nations' established systems of accountability and stability.

Digital nomads are known to use modern technological platforms that are notably difficult to regulate. For accommodation they often use Airbnb, which has been described as a grey-market housing service that occasionally poses problems for regulation. (Nash et al., 2018; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017.) Furthermore, it is difficult for governments to track the finances of digital nomads. Not only do they move their funds between jurisdictions using, for example, PayPal and Transferwise (Nash et al., 2018), but they are also known to often be familiar with and leverage the opportunities of cryptocurrencies, mainly Bitcoin (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). Storing and moving funds using cryptocurrencies are vastly more difficult for governments to track and regulate, as financial transactions happening in a blockchain do not rely on nation states. (Schlagwein, 2018a; Wang et al., 2018.)

Digital nomadism represents both opportunities and threats for governments and businesses. It has been capitalized recently by companies like Airbnb and cryptocurrency related companies, who have profited from the phenomenon. In addition to the aforementioned new players in the business, there are opportunities for governments also, as they could provide a safety net for nomadic workers. (Wang et al., 2018.) Often digital nomads seek freedom but being detached from a government typically means sacrificing things such as aged care, labour market policies that govern workers' rights, paid family leave, and healthcare options for the sake of freedom (Thompson, 2018). Some governments can attract digital nomads by providing or giving access to these kinds of services. One notable example is Estonia, which has an e-residency program (Gat, 2018).

Of course, there are risks as well. A business that is nomad-friendly may fall due to strict regulatory rules, or a nomad-friendly government may face problems if there is an unfavourable environment for businesses. Yet, there is not much literature about how governments and other traditional service providers could strategically respond to the rise of digital nomadism, and what are the impacts in the long-term from their point of view.

All in all, if digital nomadism does indeed continue to develop to become a more significant part of society and people's way of life, it might do well for governments and businesses to adapt accordingly. (Wang et al., 2018.) If the information revolution can truly be as significant in human history as the industrial or agricultural revolution, then surely digital nomads, being key figures of the information revolution, are worth fully understanding and researched (Dobrinskaya, 2016).

Digital nomadism already demonstrates potentiality to reduce regional inequality, because digital nomads can improve economic productivity and possibilities in areas that are outside of the capital and other major cities (Wang et al., 2018). For example, an Indonesian village named Ubud has totally transformed, since the installation of a stable internet connection in 2012, into a diversified international town through digital nomads (MacRae, 2016). Other countries are aiming for regional balancing, for example, Australia currently has a national level interest in increasing regional equality, and digital nomadism has already increased economic activity in non-metropolitan areas (Wang et al., 2018).

From the viewpoint of governments, digital nomads can be seen as rather challenging and even resistant regarding some aspects of fiscal policies, especially about taxation and border control. It is not uncommon, that a digital nomad does not pay income tax to their host country, because they often travel on tourist visas without a work permit. (Wang et al., 2019.) The legality of working in a foreign country as a digital nomad may be somewhat within a grey area and it is a concerning matter for many digital nomads. In some cases, digital nomads enter a country with a tourist visa, but after entering they work from the country and earn income. Thus, at least technically, they break the law. There are many countries, in which the law may not be up to date with the situation of people coming into the country to work, while earning the income from a different country. Often digital nomads enter a country as a visiting tourist, not for a deception, but as a practical approach to avoid problems that could arise while operating within a legally unclear area, including all the lengthy and burdensome bureaucratic processes in a vague legal framework. On the other hand, many digital nomads choose particularly to enter countries, which already have established a solid and clear legal environment for them to work from. Therefore, a favourable legal environment is a factor with which a country could attract more digital nomads to enter. (Hall et al., 2019.)

While not necessarily paying income taxes to their host country, it does not prevent digital nomads from contributing, since they gladly pay for local infrastructure, services,

and businesses, which do pay taxes. In addition, while typically having clients all over the world, digital nomads might offer their service or expertise to the local businesses to help them grow, for example, by helping them in marketing, and thus contributing to the improvement of the local business environment. (Wang et al., 2019.) Barley et al. (2017) highlight the question of whether institutions can keep up and match the rapidly changing nature of work and the many new paths of work that people are pursuing, such as digital nomadism. According to Barley et al. (2017), the tax structure, social programs, health care, and retirement funds in many countries are still often based on mid-20th century laws that are built on the presumption of full-time stable employment.

3.5 Covid-19 and digital work

The lockdown and other restrictions in many countries caused by Covid-19 have changed digital work from a mere option to be the new norm for many traditional office workers. To reduce the spread of Covid-19 many countries decided to restrict the movement of their people during 2020. These restrictions have forced millions of people to avoid unessential movement and work from home. This substantially increased the number of workers doing digital and remote work. The restrictions have made millions of office workers learn about and use the same kind of digital work tools that are familiar to digital nomads, such as various collaboration platforms, to be able to conduct their work remotely. (Richter, 2020.)

According to Richter (2020), there are already some general realizations and conclusions that can be drawn from the experiences after the rapid shift to fully digital remote working. Firstly, many workers have grown into proficient users of different digital work tools. Secondly, executives and organizational leaders have become more confident in the continuation of work and that it can be done even if their employees are not physically present at the office. Misconceptions, such as that it is slower to get work done remotely or that workers are just lazing around if not supervised, are dissolving. Some organizations are more hesitant than others. However, for example, Twitter has announced to allow their employees to “work from home forever” (Paul, 2020). Thirdly, customers have learned that many of their needs are still being fulfilled even if completely through digital means. Furthermore, organizations are exploring new innovative ways to digitally engage with customers and bring them value digitally. (Richter, 2020.)

Major disruptions in the society have the potential to transform the current practices. Although often being detrimental and even life-threatening, these disruptions offer

opportunities to change in ways that could lead to a better world. A pandemic virus, such as Covid-19, is a major disruption with the potential to radically change, or even enhance, the status quo. (Davison, 2020.) The disruptive force of Covid-19 is changing traditional mindsets, including business and social norms. Commuting and travelling is reduced and thus the related negative consequences for the climate. (Richter, 2020.) Many employees are able to work more flexibly and have more autonomy. Furthermore, working digitally and learning new digital tools gives workers the opportunity to update their working habits and embrace the vast range of opportunities it offers. (Dittes et al., 2019.)

On the other hand, many of these digital remote workers have also faced the same problems and challenges that digital nomads are familiar with. Most notably, it may be difficult to set clear boundaries between work life and private life as these easily blur when working from home. Setting routines, sticking to them, and staying focused may also prove to be challenging when not in an office environment, especially if the workplace is shared with others. For some, the digital remote work has positive consequences for productivity and overall wellbeing, but for others it may be the opposite. (Richter, 2020.) The most notable setback particularly for digital nomads who enjoy travelling and mobile lifestyle has been the strict travel restrictions globally during 2020.

Davison (2020) presents an important question about the transformative potential of Covid-19: “Do we try to go back to the old stable state, or do we accept the transformation challenge?”. As of now, it is difficult to predict what are the implications of Covid-19 and related restrictions and changes for people and organizations in the long-term regarding work practices and organizational policies. Organizations are still only beginning to find out what effects have the increased digital work and remote work had in their operations and what there are to learn from these changes. What seems to be clear already is that the year 2020 has led to a substantial surge in the number of users of various digital tools, in people that have learned to use them and have become more familiar and comfortable in digital work, and in people who will from now on prefer to work digitally and location-independently even if it is not out of necessity. (Richter, 2020.) Regarding the increasingly networked and digital work environments, it has already been argued before the Covid-19 that whether there is much sense anymore to work from the office (see, e.g., Fried & Heinemeier Hansson, 2013). Due to Covid-19 and related restrictions, it is currently increasingly realized by many people that nowadays knowledge work in particular does not necessarily require a fixed time and space provided by an organization and that work can indeed be done from home or on the road. (Hafermalz, 2020.)

4 CHALLENGES AND RISKS OF DIGITAL NOMADISM

4.1 Personal challenges

The lifestyle of a digital nomad that combines work and travel with frequently changing workspaces, environment, and work tasks, provides them with abundant flexibility and autonomy. Consequently, however, this lifestyle comes with notable challenges and risks, for example, in keeping productivity and work amount at proper levels, coping with possible feelings of isolation and loneliness, finding steadily enjoyable work, dealing with insecurity, and meeting the needs of clients around the world. (Ens et al., 2018.) One of the very first challenges for digital nomads is to set up a suitable workspace for themselves since there is no organization provided stable office to work from (Richter & Richter, 2019).

One of the most prominent challenges of digital nomads is loneliness. Due to their lifestyle, it is difficult for many digital nomads to maintain longer-term relationships and they are basically restricted to the spaces and people they happen to find in their current location. This is a problem that many digital nomads share, and to address this problem several online communities have been formed. (Thompson, 2019.) There are communities such as Hacker Paradise and NomadList forum. Twitter and Meetup are examples of platforms where they can find like-minded people, connect and sympathize with them, and locate events. Through these kinds of digital platforms, digital nomads not only share advice and experiences but meet other digital nomads as well. Some attend to digital nomad conferences, where can meet other like-minded individuals. (Nash et al., 2018.)

There are also possibilities to have memberships in coworking spaces. These kinds of places offer some needed benefits for digital nomads in addition to working space, such as accommodation and events for learning, socializing, and even brainstorming together with other nomads. (Wang et al., 2019.) Digital nomads aim to establish themselves a strong network of other digital nomads and former clients. This has many benefits, as it helps to cope with loneliness, and it could alleviate insecurity and difficult situations. A strong network can help in understanding different cultures and markets, set up new business, give assistance with problematic tasks, and even provide job opportunities. (Kong et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2019.)

According to Prester et al. (2019), the existing information systems literature anticipates that digital nomads probably have challenges in developing a work identity, since they are not closely associated with an organization or even a particular profession. For example, Stein et al. (2013) state that organizational culture, relationships within a company with other workers, and a clear role are necessary to build a solid work identity. Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrzesniewski (2019) characterize the capability to develop a proper work identity as rather challenging for digital nomads and other independent workers. Furthermore, Colbert et al. (2016) argue that when people are operating and communicating mainly on various digital platforms, there is the opportunity to create and present different identities and images of themselves, which can blur their self-awareness and the ability to act authentically as who they really are. On the other hand, there are Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017), who claim that digital nomads generally have a strong self-identity. There seems to be some discrepancy about the identity creation of digital nomads in the current literature, which could suggest that the creation of a work identity for a person who has no strong ties to institutions or organizations, can be either a challenge or an opportunity, depending on the person.

One challenge that digital nomads often have is maintaining productivity and balanced work-life situation. How to balance travel, work, and leisure time is something that many digital nomads deal with every day. Often work and free time, or professional and personal time, get blurred. (Kong et al., 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019.) Unlike tourists, digital nomads must have their professional activities sorted out and they have to stay productive while travelling. It may be sometimes difficult for digital nomads to motivate themselves to work, for example, when they are in an interesting new location having a sunny day with lots of things to do with new people. (Nash et al., 2018.)

One solution to avoid productivity-loss is to have a schedule and clear boundaries between professional and personal life (Reichenberger, 2018). Some organize time specifically for working and for free time and use productivity applications. (Nash et al., 2018). While digital nomads can often decide themselves when to work, they often need to go by their clients' or team members' schedules and organize their day accordingly. This leads to another major problem of digital nomadism, which is the struggle with different time zones. Digital nomads often change locations, hence they often change time zones as well. It is typical that they operate from a different time zone than their client or whoever they need to be in contact with. Often, they have many clients from many different time zones. This brings challenges for digital nomads as they often need to

carefully organize their work schedules considering these different time zones. Unpredictable working times may require digital nomads to surprisingly enter to their client's communication channel and understand what has been done in another time zone. Digital applications for team management and collaboration, such as Trello, Asana, Slack, and Calendly, have helped digital nomads to arrange and maintain schedules for themselves and their collaborators. To tackle these challenges of organizing work and staying productive, digital nomads use these kinds of digital work management applications, as well as applications that compare and track time zones. (Kong et al., 2020; Nash et al., 2018.)

As an opposing challenge to productivity-loss, it is also not uncommon to work too much or to have difficulties to stay away from work-related activities out of working hours. Especially for digital nomads, it may be challenging because of their flexible working hours and clients across time zones. When the same technologies, for example, smartphones, are used for personal and work activities, it is possible to stay connected to work constantly. It is in principle good for business to be able to answer to one more new email during leisure time but doing that limits the opportunity to detach from work, relax, and recover. (Colbert et al., 2016.) This is how digital technologies can act as a double-edged sword (Richter & Richter, 2019). Many digital workers overall face growing stress and risk of burnout, pressure from exhausting emotional labour, and increased "technostress" (Ayyagari et al., 2011), which often arise from the predominant use of digital technology, the inability to disconnect, and the obtrusive interruptions (Ens et al., 2018).

According to Kuzheleva-Sagan and Nosova (2014), while digital nomads are aware of the many business opportunities they have, they are often anxious because they do not feel their productivity is high enough compared to the opportunities, and so they might feel they are missing out. In addition to missing opportunities, also overload may bring anxiousness. Spending a lot of time processing email often leads to overload at work, because an accumulative email backlog may create anxiousness and it makes focusing difficult if there are emails continuously interrupting. As most of digital nomads' communication happens online, it may be difficult to maintain flow in the digital workspace and focus on the complex creative and problem-solving tasks. (Colbert et al., 2016.)

While digital nomads who work for themselves have stepped out of the traditional work hours routine and thus gained the freedom to determine themselves when and for

how long to work, there is an apparent downside. Compared to being an employee, their work is highly uncertain and insecure. Flexible employment often comes with increased insecurity. (Orel, 2019; Ens et al., 2018.) Depending on market conditions and how much demand there are for their services or products in a given time, there might be an extensive amount of work or perhaps none. Digital nomads need to cope with this constant uncertainty and adapt accordingly. Furthermore, digital nomads that are looking for jobs through online platforms may find that the platform takes a large cut of the project payment. It is typical, that in possible disputes between the client and the freelancer, such as a digital nomad, the platform sides with the client. (Wang et al., 2019.)

It is not uncommon for digital nomads that their job with a current client ends abruptly and surprisingly (Kong et al., 2020). Sometimes digital nomads may face financial pressures short term or even longer term (Hall et al., 2019). Many digital nomads do not have access to the safety net that organizations often provide to their permanent employees, including sick cover, health insurance, and annual leave expenses. Digital nomads are responsible for organizing these kinds of matters themselves. (Richter & Richter, 2019.)

4.2 Challenges for organizations

For digital nomads, the future of work may appear bright for operating independently and flexibly as an entrepreneur. However, while organizations could enjoy and leverage the possibilities and benefits of hiring digital nomads and other forms of temporal workers, it is reasonable to assume that many organizations are not that tolerant or receptive towards this kind of future. If organizations hire digital nomads or if their employees evolve increasingly into distant temporal workers, they would be challenging to manage, and it would be more difficult to construe solid relationships between the employers and the workers. Furthermore, this idea may push against a deeply rooted and traditional ideology of an organization that has been formed around a fixed and internalized population of workers. To successfully establish any new way of working, the new way needs to be aligned with the prevalent organizational culture coupled with a steady shift in ideologies. (Hemsley et al., 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019.)

As digital nomads are becoming a part of an organization's workforce, it can cause some changes and challenges for the organization (Kong et al., 2020). One downside in a gig economy is that there can be difficulties to form and maintain strong long-term relationships between businesses, clients, and workers. (Thompson, 2019.) Due to

different physical locations, digital nomads often have to live with less social interaction and support from their peers within the organization, which naturally hinders the sense of belonging (Kong et al., 2020). In addition, it is important to note that compared to actual employees of a company, a digital nomad doing gig work often does not have access to the same information and resources that the company generally provides to its workers. Thus, even though hiring a gig worker is often cheaper and more dynamic, there is no guarantee that the quality is the same as with a more expensive permanent employee. (Nash et al., 2018.) Issues such as getting paid too little or too late, unstable job security, and not getting enough work could lead to lacking performance and conflicts. Furthermore, while being an expert in their specialized field, a digital nomad may not have the necessary business understanding or skills to handle all the stakeholders of the particular engagement, which may lead to inadequate overall performance. (Kong et al., 2020.) Figure 3 illustrates a professional collaboration between digital nomads and organizations with these typical values and challenges from both points of view.

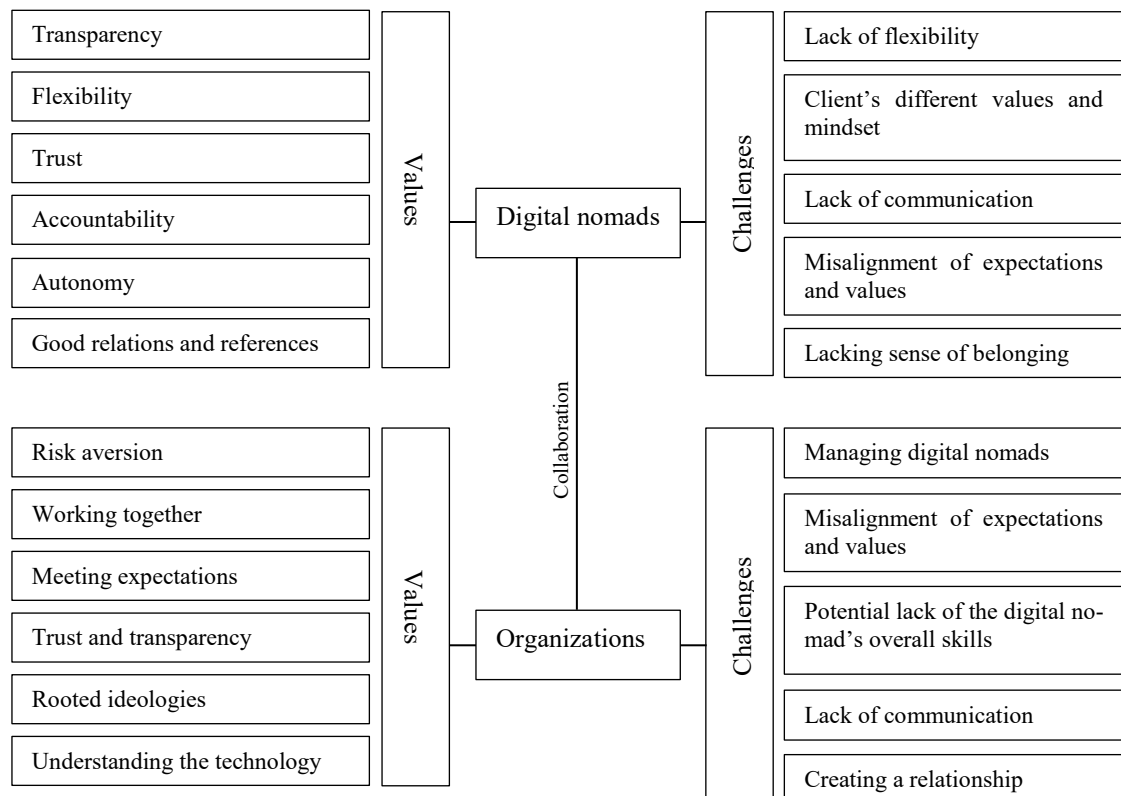


Figure 3 Typical values of digital nomads and organizations and challenges they face in collaboration (Kong et al., 2020, 11).

There could occur differences between digital nomads and traditional organizations regarding matters such as values, beliefs, social patterns, culture, and rules. (Kong et al., 2020.) These institutional logics provide meaning within the organization and enable shared experiences (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2015). Effective communication between the worker and the organization is especially important in order to maintain trust and avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. There needs to be mutually understood expectations and responsibilities for both parties. Most of the conflicts and challenges between digital nomads and their client organizations stem from misaligned expectations and values. It could be a result of a digital nomad not getting familiar enough with the institutional logics of the client organization. (Kong et al., 2020.)

Misaligned expectations can occur for many reasons, such as if a digital nomad were initially vague about their skills, or if an organization has decided to hire a digital nomad for a task that is not that suitable for a digital nomad. (Kong et al., 2020.) Naturally, every situation is unique and the number of challenges during a collaboration with a digital nomad and a client organization varies. With that in mind, it is safe to say that typically digital nomads hold somewhat different values than their representatives in organizations, but there are similarities as well, such as trust, transparency, and open communication. Furthermore, as Figure 3 illustrates, there are various challenges and problems that could occur, with those being only the most typical ones presumably. Keeping the values and potential challenges of both parties in mind and understanding the other could make the collaboration and the outcome significantly better for both.

There are ways to mitigate the most common challenges that occur during a work engagement between a digital nomad and an organization, such as:

- communicating openly before starting to work and aiming to understand the situation and the values of both parties,
- using the client's technology or digital solutions that are preferred by both parties,
- introducing the tools for the client if not already familiar,
- setting up goals, boundaries, and quality monitoring beforehand,
- establishing a collaboration channel, and
- as an organization hiring the right person for the right job, and as a digital nomad accepting a suitable job according to skills and resources. (Kong et al., 2020.)

These kinds of methods could address early and mitigate many of the potential problems that might occur during work engagement.

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1 Research method and process

The empirical part of this study is conducted with qualitative research. The aim of qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of research problems that require interpreting more than measuring to be solved (Alasuutari, 2011). This study is done by using a hermeneutic approach, which underlines the necessity of understanding and interpretation as part of the qualitative research process. Qualitative research often focuses on human behaviour, actions, and intentions. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008.) Since the main research problems of this study are why people are increasingly working as digital nomads and what motivates their behaviour, qualitative research was chosen for the empirical research process.

The research method to collect data for the empirical research part of this study was semi-structured theme interviews. The goal of the interviews was to achieve more in-depth information about digital nomadism from the experiences and opinions of the interviewed digital nomads. For the interviews, the topics were structured beforehand based on the existing literature and main topics of this thesis. The aim was not to ask too strict and direct questions but rather encourage open and free discussion within the theme and subtopics to find deep insight. In general, the discussions reinforced the findings of the literature review with some additional insight.

A total of five interviews were conducted. To narrow down a potential group of interviewees, only Finnish digital nomads who operate as online entrepreneurs were selected. All of them identified themselves as digital nomads and had been living a digital nomad lifestyle for at least a year. They are not digital nomads out of necessity but voluntarily. The interviews took place from November 2020 to March 2021 and were 0,5 to 1 hour long. The discussions happened in Finnish and were then translated into English, because a translation into English serves a wider audience. The interviewees work in various fields of business.

All the interviews followed the same high-level structure. The themes and questions of the interviews followed the topics discussed in the literature review part of this thesis. The themes discussed in the interviews were motivations, values, and characteristics of a digital nomad, digital nomadism as a part of the larger economy, and the challenges of digital nomadism. All themes were divided into more specific topics and questions to

guide the interviews forward. The question pattern was not strictly followed in the interviews but acted as a support. The interviews were based on a natural open discussion over the main themes, which gave the possibility for the interviewees to give insight about something that the interviewer did not notice to ask. The interview themes and questions are presented in Appendix 1. Table 2 consists of information about the interviewees.

Table 2 Interviewees

Person	Age	Profession/industry	Years as a digital nomad	Interview duration (minutes)	Interview date
A	27	ICT and business development	~2	58	12.11.2020
B	25	Marketing and content creation	~1 (5)	37	16.01.2021
C	25	Graphic designer	~2	44	09.02.2021
D	48	Packaging designer	~10	33	26.02.2021
E	27	Programmer / consultant	~6	37	03.03.2021

Person A has a background in accounting with an interest in coding. Before becoming a digital nomad, person A worked as an employee for various large and small companies. Lastly, he worked in banking sector and then in transport sector developing ICT capabilities and doing data analytics. After that, he formed his own company and became a self-employed digital nomad making a living from his computer. His day-to-day work tasks are not that different than what they were as an employee, but since becoming self-employed, he has enjoyed work much more and all the possibilities to develop his own business further.

Person B works in the marketing field. She has studied marketing in a university. For over five years, she has been working on small scale marketing related projects, until at the start of 2020 she decided to set up her own company and expand her business. The main reason for her to form a company was to make billing easier and to make her business more professional. Her projects currently revolve around various marketing projects, content creation, and Google analytics.

Person C works as a graphic designer, and she has been self-employed for two years. She is about to graduate as a graphic designer from a polytechnic. She wanted to start to earn her living herself as a self-employed designer rather than as an employee as soon as possible. She performs various jobs as a graphic designer, such as web design, layouts, text editing, and visual design. She often has multiple projects at the same time and her project durations vary from weeks to months.

Person D has been a graphic designer for over 20 years. For approximately ten years, she has been a self-employed entrepreneur with her own successful design company focusing on packaging designs. She has also been an in-house designer for many years, so she has experience from being an employee in the same industry as well. At first, she became self-employed out of necessity while living abroad. However, it worked well, and she has enjoyed being a digital nomad ever since and would not want to go back to be an employee. She has many clients, and the duration of her projects range from weeks to multiple years.

Person E has been a digital nomad for approximately six years. He currently runs two companies. The other company is about consulting and providing programming services, and the other one is a startup company focusing on IoT technologies. He started his first company as a programmer while still studying information networks at Aalto university. His consulting cases are currently mostly about complex software projects, including machine learning and visualizing algorithms. He also has simpler projects regarding web development, for example. He is stationed in Finland but has many clients from abroad.

5.2 Analysis

The interviews are analysed in this section. The aim is to find out what kind of similarities and differences there are between the existing literature about digital nomadism and what the digital nomads of today tell themselves. Furthermore, the differences between the answers of the interviewed digital nomads are noted. From the interviews, a few relevant quotes are presented in this analysis to highlight the experiences and opinions of the interviewees in their own words. The quotes are translated from Finnish to English while staying true to the original comment.

5.3 Motivations, values, and characteristics of a digital nomad

In the literature, digital nomads are described as determined and goal-oriented professionals, who can manage and configure their work independently. The work of a digital nomad heavily relies on digital skills. To take advantage of the opportunities they have identified, digital nomads aim to be highly productive and constantly finding new ways to improve and leverage their skills. Digital nomads have a desire for adventure and new experiences and they greatly value freedom and flexibility. However, freedom means more responsibility. There are opportunities and there are uncertainties, and a digital nomad has no fixed salary nor guaranteed income. They are solely responsible for their own work and there is no immediate help available so easily. Digital nomads are motivated by the possibilities of freedom and autonomous working life. (See, e.g., Mancinelli, 2020; Jarrahi et al., 2019; Richter & Richter, 2019; Nash et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017.)

5.3.1 Motivations

Digital nomads are often motivated by the desire to find a way to live outside of the traditional office work lifestyle that they find unsuitable for them (Richter & Richter, 2019). Person A has found that working traditionally as an employee was often rather stiff and ineffective. He had learned how to code and was doing data analytics as an employee. He noticed various inefficient and outdated ways of working with plenty of ways to improve. However, the company management preferred to continue with the way things had always been done. Person A felt that working and making changes were often too slow, hindered by bureaucracy and seemingly unnecessary regulations and restrictions. He found himself from time to time questioning the way things are done and being at odds with some management decisions.

A: "I got somewhat irritated about all that and decided to set up my own company. I sensed a business opportunity since the companies I had been at didn't know or care how to use their data much more efficiently. Now the same company I last worked for before is my biggest client. In principle, I am doing pretty much the same tasks that I did as an employee, but now I'm doing it my way with the tools I prefer, and I have much more freedom. Also, a much better payment."

Person E had similar work experiences before deciding to start his own company.

E: *“The organization where I was an employer just moved at a different pace that I would have wanted. Many problems and inefficiencies were identified in the company, and people were whimpering about them, but nothing were done to them. Then I joined the company with the purpose of fixing the problems. I had interesting projects and I got responsible tasks, but soon I got tired of how slow everything was to actually make a change happen. There were a lot of waiting for other people’s inputs or approvals and the bureaucracy to happen. So, I started my own company and now if things are too slow, it is because of me and not others.”*

Person C says that it is the variety of work and experiences that motivate her to be a digital nomad.

C: *“I have so many various interests and the desire to experience new things. It is the freedom to say “yes” to all the new possibilities there are to experience that motivates me to be a digital nomad. I can decide for myself what kind of projects I want to participate in, which would be much more limited in an employment.”*

After making the change to work as a digital nomad and an entrepreneur, Person A says his motivation to work, develop, and constantly learn has drastically improved. Now he pays more attention to business development opportunities and aims to learn new ways to create value. He noted that it would have been painfully slow to increase in the ranks within the companies he worked for to get a better rate of pay, for example. As an entrepreneur, his payment is primarily tied to how much value he delivers.

A: *“I have a lot more motivation now to provide them something of even more value. If I have developed something successful for a client, I try to think how I can scale it to other potential clients as well and so expand my own business. The lifestyle that is made possible by being a digital nomad and an entrepreneur with the potential to achieve and develop something great myself is really motivating.”*

Having a more flexible work-life was defined in the literature as one of the motivating factors to become a digital nomad (see, e.g., Jarrahi et al., 2019; Richter & Richter, 2019; Nash et al., 2018). Having flexibility was an important motivator for the interviewees.

B: *“It is that I can choose myself what kind of projects I work on, for whom, and with the schedule I prefer. The flexibility of time is important, and that I don’t need to commit to anything that I don’t want to.”*

C: *“Flexibility gives me the option to determine myself how I allocate my time between work, free time, and education.”*

5.3.2 Values

Digital nomads typically share a similar set of values. Most notably they value freedom, flexibility, and autonomy. (Kong et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2019.) These were important values for all the interviewees.

A: *“Freedom is important to me and a big motivator. Also, the possibility to achieve financial freedom in the future. The money is not the point itself, but I am not going to sell my time for my whole life just to get by and enjoy the little free time some company gives me. I’m never going to achieve the freedom I want in life if I’m restricted to the specific workplaces, working times, and limited salary. As a digital nomad I don’t need to compromise the way I want to live.”*

D: *“As a digital nomad I have this immense freedom to set up my life as I want. That’s the most important value and benefit.”*

B: *“I value autonomy and the ability to make decisions myself, for example, regarding the price of my work and where and how I do my work.”*

E: *“I enjoy having the control over myself and my doings, and I value freedom. In truth, I haven’t yet fully utilized my freedom. It has been a very exciting and immersive journey so far as an entrepreneur.”*

Digital nomadism provides an alternative work-life definition that differs from the traditional way of how work is seen, giving the option to work wherever and whenever. Digital nomads ideally aim to achieve a balance in which they perceive their work as fulfilling, not as an obligation or burden. They value the freedom to adjust their work-life balance as they best see fit. (Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018.) Without fixed hours, there is no limit to how much one can work, which can also lead to work-life balance conflict and burnouts (Ayyagari et al., 2011). Person A aims to ensure a lifestyle with a healthy work-life balance.

A: *“There are more important things than work in life, so I won’t compromise my allocated free time without a good reason. Digital nomad is a digital nomad to be free, but for what to use that freedom? More work? Absolutely not. I use that freedom to live a life.”*

Digital nomads are known to value locational independency highly. Often, they do not work in the same places for long times, and they enjoy travelling. This is mostly motivated by the desire to experience different environments, lifestyles, and even different cultures and ways of life. (Jarrahi et al., 2019; Reichenberger, 2018.) Person A

and Person B find the ability to work from anywhere important. Before becoming a location-independent digital nomad, Person A was bothered by the locational dependency as an employee.

A: *“Of course, in some cases it was totally justified, but when it wasn’t and you still had to work in a specific location at a specific time it was just stupid. The work could have been done from anywhere just as well, but still we went to the office every day just for the sake of it. Once, when I had done my work outside of the office for a few days, I got mocking comments from colleagues such as “so have you been working from the terrace again with beer on the other hand?”. In truth, I found myself being way more productive outside the distracting office.”*

Person B values the possibilities to learn as a digital nomad. She says she gets to constantly learn and try out various new things freely.

B: *“I have many kinds of clients and projects at the same time. With every project that I choose to work on, I get to learn new skills or enhance existing ones, which is important to me. There are always new aspects that I need to learn more about in a new project.”*

5.3.3 Characteristics

There are many differences in working as an entrepreneur digital nomad compared to being an employee. In the traditional work environment, an employee agrees to be directly managed and instructed in order to get a fixed salary. Often, there are fixed amount of work hours to be met. Digital nomads have the willingness and the ability to be self-managed and self-organized. (Richter & Richter, 2019; Nash et al., 2018.) According to Person B, productivity as a digital nomad is strongly linked to the ability to stay organized. Person A finds that the differences between being an employee and a digital nomad are mainly positive ones.

A: *“Sometimes as an employee I was tasked to spend my time in tasks that I found being pointless. Now I can focus my time and be more effective. I have also more freedom in the ways I work.”*

Person C noted self-discipline as an important characteristic and Person D highlights the ability to stay organized and focused.

C: *“Everything revolves around yourself, which means self-discipline is extremely important. You need to motivate yourself, organize yourself, and do the work yourself. It*

is not easy, and I was not good at it at first, but with time I have learned to be much more self-disciplined.”

D: *“It is essential to be able to stay organized and to control your own time. You need to be disciplined enough to focus on the work and not get constantly distracted.”*

As Prester et al. (2019) found in their research, digital nomads focus more on the actual output of work. Time itself is not that important as it does not itself determine the results and value of their work.

A: *“My clients often tell me to do my job as I best see fit and then we’ll see and evaluate the results.”*

According to Mancinelli (2020), the life of a digital nomad is dominated by uncertainty, risk, and individualism. All the interviewees pointed out that tolerance for uncertainty is important as a digital nomad. Person A underlines that it is vital to be able to tolerate uncertainty since there is no fixed salary or a similar stable contract of employment.

A: *“You can make more money if you find ways to provide value and there is basically limitless potential, but you might also make none. There is no minimum or maximum wage. Income is unstable and one must be able to tolerate uncertainty and even admire it.”*

The individualistic lifestyle and being self-employed means that digital nomads typically operate alone. There is no office fuzzi nor constant access to colleagues. (Thompson, 2019; Ens et al., 2018.) Person D highlights that digital nomadism is suitable for people who prefer independent working.

D: *“It depends on the characteristics of the person whether it is a good idea to be self-employed. I am an introvert, and it suits me well to work independently. I don’t enjoy working constantly in a team.”*

Person A affirms that being able to work alone is important. He allocates free time to have social interactions outside of work.

A: *“To be a digital nomad one must be able to prosper by themselves and tolerate being alone. If someone needs teamwork and a lot of social interactions from work, then this life is not for them. To counterweight working alone, I have a lot of sports hobbies and I spend free time with my girlfriend, friends, and family.”*

To prosper as a digital nomad, one should ideally have certain work-related values and characteristics, such as trustworthiness and transparency. Honest and clear communication is key to build trust. Accountability and keeping promises are vital

especially regarding future references. Digital nomads need to demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility for themselves and their actions to succeed. (Kong et al., 2020.)

E: *“Being able to handle responsibility is a very important characteristic. You are responsible to run your business and you are responsible of all your actions in all cases.”*

In the interviews, social skills and presenting skills were also found important in addition to the core capabilities.

A: *“You work alone, and no one sees what you do, so you need to be able to showcase your results really well. You constantly need to proof your value and validate your work together with the client. For example, it is not enough to just deliver the code. In addition, you need to present the results and communicate well with the relevant people about what do the results mean, what is the value for the organization, and what should they do with your deliverables. Social skills are vital in the business world and you need to be able to communicate and rationalize your value to the client. Being trustworthy and honest are naturally important too.”*

C: *“Social skills are important. You need social skills to get clients to come to you and to keep them. You constantly represent yourself and your brand in every interaction.”*

D: *“You need to have the communication skills to sell yourself and to promote your business to other people. It is not enough to have the knowledge and be an expert at something when self-employed if you cannot sell.”*

Richter and Richter (2019) state that digital nomads are skilled users of various digital tools. They are often proficient enough in choosing, learning, and if needed, even developing the needed digital tools to solve problems. Prester et al. (2019) add that digital nomads are known to be creative and innovative problem solvers. Interviewees A and B also highlighted these characteristics.

B: *“The ability to use many different digital tools creatively is extremely important at least on my line of work.”*

A: *“In most cases the client has a problem and absolutely no idea what to do with it or time to handle it. Then it is up to me to find a way to solve the problem in some way. Problem solving skills are extremely important.”*

There are some characteristics that came up in the interviews that were not that well noted in the current literature. Person A states that resiliency, confidence, risk-tolerance, and most importantly, passion are needed to be a digital nomad.

A: *“A digital nomad needs to be resilient especially if being self-employed. Not everything is going to go your way all the time. Also, confidence in your own abilities and*

confidence to keep going are needed. Then it's of course risky and there are no similar safety nets, so you need to tolerate risk. But maybe the most important thing is to have passion. Passion for freedom and this kind of lifestyle and passion to get rid of the "rat-race". You should genuinely like what you're doing in order to succeed as a digital nomad."

The interviewees point out that being a digital nomad is not for anyone. It depends on characteristics and personal preferences, whether digital nomadism is a good choice or not.

A: *"Digital nomadism is not for anyone, it takes some certain characteristics, and not everyone should be a digital nomad. If you want a lot of uncertainty in your life, then go ahead."*

B: *"If you want a stable working environment or to be able to clearly separate your life from work, then don't be a digital nomad. It is easier and less risky to be an employee."*

C: *"Lonely working environment is not suitable for people who thrive in teams and need social interaction at work. As a digital nomad you're on your own."*

D: *"This is not for hyperactive people who cannot keep themselves focused working alone."*

E: *"You should have passion towards entrepreneurial lifestyle and an actual plan before committing. Healthy scepticism is also good. If you're not okay with the risk of losing the time and resources invested then I would think again."*

5.4 The digital nomad working life and business aspect

According to the literature, digital nomads do not rely on particular companies for employment or traditional stationary office locations for work. They are self-employed and value independence. They leverage their independence by working from various self-determined locations, adjust their work schedules as they best see fit, and pursue a career or jobs that they are passionate about. Organizations have pressure to become more dynamic, efficient, and flexible, which creates demand for other types of workers, such as digital nomads and other freelancers. It is estimated that the number of digital nomads and other kinds of work modalities outside of traditional employment will continue growing. Especially the younger generation at the beginning stages of their careers increasingly prefer to work remotely, flexibly, or even nomadically. This is made possible by constantly advancing technological solutions and digital infrastructure. More and more

traditional work practices are being disrupted by digital options, and various tasks are today possible to be done remotely and digitally. (See, e.g., Richter & Richter, 2019; Ens et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018; Nelson et al., 2017.)

5.4.1 Working as a digital nomad

The traditional notion that working means an activity that happens at specific times at a specific place in order to get paid is changing. Work is not as restricted in terms of when and where it takes place anymore, especially regarding knowledge work. (Richter & Richter, 2019.) Digital nomads rarely follow a fixed nine-to-five routine but rather enjoy their possibilities of flexibility by allocating their working time according to their own preferences and professional situation. Of course, they are responsible themselves to acquire enough work and meet the needs of their business and client. (Jarrahi et al., 2019; Reichenberger, 2018.)

Person A highlights that the life of a digital nomad is dynamic, and things change a lot more compared to being a traditional employee with a fixed salary. He continues that even though he has no fixed hours, he still has deadlines and is responsible for meeting those deadlines.

A: No one will come and do my job for me. If I don't do my work as expected, I don't get paid. I don't have fixed hours, but there are meetings or negotiations at certain times, which I don't have so much control over. Other than that, I allocate my working time as I want. Sometimes a few hours in the morning and a few in the evening. Sometimes I have off days and sometimes I work through the weekend. If I don't have any jobs to do or if I feel like not working for a while, I'll have a vacation."

According to Person D, the main difference between being a digital nomad compared to an employee is having full control and responsibility.

D: "As an employee, you do what you are told to do. As an entrepreneur, you do what you believe is the best thing to do. The problem is that you must figure it out yourself what to do at any given time and why. When something goes wrong, you can simply watch to the mirror. You can skip all the pointless debates about who did what and whose fault was it."

Digital nomads often have a very different and more dynamic work-life balance than traditional employees. They usually have blurred professional and personal lives, sometimes intentionally. (Jarrahi et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2018.) According to Reichenberger (2018), digital nomads seek a balanced and holistic lifestyle, in which both

the professional work and the personal time gives them motivation and fulfilment. Person A has not had any major problems with work-life balance. He plans beforehand, for example, how much to work next month.

A: *“I’m okay with working overtime or on weekends as long as no one is forcing me to. I plan one month at a time how much I’m going to work and charge this month approximately. In theory, there would be work for every hour of the day, but I don’t want that. I also want to spend time to build my own company further, which takes time, but I don’t get paid for that.”*

Digital nomadism is a technology-enabled form of work. Digital nomads use various digital solutions to perform and organize their work. Digital nomads are heavily reliant on the underlying digital infrastructures. They are continually connected, and their work relies on the ability to share information via internet. The digital tools that digital nomads use range from more general in nature to more profession-specific. Often, they use the same solutions and platforms during their free time, for example, to connect to their friends and family. (See, e.g., Aroles et al., 2020; Kong et al., 2020; Nash et al., 2018.) The interviewees use a wide range of digital solutions. What they have in common is that they all need a laptop, mobile phone, and an internet connection to do their work. All of them use similar solutions for communication, such as phone calls, email, and Microsoft Teams. The main differences between the interviewees are in the profession-specific software and applications.

A: *“Well, basically I just need a laptop. On the software side, I use many different platforms and applications to do data analytics and to develop something basic, such as Excel, VBA, SQL, PowerBI, PowerPoint, Sheets, web development platforms, and graphics applications such as Canva. Then I use tracker applications to track my working times and my company’s situation and so on.”*

B: *“Everything regarding my work can be done digitally. I use various applications for writing and visual editing, communication applications, and cloud services for file sharing.”*

C: *“The most important applications for me are Adobe products.”*

The work of digital nomads does not tie them to any specific location. They are known to combine work with travelling, and they quite often move from one workspace to another. Digital nomads typically desire for adventure and travel a lot to gain new experiences. Naturally, the length and frequency of travelling varies between digital nomads, but generally they leverage their locational independence by changing

workspaces as they prefer. (Hemsley et al., 2020; Mancinelli, 2020; Jarrahi et al., 2019.) However, the restrictions of movement caused by Covid-19 have forced people, including digital nomads, to reduce unnecessary movement and travelling (Richter, 2020). Every one of the interviewees have used their locational independence as digital nomads to travel more but have been forced to reduce international travel in 2020. Person D highlighted an interesting insight about the importance of having clients already before committing to working abroad.

D: *“I have worked from abroad for many years even if my clients were from Finland. It certainly would not have been easy to acquire clients if I had just gone straight ahead to work from Thailand, for example, and tried to get new clients while being there. I’m sure they wouldn’t have bought from me any services in that case. However, before I went abroad, I had already a large network, contacts, and personal relationships with many clients who trusted me and my work. In this way working from abroad is a viable option.”*

A: *“I have travelled a lot before Covid. In 2020, I’ve worked from many different locations within Finland. But yes, without Covid I would be working abroad currently. I prefer countries that are close to the same time zone as my current Finnish clients but that’s not that important really. I was going to work from Australia in 2020.”*

Digital nomads rarely need an actual office. They are known to use various workspaces, such as their homes, cafeterias, other public spaces, and coworking spaces. Coworking spaces are popular among digital nomads because there they can socialize with like-minded people, collaborate, and gain inspiration. (Orel, 2019; Wang et al., 2019.) A coworking space is the main place to work from for Person B and Person C. Person A also has positive experiences from coworking spaces.

B: *“I have worked while travelling abroad, but I came into a conclusion that when travelling, I want to focus on my leisure time, not on working that much. For some time now, I have been renting a coworking space, which is my main working space. It helps me to organize my day and keep a more structured work-life balance. I also variably work from home and public places, such as libraries and cafeterias.”*

C: *“Currently, I work from a coworking space for half a week and the other half from home. There are, for example, other designers, journalists, photographers, and architects working from the same coworking space.”*

A: *“I liked a coworking space and went there regularly for a short time before that one was shut down in 2020. I think I was more efficient there than at home.”*

5.4.2 Running a business as a digital nomad

Compared to more traditional entrepreneurs, digital nomads do not have as high barriers to enter the market. For example, digital nomads do not necessarily need an office, employees, or a warehouse to store physical goods. (Wang et al., 2019.) Person A also notes that there are differences between being a digital nomad entrepreneur and a more traditional entrepreneur. Person B adds that founding a company is easy and cheap, at least in Finland, and when being a digital nomad, fixed costs are likely low.

A: *“Being a digital nomad entrepreneur is much different than being a traditional entrepreneur. I don’t have any wealth or property tied to this, so I have nothing to lose. I have basically zero fixed costs. If I fail, I can always start again.”*

B: *“It is not that risky to at least try out living as a self-employed digital nomad. If it doesn’t work out, you can always go back to being an employee.”*

According to the experiences of Person A, many organizations are lagging in utilizing data and technology. A worker with business and technology understanding can be extremely valuable.

A: *“I definitely think that any young person with some business understanding combined with creativity and digital skills, even proficiency with Excel can be enough, can drastically improve a company in ways the executives did not even think of. This is especially true in SMEs.”*

Companies are increasingly hiring digital nomads and other gig workers rather than hiring permanent employees, especially in project-based jobs that require highly specialized knowledge and skills (Kong et al., 2020; Nash et al., 2018). This can be beneficial for companies, consumers, and workers by increasing flexibility and making work more adaptable to sudden changes and demands in a dynamic economy (Thompson, 2019). According to Person A, there is a place for digital nomads from the company’s viewpoint as well. Especially in the case where a company wants to improve their operations. He says that hiring a digital nomad is often more cost-effective and flexible for the company than hiring a permanent employee. According to Richter and Richter (2019), one positive aspect of hiring digital nomads is a lesser cost of management. There is not as much bureaucracy and mandatory procedures compared to traditional employees. Furthermore, Person A makes an insightful notion that hiring a digital nomad for a specific project can often be much more cost-effective than hiring a large consultant company when external workforce is needed.

A: *“I’ve noticed that companies often think there are only two options; hire a permanent employee or hire a consultant company. Digital nomads hit the sweet spot in the middle. Often, it is much cheaper to hire a digital nomad to do a small project-based assignment than to hire a permanent employee to do it. Depends on the case of course, but also hiring big consultant companies are too expensive for many. It’s a perfect win-win situation really, the company saves more, and the digital nomad earns more.”*

Person D has had, for example, such deals with clients that she works one day per week for that client at their office. Person E has similar arrangements.

D: *“I have in some cases sold certain days to spend with a client at their headquarters and otherwise do work for them flexibly from elsewhere. Clients value this kind of service that I agree to visit them sometimes and spend time with their employees that are part of the same projects. I have some clients that I have worked with in this manner for many years now.”*

E: *“I mainly work from my home. Occasionally, I visit the clients that I consult.”*

Person A draws attention to the notion that digital nomads could be a great way for an organization to get fresh out-of-the-box ideas and come up with something new, because in many cases a company has gotten too accustomed and comfortable to their established ways of doing things as they always have.

A: *“Hiring new employees may not change anything, as they are often just taught to do the same things in the same way and follow the existing organization culture. A digital nomad could give a totally different viewpoint from outside and refresh the old ways.”*

Digital nomads are often reliant on gig work. When doing gig work digital nomads work as independent contractors for short periods of time with flexible arrangements. (Mancinelli, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017.) Many digital nomads have started their independent working career by doing gig work (Thompson, 2019). Interviewees A and B tell that they started small doing shorter assignments. Person D says that with good references new clients can trust you immediately with larger projects.

A: *“The results were good, so I have been gradually getting larger projects to do and more complex problems to solve. Nowadays my clients don’t really care how much time I use. For example, they give me a problem to solve, I think of some kind of a solution and then propose it with a timetable and a cost estimation. With multiple successful projects delivered, I receive larger ones and gain confidence to charge more also.”*

B: *“With a new client, I typically receive smaller tasks to do and in time if everything goes well, they ask me to work on larger projects.”*

D: *“My clients tend to trust the judgement of the people that have recommended my services to them and I have my prior designs to showcase, so typically there is no need to start small with a new client to gain their trust towards my work. Over the years I have also learned to sell my work in such a way that the client can be confident that I know what I’m doing.”*

The interviewees say that it varies in what manner they charge their clients, mostly project-based or hourly billing.

D: *“Usually I make an offer with a project-based billing. Another option I use is that if the client is willing for a longer-term deal, then I could bill hourly. But I’m not selling any small individual cases on hourly billing.”*

In business relations trust is a crucial component, especially in the case of digital nomads, because the client cannot physically oversee the work activities and in most cases does not know the worker in person. Honesty and communication build trust. Explaining the digital tools and resources used and showcasing the work from time to time further establish trust. (Kong et al., 2020.) A working arrangement with a digital nomad may be an unusual activity for the client, so building trust from the beginning is essential to receive work to do. (Thompson, 2019). According to Person A, it is vital to build trust with a client and it does not happen automatically. It also takes time but can lead to larger jobs. Person C highlights the importance of regular communication.

A: *“For example, I have one client for which I have delivered different kinds of development and data analytics projects for over a year, and nowadays I have access to more of their databases so I can deliver increasingly important and insightful projects.”*

C: *“Depends on a project, but on average I have regular dialog with a client. For example, sending a sample or prototype, getting feedback, discussing next steps, and so on.”*

It is an ongoing challenge for a digital nomad to have enough work and clients and keep everything organized. With successful deliverables on time and performing well increase the likelihood of getting more work and the possibility to charge more in the future. Reputation is important in the gig economy and positive feedback validates trust. Much of the work and new projects that digital nomads get, come from referrals and recommendations. (Kong et al. 2020; Thompson, 2019.) Referrals have been the main way to acquire new clients for all the interviewees.

A: *“The way I have acquired more clients and more work has been through references. I have delivered something successful for a client and then been recommended to someone else with similar problems. Existing clients are my gateway to new clients.”*

B: *“I haven’t done any marketing or sales online for my own company yet. I have received my clients via word-of-mouth, my network, and referrals.”*

C: *“Interestingly I have not had to actively search for clients at any point, not even in the beginning. New clients have come from referrals. For example, people I know have recommended to someone who could need me. I think that flexible graphic designers are also in an increasing demand.”*

D: *“Completely with references. For example, I work with a large client with hundreds of employees and inevitably some employee changes to another employer and when the need arises in that other company, they recommend me. I’m grateful that I have never had to do any separate marketing.”*

E: *“I am not a marketing-oriented person, it is not natural to me at all. I have decided that my companies don’t need to grow any bigger than they organically do. I receive my clients from my network and referrals. Finding the first client is the most difficult. In an ideal situation, you have a client already before starting a company. Then the business grows from there with successful projects.”*

Person A pointed out an insight that was not discussed in the literature review, which is that a digital nomad should aim to have more than one client to reduce risks of sudden changes in the work situation. Furthermore, fully committing to one client reduces the possibilities to search for more tempting offers.

A: *“It’s important that you are not dependent on only one client and that all your time doesn’t go to just one client. You should have the possibility to search and accept new interesting projects from elsewhere. In an excellent situation, you have more work offers than there is time and more potential clients than you can accept. But having only one client is risky.”*

Most organizations have formed around the ideology of a fixed and internalized population of stationary workers. Even though they could leverage the possibilities of digital nomads, not all organizations are receptive to the idea of hiring them. (Hemsley et al., 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019.) Many companies are not familiar with this kind of working arrangement (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). According to the interviewees, companies should at least try hiring a digital nomad, if possible, because it gives additional flexibility, for example.

A: *“In my view companies should at least give a chance for a digital nomad. Once a client called me after a successful project and thanked me for being the resource they desperately needed but could not get elsewhere. Digital nomads are also much easier to hire and fire, so there is that as well. One client calls me a “flexible resource”, which is kind of funny.”*

B: *“My clients are mostly small businesses and organizations, who cannot afford to hire a permanent employee to do that kind of work that I do, or don’t need anyone to do that full-time. This arrangement is great for them, because they only pay for the actual work done and there are not that much side costs. It is less risky for them this way.”*

C: *“For ad-hoc tasks that do not need to be performed constantly every day, a digital nomad could be a very good choice. Digital nomads can be used on-demand, so you don’t have to pay them all the time, only when there is actually work for them. A digital nomad is a cost-effective and low-risk option for many situations.”*

D: *“Companies rarely need a full-time designer, so it is a task that is often wise to outsource. Furthermore, comparing to my time as an inhouse designer, for some reason a designer hired from outside for a specific project is more credible partner than if you used your own employee for that. Often, hiring a specialist to do a specific task is better than using the skills that an all-around employee might have. Also hiring a digital nomad doesn’t show up in wage costs.”*

E: *“There are several reasons to hire a digital nomad. For example, for budgeting reasons, or in cases where highly specialized skills are needed, or if the company does not have the time or knowledge for a precise enough recruitment. In addition, at least on my industry, the best programmers are not usually looking for an employment. They are often more distinctive personalities, going their own paths and doing things their way.”*

Person D continues about how the attitude towards hiring temporal workers has changed over the last 20 years, at least regarding designers.

D: *“Companies have increasingly wanted to have themselves this sense of safety, that when they order from an external professional service rather than use an internal resource, they can trust that the work is done as well and thoroughly as possible. Of course, you need to get your business at high enough level so that the client believes your work to be more worthwhile than that of anyone internal.”*

5.4.3 Digital nomadism as a phenomenon

The evolving labour market combined with socioeconomic changes have initiated new types of employment in the modern digital economy. Digital nomadism is a growing type of employment and an alternative to a traditional office job. The nature of work is changing and even the very idea of how ‘work’ is defined is changing. Digital nomads are in resistance to the more established work practices. (Orel, 2019; Wang et al., 2019.) Person A thinks this is because people are getting dissatisfied with the old-fashioned organizational structures. Person D brings up the impact of managers.

A: *“Many young and capable people are not getting paid enough relatively to what value they can bring to the organization. The common way to think is still that one must start from the bottom and slowly climb their way up the organizational ladder. There are no such restrictions when working outside. You don’t have to start from the bottom, you start from wherever you’re capable of. Age and work experience doesn’t matter, all that matters is what you can do.”*

D: *“Maybe organizations should aim to further improve managerial practices, if they want to make employment more tempting for people compared to entrepreneurship.”*

Person B believes career progression can be much faster when self-employed.

B: *“You can choose it yourself to seek more challenging tasks and jobs that you could earn more from compared to chasing promotions as an employee. There is the possibility to progress faster as a digital nomad. Of course, this is not certain, and it depends on yourself how fast you can progress no matter the profession.”*

According to Person C, the desire for freedom is behind the growing digital nomadism phenomenon. She also says that people do not want to be limited to one education or one profession for all their lives. There is no limit on what and how one can learn more and there is also demand for very specialized skills globally. One can work in many different ways in many different industries during a lifetime.

C: *“I think it’s freedom in all its many forms. Especially millennials increasingly want to decide themselves what, when, and where they work. Furthermore, it is continuously becoming easier to find work that suits those exact skills and interests you have, because of the global networks and global mobility. I think a few decades ago it was much more straightforward. Then you acquired a profession and got a corresponding local job. Now you have basically endless possibilities and different ways to earn a living, even the most niche concepts can thrive in global markets.”*

Digital nomadism is a growing phenomenon especially among the younger generation of knowledge workers (Jarrahi et al., 2019). Person A believes this is mainly because the younger digitally skilled people increasingly realize their worth and potential to generate value, even if they are young and unexperienced in the job markets.

A: *“I’ve noticed that especially young and technologically capable people nowadays realize more the value they can bring to the business world, and that value does not need to be restricted to certain companies, locations, or fixed salaries. Your worth doesn’t have to have anything to do with age. Young people have the courage to point it out when something is done stupidly and in an old-fashioned way. If one knows how to do things better, there can be an enormous business opportunity.”*

Person B adds that also the desire for versatility, flexibility, and travelling are explaining factors of this phenomenon.

B: *“In my view, younger people value versatility and flexibility in work life. They are more hesitant to commit to a specific company, for example. Furthermore, travelling and experiencing the world is really popular among the younger generation, and the possibility to combine work with travel is tempting and exciting.”*

Person D and Person E highlight the impact of institutional encouragement towards entrepreneurship.

D: *“Young people have the courage to do something like this nowadays. When I was graduating in the ’90s, no one talked about self-employment, it wasn’t a real option. Now that option is present from much earlier on and entrepreneurship is taught in schools. Moreover, the way people see work careers now is different. From those graduating nowadays, who is actually going to work for the same employer for 35 years anymore? Nowadays people have the courage to try out different things and pave their own path.”*

E: *“At least in Aalto University there has been formed a community and a network of likeminded entrepreneurial people, which encourages and supports people on their entrepreneurial path. Overall, self-employment is more accepted nowadays and, for example, you can hear and see the digital nomad lifestyle and their success stories all around.”*

Covid-19 caused lockdowns and other restrictions, which made digital work the new norm in 2020 for many employees that were usually located in offices as well. The restrictions forced millions of people to work from home and to become familiar with various digital work and communication tools. Some general conclusions can already be assumed from the rapid shift to more digital work during 2020. First is that many workers

are growing into more skilled users of different digital tools. Secondly, companies are realizing that often work can be successfully done remotely too, and the needs of their customers can be met with digital means as well. (Richter, 2020.) According to all the interviewees, Covid-19 has changed the way people work and how people think about remote working significantly.

A: *“Covid changed everything, all the prejudices against distance working have vanished. I’ve noticed that many have realized this year that distance working is a viable option and that the work can be done just as effectively, if not more, as before. It also saves the time of pointless commuting. This has been a great change in attitudes. Of course, there are times one needs to visit the office and some things are better done face-to-face in the same place, but in general, people have realized that location does not matter in many work situations. The business won’t just vanish if people aren’t coming to the office.”*

B: *“Many people who didn’t know before Covid if they can work digitally or if working digitally is a good option for them, know it better now. Same is true for companies as well.”*

C: *“Distance working and virtual meetings are here to stay. Companies have learned to trust their workers even if they work remotely.”*

E: *“Maybe the more traditional organizations should try to learn and implement something from the digital nomad way of doing things, such as increasing flexibility and trust towards their employees.”*

All the interviewees agree that digital working is becoming a new norm, and the attitudes have changed towards more accepting of flexibility regarding time and place of work. They see that these changes in attitudes are positive for digital nomadism. For Person A, the Covid-19 situation brought more work to do.

A: *“Companies have become more flexible regarding working location and time. This may have even become a new norm. It has now been proven that work can be done from wherever and that’s great for digital nomads. Actually, because Covid I got more assignments to do. Some clients wanted to know how they could use and understand their data and information more efficiently and make well-informed business decisions.”*

D: *“This has been a massive leap towards a more flexible and digital working culture.”*

Person A also notes the negative side of the Covid-19 situation for his work. Person E also brings up the negative side of Covid-19.

A: *“Before Covid I met with the clients in person more frequently and visited their office occasionally. That was more motivating, and it helped to create trust for both parties. Being completely distant to a client is not ideal.”*

E: *“Well, this situation kind of mitigates the whole point of this lifestyle and of the acquired freedom. In any case, you are stuck inside these four walls no matter if you are a digital nomad or an employee. I cannot anymore just take off and work abroad for a few weeks. The benefits of digital nomadism are currently reduced.”*

5.5 Challenges and risks of digital nomadism

There are challenges and risks in digital nomadism for both the digital nomads and the organizations that hire them. Digital nomadism is not for anyone, as it is a lifestyle where a high tolerance for uncertainty is needed. Risks are a natural counterpart of possibilities. For example, there is the possibility of earning more than as an employee, but also the risk of earning nothing. The lifestyle of a digital nomad is much more dynamic and turbulent than that of a typical employee with a stable job. (See, e.g., Richter & Richter, 2019; Ens et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2018.)

5.5.1 Personal challenges

There are a lot of uncertainties in the everyday work life of a digital nomad. Their work is more uncertain and insecure compared to traditional employment. (Orel, 2019; Prester et al., 2019.) Depending on, for example, market conditions and the level of demand for their skills, they may have a vast amount of work or sometimes no work at all. (Wang et al., 2019) Digital nomads do not necessarily have access to a similar safety net compared to what permanent employees typically enjoy (Richter & Richter, 2019). All the interviewees have similar thoughts about the uncertainties and constant risks of digital nomadism. The most prominent challenge and uncertainty is securing the next month’s payment.

E: *“The first and the biggest challenge is making the decision to abandon a secure monthly fixed payment in order to pursue your own business goals as a digital nomad.”*

A: *“Occasionally I stress over the fact that a client might call me any time and say that I’ve done shit job and we are no longer doing work with you. There’s this constant uncertainty because I don’t have any fixed monthly salary. In the beginning, it was more stressful when I had only small projects and maybe one client, but things have stabilized.”*

I can be rather confident nowadays that my work and income won't just suddenly end. My income varies every month, but when I look back for a year it has always been quite good. On average much better than before. But the risk of a low-income month is constantly there, which is stressful."

C: "As an employee, you just wait for someone to give you work to do. As a digital nomad you must get that work yourself. Sometimes there is no work to do, which means no earnings. You can never be sure about the work situation. For example, during the worst time of Covid crisis, there was very little work to do. Clients were saving money aggressively and a temporal graphic designer was naturally the easiest to get rid of."

D: "During any crisis, companies focus on their essential core processes, not on hiring new external workforce. Wisely, they ensure first the payment of their own employees."

Loneliness is one of the most notable challenges for digital nomads. Their work as self-employed is inherently lonely and there are no colleagues necessarily to interact with. Digital nomads operate digitally and are known to frequently change locations, which makes maintaining social relationships challenging. (Thompson, 2019; Nash et al., 2018.) This was a common challenge among the interviewees. All the interviewees counterweight the lonely working environment by spending free time with their family and friends.

A: "There's the lack of social connection and community, especially when working long hours alone. It's a lonely grind. Sometimes I get a cabin fever, so I like to change places from time to time."

B: "Loneliness doesn't mean only the lack of social connection in work, but also the fact that I personally have all the responsibility over everything. To have all the responsibility is great and motivating, but on the other hand, it is also very stressful and burdensome."

Other problems that were identified in the literature that digital nomads commonly share are, for example, maintaining productivity, motivation, and balanced work-life situation. It is typical that work and free time get blurred. (Kong et al., 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019.) Digital nomads are responsible for organizing their work themselves. One solution is to have clear boundaries and schedule between working time and personal life. Some digital nomads use applications to help with productivity and scheduling. (Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018.) The interviewees noted that it is sometimes challenging to maintain a work-life balance and stay organized.

B: *“Working hours and my free time get often blurred. It is more difficult to have structured timetables compared to being in an office-based employment.”*

C: *“I wish I were more organized with my work, but I am becoming better at it. I have initial schedules and plans for the day, but sometimes I adjust them to some direction. It varies a lot from day to day. I started using a coworking space in order to stay more organized and to have more a clear work-life balance. It is difficult to relax at home if all the work is there as well.”*

D: *“How to keep work and other aspects of life separated and balanced is a challenge and a negative side of this lifestyle. It depends a lot, for example, on whether you have a separate office for work or if the work is with you at home too. Easily when the work is interesting and fulfilling you might work too much.”*

Furthermore, what came up in some of the interviewees, is that self-employed digital nomads need also to take care of their business, including administrative work.

A: *“Sometimes it’s tough to balance with client assignments and improving my own business. Often the administrative tasks feel like a burden. Being self-employed means that I must do everything myself and it’s heavy sometimes.”*

C: *“There are a lot of bureaucratic tasks that must be done that as an employee you wouldn’t need to think about.”*

E: *“There are also legal and contractual matters that are challenging to handle, especially with international clients.”*

The difficulties for digital nomads in evaluating their own work was not that much discussed in the literature. According to Person A, it is challenging to estimate the monetary value of his work, timetables, how much to bill, and how to put that all into a reasonable agreement. Furthermore, if things change, it is challenging to adjust these variables.

A: *“Sometimes it’s difficult to evaluate how much I can charge from the client and it’s a struggle to define a suitable agreement in which I’m not billing too much nor too little. What if I spend a month doing a project and it goes completely wrong, should I still charge from that work or be without payment? Or if it takes way longer than I initially estimated? I also have cases where I charged way too little, realizing later that the result was much more valuable than what I agreed to charge. It is difficult to find a balance.”*

Person B mainly charges her clients based on hours worked. She finds it difficult occasionally to determine the hours to charge from. Person C prefers billing by hours.

B: *“An employee gets the same fixed salary from both the busy days and the days when there is not that much actual work to do. Sometimes when I work, I am tired and not that productive, but sometimes I get the work done very efficiently. It is difficult to determine then how many hours I actually worked and should charge. Also, if I think about the task on my free time, should I charge that time too?”*

C: *“The initial estimations of how many hours a project takes are rarely accurate, so I prefer that I can bill the hours that are over the initial estimation if the project turns out to be a larger one.”*

5.5.2 Challenges for organizations

There are challenges for organizations as well regarding the hiring of digital nomads. Remote temporal workers may be challenging to manage and build a relationship with. (Hemsley et al., 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019.) If a large part of a company’s workforce are temporal workers, creating an organizational culture could also prove challenging. Due to physical distance, there is naturally less social interaction and support from others within the organization, which hinders the sense of belonging. (Kong et al., 2020; Thompson, 2019.)

A: *“Committing a digital nomad to your company is much more difficult than in the case of actual employees.”*

Trust is essential in a work agreement between a company and a digital nomad. The work of digital nomads can be difficult to oversee or micromanage if that is wanted. In addition, there can be differences or even disagreements between the parties regarding values, culture, rules, and ways of work. Sometimes the expectations and responsibilities are not mutually understood. To avoid these challenges, building trust and having effective communication are key. (Kong et al., 2020.) Person A agrees that building trust is essential, although establishing trust is a challenge for the company as well as it is for the digital nomad. Person B highlights the importance of communication and Person C says that a digital nomad is more unknown variable than an employee.

A: *“At the beginning it is difficult to trust a digital nomad. Trust needs to be built. Especially in the first project the communication should be as open as possible. With a new client, I have status checks more frequently. They want to know what I’ve done and see some concrete results. It wouldn’t work if I just told them that I have worked on this for hundred hours if I had no results to show. With time trust gets stronger and they can be confident that I do what was agreed upon and that their investment in me is justified.”*

B: *“To avoid challenges, I’ve found it important that we get to know each other a little first with the client and communicate openly what are the needs, what should happen and when, with what resources, and other ground rules for the project.”*

C: *“It may be difficult to trust a stranger who does not work in sight. For employees, there are much more thorough evaluations, background checks, and skill assessments before the decision to hire. You cannot be so thorough and sure when hiring a digital nomad.”*

Person D and Person E say that the risk for companies is that they might not get what they have ordered.

D: *“They can never be sure if the work they get will be of the quality they expected and were willing to pay for. Then there are potential challenging situations, such as what if I fall sick during a project.”*

E: *“Clients typically stress about whether the code they receive is of high enough quality, and what to do if the code breaks right after the job is done. For a project, a client allocates a budget of time and money to be spent on that project. If the project takes, for example, six months and fails the biggest issue is the time that was wasted, not only the wasted money. They can’t make that time back and they might be too late now for a new release or something else important, so there are negative multiplier effects.”*

Person A further points out that it is difficult for a client to track what has been done and how, which also makes agreeing on pricing difficult for a client.

A: *“Tracking the work of a digital nomad is definitely a challenge for the company. If the project is agreed to be delivered on a fixed price, then no problem, but if the work is agreed to be billed hourly then it’s more difficult. I’ve noticed that companies don’t like the idea if I’m going to charge them based on hours worked, because they cannot see anything of the actual process themselves, or even understand what the process includes. It’s difficult for them to validate the hours and it increases uncertainty for them. Companies fear overbilling.”*

Something that has not been really discussed in the literature is this challenge for companies to elaborate a clear assignment. If they identify a problem, they might not know how to address it and in which ways it could be solved, so it is difficult to define the concrete next steps. Sometimes they cannot identify a problem at all and then someone from outside could notice it and propose a solution. This is something that Person A brought up.

A: *“One challenge for companies I’ve noticed many times is to define the assignment properly. Often, they are not sure what they want. I rarely get an assignment where it is totally clear what to do and what they want in the end. In most cases they have identified some sort of a problem or an opportunity and then ask me if I can do something about it. If I think I can, I propose that. In some cases, I have a vague idea about something I’ve noticed myself that could be helpful for a client and then I try to sell them the idea and initiate a project.”*

Person E has noticed that it is challenging for many companies to find the right people for the task.

E: *“It’s difficult for many companies to hire the right people to fix problems that they don’t understand thoroughly themselves. They may not know what they are looking for. Recruitment processes are difficult in these cases. Hiring a digital nomad, who can explain what to do and propose how to fix the problems, is often better and less risky solution than hiring an employee.”*

6 RESULTS

6.1 Analysis

The purpose of this research has been to construct a better understanding of the digital nomadism phenomenon. The aim was to answer questions, such as why people are increasingly working as digital nomads, what motivates them, how do they operate themselves and with clients, how do they fit into the larger economy and what are the challenges and risks of digital nomadism.

These questions were studied in the literature review part in addition to researching how digital nomadism has evolved and how digital nomads generally live their digital nomad lifestyle. In the empirical research section, a few digital nomads of today were interviewed regarding the same topics studied in the literature review. The aim was to find out similarities and differences compared to the literature as well as additional insights from the interviewees that were not in the literature review.

The summary of the interviews is divided into Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5. Motivations, values, and characteristics are represented in Table 3. The comments by the interviewees regarding these subjects were similar to what was discussed in the existing literature. The motivations of the interviewees to be a digital nomad were not exactly like in the literature. They were not contradicting either but rather complementary. In the literature the main identified motivations were the desire for freedom and adventure, autonomous work-life, opportunities outside of traditional employment, and finding fulfilling work. Additional motivations from the interviews were irritation towards traditional organizational environment, variety of work and experiences, and constant learning. The values of work-life were very much the same in the interviews as they were in the literature. Regarding typical characteristics of digital nomads, the interviewees provided additional insight. The characteristics they highlighted that did not come up that much in the literature were social skills, resiliency, confidence, passion, and self-discipline.

Table 3 Summary of the qualitative research: Motivations, values, and characteristics of a digital nomad

Topics	Interviews
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased freedom and autonomy -Irritation towards traditional organizational environment -Business opportunities -Variety of work and experiences -Constant learning
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Freedom -Flexibility -Autonomy -Locational freedom and travelling
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Productivity -Creativity and problem-solving -Digital skills -Independence, ability to self-manage and self-organize -Changing of locations -Tolerance of risk and uncertainty -Working alone -Trustworthiness, honesty -Responsibility, accountability -Focus on output -Social skills -Resiliency, confidence -Passion -Self-discipline

Table 4 contains the summary of the answers about working as a digital nomad and running a business as a digital nomad. The comments regarding working as a digital nomad were coherent with the literature review. The interviewees were passionate about the freedom when working as a digital nomad, being able to decide themselves what to work on, and having all the control. As Person A put it, he is perfectly happy to work overtime if it is by his own decision. All the interviewees enjoy switching workspaces from time to time and would travel more without the current restrictions. About working abroad, Person D pointed out valuable insight that it is a much more viable option to work from abroad if you already have a solid client base before moving abroad than if you tried to start acquiring clients while abroad, especially if the work is anyhow country-specific. The usage of digital technologies was also similar between the interviewees. Laptop,

mobile phone, and internet connection are the necessities. The differences come mainly with the various profession specific tools. Covid-19 has accelerated the acceptance towards digital work and distance work, but on the other hand, it has reduced the freedom of people, including the benefits of digital nomadism.

Table 4 Summary of the qualitative research: The digital nomad working life and business aspect

Topics	Interviews
Working as a digital nomad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flexibility to arrange the time and place of work, freedom to travel -Dynamic work environment and work situation, no fixed salary -Solely responsible for acquiring enough work and meeting client needs -Dynamic work-life balance, often blurred professional and personal lives -Reliant on digital technologies and infrastructure, profession specific applications -Digital nomads use locational independence to travel more and to use various workspaces, including coworking spaces -Career and work tasks of a digital nomad can be as versatile as preferred
Running a business as a digital nomad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Low or non-existent fixed costs to start a business as a digital nomad -Hiring a digital nomad is often more cost-effective and flexible for a company than hiring a permanent employee or a large consultant company -Digital nomads are best suitable for project work and ad-hoc assignments -Typically, with a new client the work starts with a smaller project -When trust between a digital nomad and a client is more established, larger and more responsible work typically follows -Honesty, communication, and transparency are key to build trust -Most of the new work assignments come through referrals and existing clients
Digital nomadism as a phenomenon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing desire for freedom, new experiences, and independent work-life -Especially some young and capable people are being dissatisfied to the traditional organizational structures and work environment, to which digital nomadism provides an alternative -There are increasingly business opportunities and demand for digital nomads -Not restricted to any particular education, profession, industry, skill, or background -Career progression can be faster when self-employed -No need to be tied into a specific company -Covid-19 has changed how people work, the attitudes towards remote working more positive, and made digital working the new norm -Covid-19 has mitigated the benefits of being a digital nomad

The third area of interest in the interviews were the challenges of digital nomadism, which are summarized in Table 5. The challenges that the interviewees brought up were rather well-identified in the literature as well. The literature and all the interviewees agree that the life of a digital nomad is highly uncertain with varying income and insecure work positions, acquiring enough clients is stressful, the work is typically lonely, and all the responsibility lies on their shoulders. Furthermore, maintaining productivity, motivation, and a balanced work-life situation were found to be challenging as well. However, as Person A and Person D pointed out, it is easier to motivate yourself to work overtime, for example, than it would be if someone else forced them to do it. There were some challenges that the interviewees highlighted that were not discussed in the literature review. For example, the burden of taking care of their own businesses including administrative tasks and expanding the business in addition to the client work is challenging. An additional insight that came up from the interviewees were also that it is a constant challenge to evaluate the worth of their work and to estimate how much to charge from the client.

Table 5 also contains the identified challenges for organizations that hire digital nomads. Challenges identified in the literature were managing and building a relationship with a digital nomad, establishing trust, tracking work, and misalignment of expectations or misunderstanding of the true skills of a digital nomad. The interviewees did not, however, mention any problems with misunderstandings or misaligned expectations, although it is naturally a potential risk. Additional challenges that the interviewees highlighted were the difficulty of estimating how much to pay for the digital nomad and that it is sometimes a challenge for an organization to define a clear and specific assignment for a digital nomad.

Table 5 Summary of the qualitative research: Challenges of digital nomadism

Topics	Interviews
Personal challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work is typically uncertain and insecure -The work amount fluctuates, constant stress over acquiring and maintaining enough work -Loneliness -Challenging to maintain productivity, motivation, and a balanced work-life situation -Blurred professional and personal lives -Having all the responsibility can be a burden -Taking care of their own businesses and administrative tasks -Evaluating the worth of own work -Estimating how much to charge and how much time a job takes
Challenges for organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Committing a digital nomad to the client company -Establishing trust, having enough communication -Difficult to get to know a digital nomad well -Tracking or supervising the work of a digital nomad -Estimating and negotiating how much to pay for a digital nomad -Defining a problem and elaborating a clear assignment for a digital nomad

6.2 Limitations

There are some limitations that need to be considered regarding this study. The topic itself is of relative recency, and therefore there are not that many academic studies to consider yet. According to Reichenberger (2018), the available information about digital nomads is fragmented and often not of scientific nature. Further research could enlighten the possibilities for businesses and governments to react to the digital nomadism movement. The digital nomadism phenomenon can be expected to shift and change in unpredictable ways, and hence, the current understanding and knowledge could become somewhat outdated relatively quickly. This calls for the action of continuous research of the phenomenon and the people that are part of the digital nomadism movement.

The main limitation of the empirical research part of this study is that only five digital nomads were interviewed. It is also important to note that all the interviewees were Finnish. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and later carefully translated into English. However, some minor details may have been lost in translation. Digital nomadism is a global phenomenon with digital nomads from all around the world with

various backgrounds and different cultures. All the interviewees in this study were from the same nation and have lived most of their life in Finland, and thus share a similar national culture and background. Although digital nomadism is a global phenomenon, in which the origin is not that meaningful as basically any digital work can be done from anywhere in the world by anyone with suitable skills, it is reasonable to assume that interviewing five digital nomads from the same nation is not a perfect representation of the digital nomad community as a whole. However, the interviews add some valuable up-to-date insight into the lives of digital nomads and affirmation to the prior literature about digital nomadism.

Furthermore, the current global Covid-19 pandemic could change the phenomenon of digital nomadism in various unexpected ways. Lockdowns hinder the digital nomads' ability to move, but on the other hand, the pandemic has also shown the world the possibilities of entirely remote and digital work. Already during 2020, digital work, people's abilities to perform work digitally, and organizations' capability to provide options to work digitally have advanced significantly. Also, technology and digital applications have advanced and expanded rapidly to meet the growing demand. The attitudes of organizations towards remote digital work have changed, partly out of necessity. Millions of people have now experienced what it is like to work digitally. Digital work is becoming a new norm, and it is safe to assume that the world is not going back exactly to that what it was before the pandemic. All these changes mean that prior studies regarding these subjects likely do not represent the current state of the world in a perfectly accurate way.

As of yet, it is unknown how the recent events in the world will affect digital nomadism in the long run. More research is needed about the current state of digital work and remote working. Regarding digital nomadism, especially studies about how digital nomads interact with companies and how could companies better leverage alternative work modalities are currently lacking. Upcoming technological advances and innovations are likely to keep changing the ways digital nomads work. There is also a need to further study the risks of digital nomadism and how technologies affect the construing of work identities.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the increasingly dynamic and global business world the demand for other types of workers than traditional employees is rising. People are more and more choosing the lifestyle of self-employed digital nomads, from which companies can buy services or they can hire them as a temporal workforce. Digital nomads are digital workers who enjoy freedom and global mobility, which allow them to live and work from anywhere in the world. This is made possible by technological advances and favourable global economic conditions. Digital nomads have chosen a lifestyle in which life, work, and travel are intertwined. (Aroles et al., 2020; Richter & Richter, 2019; Jarrahi et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2018.)

To better understand digital nomadism, the phenomenon has been studied in this research by conducting a literature review of existing studies and by empirical research. The aim of this research has been *to construct a more thorough understanding of the digital nomadism phenomenon* with the main research question being: *Why are people increasingly working as digital nomads?* This main question was divided into smaller research questions: 1) *What motivates digital nomads?* 2) *How do digital nomads operate?* 3) *How do digital nomads run their businesses?* 4) *What are the challenges and risks of digital nomadism?*

Digital nomads are a prime example of people and workers who take advantage of the technological advances and innovative digital possibilities that have enabled them location-independent and flexible work. Digital nomadism is a phenomenon arising especially from the desire for freedom and self-actualization. Digital nomadism is an economic and societal activity, which challenges the more traditional ways of work. (Reichenberger, 2018; Ens et al., 2018.) According to Wang et al. (2019), digital nomads are often in resistance towards, for example, institutional routines, consumption, and economic and fiscal policies. However, as Mancinelli (2020) argues, digital nomadism can be seen as an opportunistic adaptation of digital entrepreneurial freedom rather than a complete challenge to the existing system.

The literature review part of this study was divided into three sections: 1) *Digital nomads*, 2) *Economic conditions of digital nomadism*, and 3) *Challenges and risks of digital nomadism*. The first section was about defining digital nomads and digital work, the main characteristics of digital nomads, and technological advances that make digital nomadism possible. In the second section, the economic conditions of digital nomadism

were discussed, including digital nomads as market participants, institutionalization of digital nomads, organizational and governmental viewpoint, and the effect of Covid-19. The third section focused on the personal and organizational challenges and risks of digital nomadism. The empirical research part of this study followed broadly the structure of literature review while going deeper into certain topics. The interviews were semi-structured discussions around three larger themes: 1) *Motivations, values, and characteristics of a digital nomad*, 2) *The digital nomad working life and business aspect*, and 3) *Challenges and risks of digital nomadism*.

The interviews complemented what was discussed in the literature review about the motivations, values, and characteristics of digital nomads. Digital nomads are mainly motivated by the desire for freedom, adventure, and new experiences, increased flexibility regarding the time and place of work, independent lifestyle as an alternative to being dependent on employment, and the possibility of creating and advancing their own businesses. Digital nomads highly value freedom in all aspects as well as flexibility, and autonomy. The life of a digital nomad is not a favourable option for everyone, and a digital nomad generally has or should have certain characteristics. Digital nomads are digitally skilled, productive, and creative problem-solvers. They are passionate about what they do and seek fulfilment in their life and work. As independent workers, they are able to manage and organize themselves, and they can prosper working alone. The life of a digital nomad is dynamic, so tolerance for risk and uncertainty are essential, as well as resiliency and confidence. To thrive in the business world, social skills are important to communicate and sell their services. Trustworthiness, honesty, responsibility, and accountability are characteristics that are needed to acquire clients and maintain a successful business.

One area of specific interest of this research was the business aspect of digital nomadism. The second major theme of the study and the interviews was about working as a digital nomad and running a business as a digital nomad. The interviewees gave additional and timely insight into these topics. Working as a digital nomad means flexibility to arrange the time and place of work. Some digital nomads enjoy working from home, and some use the locational freedom to travel and work abroad. Coworking spaces are popular, with the purpose of having a separate place to work away from home. The work environment is dynamic, including the work situation. Digital nomads have no fixed hours nor fixed salary. They decide themselves how much to work and during which times. Typically, however, digital nomads have blurred professional and personal lives.

They are heavily reliant on digital technologies, applications, and digital infrastructure. Basically, all they require are a laptop, a mobile phone, and internet connection in order to do their work.

Digital nomads running their own businesses are responsible for acquiring enough work and keeping clients satisfied. The career and work tasks can be as varied as they prefer as digital nomads, but it is up to themselves to earn the next month's income. Compared to traditional entrepreneurship, the fixed costs of starting a business as a digital nomad are often low or non-existent. For a potential client organization, hiring a digital nomad can be a more cost-effective and flexible option than hiring a permanent employee. Digital nomads are best suited for project work and ad-hoc assignments, which means work that is important but not so regular that it requires someone to pay for every day. Often, the work with a new client starts with smaller assignments and when enough trust is established, larger and more responsible projects follow. Honesty, open communication, and transparency are essential to build trust between a digital nomad and a client. As was the case with all the interviewees, the majority, if not all, new work assignments come from referrals and recommendations.

Digital nomadism is growing in popularity, especially among the younger generation of digitally skilled people. The interviewees thought of several explanations for this. Some young and capable people are not satisfied with the traditional organizational structures and work environment, to which digital nomadism provides an alternative. Rather than committing to a company as an employee, they seek business opportunities elsewhere while enjoying freedom, new experiences, constant learning, and independent work-life. For example, background, education, and age do not matter and the possibilities for a digital nomad are not restricted to any particular profession, education, or industry. Covid-19 has changed how people work, the attitudes towards remote working more positive, and made digital working the new norm for people and companies.

Challenges and risks of digital nomadism were also a theme of interest in this study. The work of digital nomad is typically uncertain and insecure compared to traditional employment. The amount of work is dynamic, meaning that occasionally there can be too much work and sometimes no work at all. It can also be stressful to acquire new clients and maintain a stable work situation. When self-employed with no colleagues, the work-life can get lonely and maintaining social relationships may be difficult, especially when located abroad. Having all the responsibilities over running a business and meeting client

needs can be a burden. There are administrative tasks that need to be taken care of. For organizations committing a digital nomad can be challenging. Furthermore, it may be difficult to get to know the hired digital nomad enough and establish solid trust. As digital nomads often work from a distance, their work is difficult to supervise and track, especially if there is not enough communication. A notable challenge for both a digital nomad and a client organization is estimating and negotiating a suitable price for the job, defining the problem to be solved, and agreeing on timetables and other details.

This study has provided additional and timely insight into digital nomadism. The aspects of digital nomadism that were in particular focus on this study have not been researched much in the existing literature, most notably the aspect of running a business as a digital nomad, interacting with clients and their viewpoint, and the challenges and risks of digital nomadism. These topics, as well as governmental viewpoint, impacts of Covid-19, leveraging the newest technologies, and how digital nomads could fit into the larger global economy more profoundly need to be researched more in new academic studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview themes and questions

All the interviews followed loosely the same structure. The interviews were discussion-like, so not all followed exactly the same order of topics and questions. Occasionally, the discussion flowed naturally to additional questions to gain deeper insight about the topic.

1. Background information
 - Current work/business situation, previous jobs
 - Age and time as a digital nomad
2. Being a digital nomad
 - Why are you a digital nomad? Motivations
 - What do you value in work-life? Values
 - Characteristics
3. Working and running a business as a digital nomad
 - Day-to-day life
 - Technology, digital tools
 - Managing and organizing your work-life
 - Preferred locations, travelling
 - How do you get clients?
 - Billing and negotiating with clients
 - What are the reasons for the client to hire you rather than an employee?
 - Organizations' attitude towards digital nomads
 - Communication and organizing work with clients
4. Overall
 - The significance of digital nomadism
 - Why is digital nomadism gaining in popularity?
 - Impacts of Covid-19
 - Why should / should not someone be a digital nomad?
 - Why should / should not someone hire a digital nomad?
5. Challenges and risks
 - Personal
 - For the client