



**Vaasan yliopisto**  
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

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# **Work-life balance in remote working conditions**

School of Management  
Master's thesis in Economics  
and Business Administration  
International Business

Vaasa 2022

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****School of Management**

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<b>Title of the Thesis:</b>	Work-life balance in remote working conditions
<b>Degree:</b>	Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
<b>Programme:</b>	International Business
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<b>Year:</b>	2022 <b>Sivumäärä:</b> 103

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**ABSTRACT:**

Koronapandemian alettua etätyöstä tuli uusi normaali monille työntekijöille ympäri maailmaa. Perinteisestä toimistosta kotitoimistoon siirtyminen oli nopea muutos, johon organisaatiot ja työntekijät eivät olleet täysin varautuneet. Muutos on vaikuttanut työntekijöihin monin eri tavoin. Yksi merkittävä muutos liittyy siihen, miten työntekijät ovat pystyneet tasapainottelemaan työtä ja vapaa-aikaa kotoa käsin. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka etätyö vaikuttaa työntekijän työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoon ja kuinka näiden kahden tasapainoa voidaan johtaa. Tutkimuksessa käsitellään etätyön vaikutuksia työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoon, minkälaisia haasteita ja hyötyjä tilanteesta on aiheutunut, kuinka työntekijät voivat johtaa omaa työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoaan, sekä miten esimies sekä organisaatio voivat tukea tässä työntekijöitä.

Tutkimuksessa työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoa tarkastellaan rajateorian näkökulmasta. Teorian mukaan työ ja vapaa-aika ovat toisistaan erillään olevia osa-alueita, jotka ovat vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään. Tutkimus on toteutettu laadullisena tutkimuksena ja tutkimuksen haastattelut toteutettiin puolistrukturoituina teemahaastatteluina. Tutkimukseen haastateltiin seitsemää työntekijäasemassa toimivaa henkilöä eri aloilta ja maista. Lisäksi osalla henkilöistä on esimiestaustaa.

Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittavat, että etätyö vaikuttaa työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoon sekä sen johtamiseen monella eri tapaa. Etätyöstä on tullut normaali työjärjestely pandemian aikana ja työntekijän näkökulmasta sen vaikutukset työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoon ovat olleet pääosin positiivisia. Tutkimuksen tuloksissa ilmeni, että työ ja vapaa-aika ovat merkittävässä vuorovaikutuksessa etätyöskentelyn aikana. Näiden osa-alueiden rajojen hämärtyminen koettiin ajoittaisena haasteena. Kuitenkin tutkimuksessa korostui työn ja vapaa-ajan erottamisen merkitys, jotta toivottu tasapaino näiden kahden välillä voidaan säilyttää. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että etätyössä työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainon hyödyt ovat suurempia kuin haasteet. Haastateltavien mielestä itsensä johtamisen taito ja työkalut ovat merkittävin tapa ylläpitää työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoa. Lisäksi esimiehen ja organisaation tuella on merkittävä rooli työntekijän työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainon ylläpitämisessä. Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittavat, että avoin keskustelu esimiehen kanssa, monipuoliset käytännöt ja linjaukset työntekijän työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoon liittyen, sekä investoinnit työntekijän hyvinvointiin organisaation puolesta ovat tärkeitä tekijöitä, jotta työntekijän työ ja vapaa-ajan tasapainoa voidaan tukea paremmin.

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**KEYWORDS:** Remote work, Covid-19, work-life balance, self-management, managers support, organizational support

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## 1 Introduction

Ways of working and living have changed drastically in post-industrial economies in the last decade. Technological developments have enhanced work beyond traditional offices and working hours, more women are working, expectations of parenthood are changing, and mothers are working more. Moreover, organizations are offering flexible working arrangements in order that employees can change the location, time, and schedule of work, to be suitable for their needs (Field & Chan, 2018).

As information and communication technologies (ICTs) have developed in their capabilities, and with greater availability of high-speed internet, remote working has grown as a new manner of work in the past several decades (Allen et al., 2015, p. 59). For example, in Europe, an average of 5.4% of employed persons worked from home on a regular basis in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020). However, this number has escalated after 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic has required millions of people worldwide to be remote workers (Wang et al. 2020). The acceleration of flexible and digital work arrangements is now on a scale undiscovered before.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, businesses have not been able to operate in the usual way (Bank of England, 2021). Companies have had to let people go to cut costs and stabilize the income of the company. Furthermore, the pandemic has slowed economic activities which has consequently affected the labor market (Eurostat, 2021). Organizations have faced uncertainty and challenges that have shaped the work environment rapidly. Nonetheless, economic recovery and other signs of adaptation to the situation have been gaining steam (Best, 2021).

Even though remote work is not a new trend, measures are taken to prevent the virus from spreading. Hence, confining employed people to their homes has sped up the remote work practices in organizations. The switch from a traditional office to remote work has been quite sudden and many people are working for the first time remotely without any preparation. However, throughout the several waves of the pandemic, adaptation,

and acceptance of remote work have become the norm (Best, 2021). Normally, this type of flexible working manner requires time to prepare, design, and adapt for the whole organization to assure better work-life balance and support employees' productivity. However, the Covid-19 outbreak has considerably forced a remarkable number of individuals and organizations to adapt to remote working (Al-Habaibeh et al. 2021). According to Foss (2020), the pandemic will have multiple complex consequences for organizational design. Overall, the pandemic will likely lead to more widespread use of workers who are more loosely connected to the organization, and more remote work (Foss, 2020). The post-pandemic situation will show how the taken measurements will be used in the future (Best, 2021).

Employees have been put in a situation where they try to maintain the same level of productivity without having the necessary skills to succeed in working from another place than the office (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021; Galanti et al., 2019). Despite the job responsibilities being the same whether the work is conducted from the office or from home, there are several factors that change when a rapid shift in working habits transformed. Factors such as job performance, flexibility, and work-life balance influence the employees' ways of working. Remote work has gotten immense attention from researchers because of its potential for extensive benefits at the individual and organizational levels (Allen et al., 2015). Therefore, employees' adjustments to a remote working environment in the "new normal" are important and should be further studied.

Because multipolar work and remote teams have become common in all types of organizations it is important to understand the impact of those on the employees. Remote working has had positive effects on the employees such as flexibility and increased personal time (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Furthermore, most of the studies show that flexibility of work arrangements is seen as a positive factor (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Ferreira et al, 2021; Mulki et al., 2009). Flexibility has been identified with work autonomy. Employees can outline patterns that suit them best which leads to higher productivity. From the perspective of the organization, remote working can be beneficial for

workers' attachment to the organization, job satisfaction, and enthusiasm for the work. It is crucial that employers support the employees to enhance work-life balance and the organization of remote work (Lonska et al., 2021). This way, employers can help employees increase productivity, increase job efficiency, strengthen loyalty, create higher motivation towards work, and improve employees' health.

Even though there are multiple benefits to working remotely for employees, there are risks and challenges that might affect job satisfaction. Haapakoski et al. (2020, p. 152-153) state that the risks and challenges concerned matter such as feeling lonely, worry about career development, and remote leadership. Additionally, Viikman (2016) states that the biggest challenges in remote work have to do with a sense of community, trust, interaction, and working habits.

An increase in remote work and reduction of social mobility means a critical change in the organization of their lives for many employees. The balance between work and private life can be difficult to maintain. In the article of Woodard (2021) it is presented that recent research has shown that 29 percent of remote workers struggle to maintain a proper work-life balance and have expressed higher stress levels. Some studies noted that not having defined work-life boundaries can be difficult for employees (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Galanti et al., 2021; Vartiainen, 2021). Furthermore, studies have shown that one of the biggest challenges with remote work is maintaining work-life balance (Bulińska-Stangrecka et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). To emphasize this Aczel et al. (2021) stated that the key challenge in this new work arrangement is to find strategies to balance the demands of work and personal life. Increased flexibility can quickly lead to blurred roles of work and personal life and multitasking. Despite benefits, remote work often contributes to conflict of roles and disturbance of work-life balance.

Work-life balance (WLB) is a topic of interest for researchers and practitioners regarding supporting employee well-being (Jones et al., 2013; Kinnunen et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2014, as cited in Bulińska-Stangrecka et al., 2021). Previous research has demonstrated



that work-life balance creates positive energy at work and has a positive impact on employees' well-being (Russo et al., 2016, as cited in Bulińska-Stangrecka et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has been indicated that work-life balance is linked to turnover intentions and job engagement (Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019, as cited in Bulińska-Stangrecka et al., 2021). Moreover, research has shown that remote working and other types of flexible work arrangements admit work-life balance to be retained and help the progress of a balance between professional and private life (Bulińska-Stangrecka et al., 2021, p. 60).

As it has been stated earlier, the balance between work and personal life is difficult to maintain. Some of the reasons for a poor work-life balance are increased responsibilities at home, working longer hours, and increased responsibilities at work. Therefore, it can be challenging to split the time between work and other important aspects of life. Although it is a daily challenge to achieve a work-life balance, employees can manage the boundaries and find ways to balance demands between professional and personal life in remote work. (Heathfield, 2021; Sanfilippo, 2021).

Work-life balance in remote work is not only the concern of the employee. Organizations and managers have a critical role in work-life balance as well. Work-life balance is a substantial aspect of a healthy work environment. In order to have a healthier and more productive workforce, employers need to create a work environment that prioritizes work-life balance. However, promoting work-life balance is a challenge to employers since it is difficult to advocate a healthy lifestyle, both emotionally and physically, without giving up employee productivity. Organizations can support work-life balance with programs and policies that help employees maintain a better balance between work and personal life. Furthermore, managers' role in supporting employees' work-life balance is essential. Managers can help their employees to maintain work-life balance by updating and recreating workplace culture (Kohl, 2021).

According to the study of Mulki et al. (2009, p. 65), it was stated that there has been limited research on work-life balance as it relates to remote work arrangements. Wang

et al. (2020) disclose that scholars have had enough sufficient evidence to understand the challenges that remote work has. However, remote work as a practice has gained a new meaning during the pandemic and it should be investigated how working remotely has shaped the experience of work-life balance. A comprehensive understanding of both benefits and challenges of remote work and its relation to work-life balance is needed to help employees maintain boundaries and job satisfaction and additionally to shape organizational practices.

There is a clear gap in the literature about the work-life balance in remote working conditions. Particularly, because of the Covid-19 pandemic when most of the employees have moved to remote work for the very first time and because remote work practices seem to evolve in the new normal and in the future. In this study, the impacts of remote work on work-life balance will be investigated. Therefore, both the negative and positive effects of WLB will be thoroughly explored. Furthermore, how employees can self-manage work-life balance and the employer's role in balancing work and private life are important aspects that this study will investigate.

### **1.1 Research question and objectives of the study**

The aim of the present study is to understand better how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees. The study will focus on employees who work remotely or partly remotely or have been working remotely, due to the Covid-19 situation. This study will analyze employees' views on what factors affect positively and negatively their work-life balance. Self-management of the balance between work and personal life will also be covered. In addition, also managers' and organizations' roles will be analyzed to understand how they can support their employee's work-life balance. In addition, it will be studied what kind of support employees want to get from their employers related to WLB, and which organizational practices could help them to maintain better work-life balance remotely. Therefore, the following research question was formatted.

*1. How do remote working conditions affect the work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed?*

Clear and transparent objectives help to answer the research question. The following objectives were chosen to achieve the purpose of the study:

- *What kind of impacts do remote working conditions have on work-life balance of employees?*
- *What kind of benefits and challenges does work-life balance face in remote working conditions?*
- *How can employees themselves as well as managers and organizations manage the work-life balance of the employees?*

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The thesis starts with an introductory chapter which includes the background of the study, research gap, research questions and objectives, and structure of the study.

The theoretical chapter that follows the introduction presents an overview of the current literature on the topic. The theoretical chapter is divided into two different chapters. The first chapter of the theoretical review focuses on remote work, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on remote work, the benefits, and challenges of remote work, and the international perspective of remote work. The second chapter of the theoretical review covers work-life balance from the aspects of nature of work-life balance, definitions, theories, challenges, and benefits of work-life balance, management of work-life balance, work-life balance in remote work, and lastly summary of the theoretical framework.

The fourth chapter, methodology, includes research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, and research method of the study. This chapter introduces data collection, data sample, and data analysis. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed.

The fifth chapter is the key chapter of the thesis and introduces the analysis and results of the empirical findings. The results will be presented according to the following themes: the impact of remote work on work-life balance, work-life balance challenges and benefits in remote work, self-management of the work-life balance, and managers' and organizations' role in supporting employee work-life balance.

Finally, the last and sixth chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings. This chapter provides a summary and key findings of the study, followed by theoretical and managerial contributions, limitations of the study, and suggestions for the future.

**Table 1.** Structure of the thesis

<b>Introduction chapter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Background of the study</li> <li>● Research gap</li> <li>● Research questions and objectives</li> <li>● Structure of the thesis</li> </ul>
<b>Theoretical chapter 1: Remote Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Definition of remote work</li> <li>● The impact of Covid-19 pandemic towards remote work</li> <li>● Benefits of remote work</li> <li>● Challenges of remote work</li> <li>● International perspective</li> </ul>

<b>Theoretical chapter 2: Work-Life Balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nature of work-life balance</li> <li>● Definitions</li> <li>● Theories</li> <li>● Challenges and benefit of work-life balance</li> <li>● Management of work-life balance</li> <li>● Work-life balance &amp; remote work</li> <li>● Summary of the theoretical framework</li> </ul>
<b>Methodological chapter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research methodology</li> </ul>
<b>Results and analysis chapter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Analysis of interview data</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Summary and key findings</li> <li>● Theoretical contributions</li> <li>● Managerial contributions</li> <li>● Limitations of the study</li> <li>● Suggestions for future research</li> </ul>

## **2 Remote work**

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the literature review about remote work. The purpose of the literature review is to present a theoretical background based on existing literature that is in accordance with the research objectives of the study. This chapter provides an overview of the following topics: definition of remote work, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic towards remote work, benefits of remote work, challenges of remote work, and international perspective. Each topic will be separately discussed next.

### **2.1 Definition of remote work**

Remote work is a practice that is increasingly adopted by organizations around the world (Mulki et al., 2009, p. 63). According to Remote Year (2021), it is a working style that grants professionals to work outside of the traditional office environment in places such as homes, coffee shops, or coworking spaces. It is based on the concept that work does not need to be done from a specific place to be executed successfully (Remote Year, 2021). Similarly, remote work arrangements are not dependent on time or place, and based on their characteristics they could be done at the office base (Vilkman, 2016). Remote work can be practiced full-time or part-time depending on the arrangements made with the supervisor (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007, p. 1524).

Working from a place other than company premises or a location other than an office can be described with numerous names (Vartiainen, 2021). The names that are most commonly used include “remote work”, “telework”, “mobile work”, “distance work”, and “telecommuting”. However, there is a dispute with these terms because the terms often represent different conceptualizations and overlap (Allen et al., 2015, p. 42-45). This makes it difficult to review the scientific findings. Remote work as a term is mainly considered more extensive than telecommuting and can implicate any form of work not administrated from the office (Vartiainen, 2021). According to both Vartiainen (2021) and Allen et al. (2015, p. 45), it is important to be clear and specific about the term that is

being used to ensure consistency. Hence, in this study, the term that will be used is remote work.

According to Peek (2021), remote work has become more common during the last decade. To emphasize, Butler (2021) states that the epoch of technology has fastened the transition and increased remote work's popularity. Moreover, Gajendran and Harrison (2007, p. 1524) state that digitalization has enabled diversifying of work arrangements for employees and that remote work has become comprehensive practice. Previously, remote work has held a bad reputation because employers assumed that their labor force would be distracted too easily at home, where no one could keep an eye on them (Peek, 2021). Nowadays, companies are trying to find a balance between all-remote work and hybrid-remote operations (Choudhury, 2021). Furthermore, some companies are more accepting of the practice while others are more resistant (Peek, 2021). The resistance has to do with insignificant investments in telework tech to support workers and a lack of productivity fear (Peek, 2021).

In order to get a more comprehensive picture of remote work, the notion of remote workers will be shortly presented. According to the article of Carreras and Valax (2010), a remote worker is an employee who works outside the organization during an alternative period or regularly. It usually requires good telecommunication between the organization and customers via the internet, phone, or emails (Vartiainen, 2021). Remote workers' work time differs from the workers at the office. They are usually more flexible, do not count breaks or meals, and might work longer hours because it is harder to identify the line between work and free time when working remotely (Carreras & Valax, 2010).

In the future, remote work will increase, and remote work options and flexibility will become more comprehensive (Gupta, 2021). According to Castrillon (2021), 70% of the workforce will work remotely at least five days a month by 2025. Technology companies such as Twitter and Facebook are forerunners with remote work plans (Castrillon, 2021).

Other reasons for remote work becoming more common in the future have to do with productivity, digitalization, technological developments, and companies wanting to cut down costs (Peek, 2021).

## **2.2 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on remote work**

The Covid-19 pandemic is a critical disaster that has affected organizations, employees, customers, and communities globally all over the world. It also has economic and social impacts that are still growing (Mahmud et al., 2021, p. 1-2). Remote work is a way of working that can be utilized as a pandemic response (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 70). Based on the prevailing circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, to maintain business activities, almost all companies must rely on remote teams (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 70). However, remote work has not been implemented in all sectors and occupations because of the characteristics of work (Lund et al., 2021). The characteristics include factors such as using specialized machinery, work that must be conducted on location, and jobs that require collaboration (Lund et al., 2021).

Explicitly, existing knowledge of remote working has mostly been caused by a context in which remote working has not been practiced to a great extent by all or most of the workers within an organization (Wang et al., 2020, p. 17-18). Prior to the pandemic, among employees that worked full-time at office jobs approximately five percent worked remotely. In the new normal, the percentage is settling at 20-30 percent (Levanon, 2020). According to Galanti et al. (2021, p. e426) in the EU, the number of people working from home (at least partly) has increased from 12% before the pandemic to nearly 50%. Nonetheless, in America, the amount of remote work has increased rapidly because of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, around 5 percent of Americans worked for more than three days from home. Since the pandemic, the number has increased to nearly 37% of Americans working fully remotely (Yang et al., 2021). Levanon (2020) states that the biggest impact of Covid-19 may be remote work.



Prior to the pandemic, remote working was not a broadly used practice, it has been a “luxury for the relatively wealthy” such as white-collar workers (managers, professionals, and executives) and higher-income earners (Wang et al., 2020, p. 17). To emphasize this, Levanon (2020) argued that before the pandemic, employees were less likely to work remotely for various reasons. The reasons included not having the space or equipment to transition to remote work and documenting working hours. Because of this, the remote working experience was only little for most of the workers prior to Covid-19. Furthermore, companies were not prepared for supporting this practice. Therefore, remote working became the “new normal”, almost overnight. (Wang et al., 2020, p. 17). The pandemic forced millions of people to stay home, which has led to work and private life intertwining regardless of sex or age (Galanti et al., 2021, p. e427). This rushed and unexpected transition has been hard on employees who have had to switch from working at a traditional office to remote work (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020, p. 909-910).

In today’s prevalent pandemic situation, the traditional workplace has been replaced with a home base, where workdays take place. Companies have had to redefine the way work can be performed and where it can be done from. Remote work has given employees the possibility to work safely and adhering social distance, within the safety and health regulations. When this type of change happens in the work environment factors, such as work culture, collaboration, and daily routines are being transformed drastically. The remote works role is important for business continuity during the pandemic and companies need to revamp remote work regulations so that the work can be organized and successfully done (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2020, p. 2304-2309).

Technology has become a major factor during Covid-19. It enables interaction that is agile at work and makes the work environment more collaborative (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2020, p. 2305). Covid-19 has accelerated the digitalization process for many companies. New practices and strategies are required in this economic and business environment to stay competitive (LaBerge et al., 2021). Due to the lockdowns and global restrictions video meetings and online business has increased rapidly. Organizations have been able

to adapt to new working styles with the help of software availability and broadly available internet infrastructure. Innovation and usage of advanced technologies have become a survival tool in the Covid-19 pandemic (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021, p. 101).

It is unlikely that companies will fully return to their pre-Covid-19 work plans. It is more likely that companies will convert to some type of hybrid work model, where both remote and office work are included (Yang et al., 2021). To emphasize this de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2020, p. 2302) state that the future workplace will be more comprehensive, novel, and evolved. To create a good balance, both business and employees' needs must be considered. To conclude, to be able to have an efficient and successful business and happy employees it is important for companies to consider which model works for their operations best. It is inevitable that the concept of the workplace will change.

### **2.3 Benefits of remote work**

In today's world working away from the traditional workplace is an option that is increasing (Aczel et al., 2021, p. 1). One of the factors for the increase has been the Covid-19 outbreak. For the first time and without any preparation many employers and workers had to suddenly switch to remote work (Galanti et al., 2021, p. e426). Sudden organizational changes have had both benefits and challenges for employees and companies (Choudhury, 2021). From these perspectives, the experience and adaptation to remote work have been different (Mulki et al., 2009, p. 64). In this chapter, the focus will be on the benefits of remote work.

From the perspective of employees, there are several benefits. It needs to be highlighted that there are different motivations that individuals have for wanting to do remote work (Allen et al., 2015, p. 54). According to Allen et al. (2015, p. 54), the fundamental motives are personal life and productivity. Yet another benefit is flexibility which is valued by the employees (Mulki et al., 2009, p. 64). It allows employees to juggle between work, time with friends, and hobbies, which results in stress reduction and an improved work-life balance (Buffer, 2019). Furthermore, factors such as autonomy and schedule control

allow individuals to efficiently control resources (Allen et al., 2015, p. 51). Productivity is another benefit of remote work. According to Farrer (2020) employees who work remotely are an average 35-40% more productive than their co-workers who work from the office. Another factor that the employees value highly is the opportunity to work from anywhere (Molla, 2019). This gives the employees an opportunity to decide where they can work. Additionally, employees with families have enjoyed remote work because it leaves more time to spend with family (Molla, 2019). Lastly, one of the benefits for employees is saving time from commuting to work since they don't have to do it when they work remotely. Not having to commute to work also saves money and it helps the environment because people drive less (Allen et al., 2015, p. 54).

For organizations, remote work benefits include lower real estate costs, higher productivity among employees, lower turnover rates, and greater job satisfaction (Mulki et al., 2009, p. 64). According to the article by Bohrer (2021), the average office space cost per worker is approximately \$18,000. By centralizing, relocating, and letting employees work remotely, companies can save a lot of money and employees are also happier and more retained because of work flexibility. Global Workplace Analytics advocates that companies can save per year per employee around \$11,000 (Bohrer, 2021). Companies such as IBM have reduced their real estate costs by \$50 million (Bohrer, 2021). Remote work practices also reduce sick leave absences which reduces total costs for the organization (Vilkman, 2016).

Besides lower real estate costs, the benefits for the organization can be seen from the perspective of the workers. Employees are more productive and work longer when they work remotely. Employees want to build trust with their employers so that they do not lose their remote work privilege. Moreover, if the employee has a proper workspace at home there are fewer interruptions, and they can concentrate on their work better. Happier employees are also another benefit. If the employees are happy while working remotely it increases their performance and productivity. The reasons for employees being happier working remotely have to do with spending extra time with loved ones and

hobbies, freedom to manage their schedule, and lack of commute. Besides remote workers being happier, they are also healthier. Remote workers have better physical and mental health due to increased flexibility and reduced stress than their counterparts at the office (Poetker, 2021).

Employee retention is one of the biggest challenges for companies. Because employees change jobs for many different reasons such as life planning and location, workplace flexibility is one of the crucial factors in retaining employees. Providing flexible work arrangements helps to adjust to life changes without having to change jobs (Poetker, 2021). In addition, Vilkmann (2016) elaborated that having the possibility to work remotely part-time or full-time attracts applicants more because it enables a better combination of free time and work. The talent pool also gets bigger when remote work opportunities are offered (Poetker, 2021).

Successful companies will find ways to adjust to the differences and provide specialized mentoring, training, and broad opportunities for social and business interactions with both remote and traditional employees (Mulki et al., 2009, p. 67-68). Vilkmann (2016) elaborates that work is changing and remote work is seen as a future asset for companies. By successfully implementing remote work in organizations' operations, it will have a positive effect on the results and quality of work, and on the reputation of the company.

## **2.4 Challenges of remote work**

Even though from a company and employee perspective there are multiple benefits of remote work, the challenges of it need to be highlighted to get a full picture of how it impacts organizations and employees. It is important to discuss the underlying issues and risks of remote work because it will be a permanent option for the workforce in the future (Meier & Traber, 2021). The negative aspects of remote work include isolation, knowledge sharing, communication difficulties, and less defined work-life boundaries (Allen et al., 2015; Choudhury, 2021; Mulki et al., 2009). These and some other downsides will be discussed next.

Vilkman (2016) states that it is challenging to build a functional team and to create real co-operation between the team remotely. Building a team is easier if the people in the team are occasionally in the same place. Additionally, it takes more effort, work, and planning to build team spirit with a team that is fully or partly remote (Vilkman, 2016). Another challenge that is related to remote teams is communication. In-person communication is eliminated when people work remotely. However, there are many ways for employees to keep in touch with their co-workers and supervisors, despite that many employees might find it difficult to communicate without the human element (Clark, 2021). According to Clark (2021), remote workers find it hard to build trust and be personal when they meet someone new over the internet, and it is hard to read people's emotions. This makes it also harder to get to know the co-workers. Because communication is more difficult remotely it also makes knowledge sharing harder. Knowledge sharing is a process in which knowledge distributes from one to another within companies (Allen et al., 2015, p. 53). Knowledge sharing is critical to organizational effectiveness and to social capital development (Allen et al., 2015, p. 53). Because remote workers cannot tap one another's shoulders to ask for help or to ask questions companies need to pay attention that important information gets around and that remote workers have the tools to do their job remotely (Choudhury, 2021). The more there is information for the remote workers the more they feel like they are part of the company community.

Rating and reviewing employees that work remotely is yet another challenge (Choudhury, 2021). The metrics used to evaluate remote workers cannot be the same as those used for the employees who work from the office. It is critical to rethink and identify key performance metrics that are suitable for remote work (Castrillon, 2021). Even though the criteria would be clear and transparent it is still more difficult to evaluate remote workers than people who work from the office (Choudhury, 2021). To support the evaluation managers should give feedback continuously to remote workers (Castrillon, 2021). Another challenge is compensation for the workers who work remotely. Contract type, the

experience of the worker, location, and tasks being performed are factors that companies need to consider when setting the compensations for workers. In addition, another key issue with compensation is paying wages. Whether the company should pay remote workers in the currency of a local organization or incorporated one affects the consistency of wages because of the exchange-rate fluctuations (Choudhury, 2021).

In the review from Mulki et al. (2009, p. 64), the biggest challenges of remote work were overcoming work isolation, compensating for the lack of visibility, finding the right work-life balance, and compensating for the lack of face-to-face communication. Firstly, workplace isolation impacts organizational commitment, turnover rates, and job satisfaction. Isolation perceptions develop when remote workers lack support and sense absence from managers and co-workers. The feeling of isolation is more common among employees who live by themselves. Remote workers who feel isolated miss traditional office because of its social environment. Secondly, lack of visibility affects the career promotion opportunities and contributions to the organization's success. Losing out on opportunities and not being recognized are factors that negatively impact remote workers. Thirdly, a critical issue for both employees and companies is managing the boundaries between work and home. There are conflicts that the work-family situation creates when employees work from home. For example, expectations that the families of remote employees have often led to distress and disagreements. Another struggle is that remote workers have problems disconnecting from work. Many remote workers work more hours than in the traditional work environment. Even though this might seem positive from the employer's perspective, the heavy workloads make the remote workers stressed. Lastly, lack of communication contributes to isolation feelings and makes building relationships and trust more difficult in a remote environment. If communication lacks, it leads to frustration and inefficiency on the part of remote workers (Mulki et al., 2009, p. 64-69).

Technical difficulties are also a challenge that comes with remote work. Employees get the needed tools from the employer such as computers and other software that is needed for the work. But it is on the remote workers' responsibility that for example,

the internet connection is stable and strong enough to do the needed work from elsewhere than the office. This can lead to interruptions, hiccups, and in severe cases – security breaches. The employees who are not tech-savvy will have a more difficult time with this aspect (Clark, 2021). According to Malecki (2020, p. 10-12), it is an enormous data security risk to move employees, their computers, and data away from the protected office environment. There is a lot at stake for businesses because the risks range from small technical errors to comprehensive cyber-attacks (Malecki, 2020, p. 10-12). When employers are running a remote workforce, they need to take into consideration the increased security risk. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cyber-attacks on unprotected and unprepared companies have been increasing excessively. For example, in the financial sector cyber-attacks increased by 238% from February to April 2020 (Malecki, 2020, p. 10-12).

## **2.5 International perspective of remote work**

One of the driving forces of remote work has been globalization (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 70). Distributed teams have become more common in the core business structure and physical locations are no longer required (Lau, 2020). Nowadays, many companies rely on employees all over the world, exploiting their local knowledge and diversity to achieve a competitive edge (Neeley, 2015). However, globalization has caused struggles such as not having enough physical space for all the employees within many big companies. These factors have begun a new wave of remote work adaptation (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 70). Geographically scattered teams are up against a great challenge: cultural differences, physical separation, and lack of emotional connection that can lead to mistrust and misunderstandings (Neeley, 2015).

International remote teams benefit from diversity, which brings together people from a variety of cultures with different perspectives on organizational and strategic challenges and varied work experiences. Furthermore, international remote teams bring a broader understanding of different cultures. Companies benefit from having international remote teams because of the local knowledge that can be utilized, diversity, and a bigger

talent pool (Fried & Hansson, 2014, p. 143-144). In addition, having employees working remotely around the world enables better time zone coverage for customer service and projects can be done more faster when those can be worked on around the clock. This brings companies both effectiveness and competitive advantage.

International perspective can also bring challenges to remote working conditions. Having team members from different functional backgrounds and countries that are working from different locations can be a difficult arrangement (Neeley, 2015). Factors such as different time zones, language barriers, communication styles, and work culture differences impact remote teams enormously (Fried & Hansson, 2014, p. 143-144). Even though international remote work is complex it can be done with the effort of the whole organization. The key factors for international remote work to be beneficial for both employer and employee are clear communication, making information accessible for all the workers, understanding the importance of real-time connection, considering different time zones, and having perks and benefits that suit remote workers' needs.

Haapakoski et al. (2020, p. 62) state that one of the elements of making a globally functioning remote team is meeting in person a couple of times a year. The goal of the meeting is above all feeling of togetherness. At least for now it is easier for people to get to know and trust one another when people get together physically to work and spend time together. Since 2020, it has been difficult to arrange meetings in person for global remote teams which has given more value to the remote meetings that global team members have. Both one-to-one and group meetings are substantial and the meeting preparations meaning needs to be emphasized. In the meeting preparation phase, an international perspective must be considered. Work cultures differ nationally for example in the United States work culture is more fast-paced and spontaneous whereas in the Asian work culture it is required that everyone who participates in the meeting has enough time to prepare their own part. Moreover, with international remote teams, it is an important phase to tell each participant what the structure of the meeting is, what is



expected from them in the meeting, and what takes follow-up actions (Haapakoski et al., 2020, p. 62-65).

Even though many employers promise their employees that they can work from anywhere, to appear more agile and flexible, this promise may prevail difficult and vague to implement in practice. Moreover, remote work becomes more complex when working happens cross-border. Factors such as taxation, social security, and insurance are issues that come with having a workforce cross-border. Companies must decide whether it is reasonable to invest and use resources to have an option where employees can work in an international remote position. Therefore, it is important to define what “remote work” means within companies. From an international perspective, remote work needs to be prepared on an individual basis. Across companies and countries, remote work will look different for the employees, and therefore it is crucial to set boundaries on remote work possibilities (Meier & Traber, 2021).

All in all, current literature shows that remote work has gained a strong place in the work culture (Castrillon, 2021; Gupta, 2021). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the usage of remote work and it will shape the working conditions in the future (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2020). Both benefits and challenges of remote work from the perspective of employees and organizations have been acknowledged by many researchers (Allen, 2015; Clark, 2021; Mulki et al., 2009; Vilkman, 2016). Remote work has given organizations an opportunity to have a workforce across the world which enables organizations to have local talents, diverse teams, and a greater talent pool. One consequence that is closely related to this study is related to work-life balance. It was discovered that remote work affects the work-life balance both positively and negatively. Next, a current literature review related to work-life balance will be presented.

### **3 Work-life balance**

This chapter provides an overview of the current literature review related to work-life balance. At the beginning of the chapter, the nature of work-life balance is briefly defined. After that, the study presents the definitions of work-life balance. The third part of this chapter focuses on the work-life balance theories. The fourth part of this chapter will demonstrate how the challenges and benefits of work-life balance. The fifth chapter represents how work-life balance can be managed by employees, and how managers and organizations can support employees' work-life balance. The sixth chapter illustrates work-life balance in remote working conditions. Lastly, a summary of the theoretical framework will be presented.

#### **3.1 Nature of work-life balance**

Resulting from employees' concerns about the expected demands by their work, work-life balance (WLB) is a considerably new phenomenon. There are three traced factors that can be recognized in these demands: Changes in life, changes in the work environment, and changes in individual attitudes (Nortje, 2021). The concept of "Work-life balance" came into use in the 70s and 80s when baby boomers were stressed to achieve a balance between family, career, and other aspects of their lives (Alton, 2019). Additionally, there was a concern encompassing women joining the workforce. Earlier, the workforce mainly consisted of men. However, when women started joining the workforce, the juggle between both family-life responsibilities and work became an essential concern (Nortje, 2021).

Nonetheless, work-life balance affects organizations, families, women, and men. It is an important issue that concerns men, women, singles, couples, parents, and non-parents (Nwachukwu et al., 2021, p. 30). Because of this, the concept has been adjusted from work-family life to work-life balance because our personal lives cannot be limited only to family needs (Nortje, 2021). Furthermore, there are other concerns about WLB within the work environment such as increased work pressure as a result of technological

improvements, increasingly tight deadlines, increased expectations about the level of customer service, and shorter response times for communication (Nortje, 2021). Because of these changing work demands; personal lives are inevitably influenced.

Work-life balance can be defined as the separation between the personal life and the work-life of an employee in the organization (Nwachukwu et al., 2021, p. 29-30). Bello and Tanko (2020, p. 218) state in their article that work-life balance is a broad concept that prioritizes work and life. The word "WORK" stands for actions that take physical or intellectual abilities to accomplish it. Moreover, the word "BALANCE" can be defined as a construct that gives stability in work and life domains (Bello & Tanko, 2020, p. 218). Garg and Rani (2014, p. 1472) defined work-life balance, at its broadest, as a satisfactory level of "fit" or involvement between the diversified roles in a persons' life. Work-life balance is formed when priorities and requirements of career and personal life are on the same level. The imbalance between work life and personal life is commonly originated from reasons such as long working hours. Every employee faces the challenge of finding the right work-life balance (Lonska et al., 2021, p. 1).

It is crucial for both employers and family members of employees that work and personal life can be successfully combined (Lonska et al., 2021, p. 1). In organizations, the term WLB is commonly used in relation to the well-being of the employees (Bello & Tanko, 2020, p. 218). To emphasize this Wiradendi Wolor et al. (2021, p. 237-238) argue that WLB can be an incentive for the employees which balances work and personal responsibilities and then improves employee performance. Organizations are trying to find solutions in today's fast-paced society to retain employees, improve employee morale, and positively impact the work culture. From an organizational perspective, work-life balance is about maintaining and creating a healthy and supportive work environment, where employees are enabled to have a balance between personal responsibilities and work, which generates employee productivity and loyalty (Dhas, 2015, p. 21660).

There is no single-use or understanding of the term work-life balance. Therefore, the term has been criticized from multiple perspectives. Work-life balance is an individual experience, and as a result, it is highly problematic to describe the term in workplace practices or policies. It has been also argued that work-life balance is a “favor” that is granted to the employees. Another problem with the term is that is presented as a flexible working practice that offers employees freedom and choice; however, it is often manifested in employee-unfriendly ways such as inconsistency and unfairness within organizations. The term is also criticized because of outdated assumptions of ideal workers and not connecting work-life balance with workplace culture, practice, or structures (Shockley et al., 2018).

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the connection between life and work nearly everywhere on the planet (Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021, p. 1). Furthermore, work arrangements have been adjusted in ways such as remote work (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2021, p. 237). Even though, benefits are being perceived from the connection of remote work and work-life balance there are also negative impacts are shown. According to Wiradendi Wolor et al. (2021, p. 237-238), the benefits include more productive employees, an increase in employee retention, and a better balance between work and life. However, social isolation, increased workload, and longer working hours are issues that remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic has created. Covid-19 has created frustration, stress, and fear among people and the relation between the pandemic and work-life balance needs to be highlighted. Exhaustion and stress as a result of Covid-19 affect employee productivity. In addition, separating employees from their co-workers can reduce employee morale and be stressful (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2021, p. 238).

### **3.2 Definition of Work-life balance**

According to Khateeb (2021, p. 29), there are several ways to define the concept of work-life balance. The meaning and perspectives have been formed differently by several scholars (Bello & Tanko, 2020; Khateeb, 2021). Table 2. demonstrates the definitions by several scholars of the work-life balance (Bello & Tanko, 2020, p. 219).

**Table 2.** Definitions by different scholars of work-life balance

Scholar / Year	Definition
Clark (2000)	“Good functioning and satisfaction at home and at work with a low amount of role conflict”
Frone (2003)	“High levels of inter role and low levels of conflict assistance represents work-family balance”
Greenhans & Allen (2006)	“The extent to where individual’s life priorities are compatible with individual’s satisfaction and effectiveness in family roles and in work”
Kalliath & Brough (2008)	“The individual’s viewpoint in which non-work and work activities promote growth and are adaptable in accordance with an individuals’ present life priorities”
Delecta (2011)	“An individual capability to meet family and non-work commitments as well as work commitments”

The definition has evolved throughout the years. Factors that have affected the development of the concept include changes in the work-life and environment, technological advancement and digitalization, and people’s needs to separate work and life. Going from 9-5 jobs where hierarchy prevails to having a flexible and collaborative work environment hasn’t happened overnight. Organizations are paying more attention to creating a work environment for their employees where there is flexibility to manage work

and life together. The impacts of having a good work-life balance can be seen in both employees and employers and therefore it is crucial for organizations to create policies that support the changing mode of non-work and work-life (Nwachukwu et al., 2021, p. 29-30)

### **3.3 Work-life balance theories**

Various theories have evolved around the definition of work-life balance. Two major theories that the work-life balance has been built on are border and boundary theory (Bello & Tanko, 2020; Khateeb, 2021). In this chapter, besides the two major theories, other current theories such as segmentation, spill-over, and compensation theories will be presented to explain the link between work and personal life.

#### **3.3.1 Border theory**

The border theory emphasizes that work and personal life are two different domains that are interactive. People can have diverse associations within these domains based on how they feel, what kind of values are most important to them, what kind of behavior and rules do they follow, and what kind of thought patterns do they have. Border theory accentuates that people are border-crossers who manage these different domains to acquire a balance between the domains (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015, p. 85). The theory focuses on the domains and building bridges between them and how the domains should be managed in order to have a desired balance between them (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015, p. 85). According to Clark (2000, p. 751) balance signifies as having minimum role conflict and good functioning within work and home domains.

The borders of the domains can be psychological, physical, or temporal (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015, p. 85). Psychological borders contain emotions as well as thinking patterns and behavior patterns. Moreover, these borders do not only exist in one domain and are produced by individuals. Physical borders on the other hand mean for example walls of

a home. Whereas temporal borders meaning for example work time creating separation between the domains (Clark, 2000, p. 756).

According to Shaw (2021) permeability, flexibility, and blending are three abilities that a border's strength relies on. 'Permeability' means which elements can enter other domains and to what degree (Clark, 2000, p. 756). For example, dedicated office space creates borders between work and home. However, the border has permeability because family members can enter the space and interrupt the work. Flexibility on the other hand means the borders' ability to expand and contract depending on the requirements of the domains. For example, people having the opportunity to work remotely makes the physical border flexible. Blending means a mix of both flexibility and permeability occurring at the border. When blending happens the borderland cannot be called work or home domain because both work and personal life are intertwined (Clark, 2000, p. 756-757).

It is fundamental to describe border-crossers, individuals who jump between the work and personal life domains repeatedly. One of the important features of border-crossers is their ability to change domains and borders to suit their needs. Moreover, according to Lave & Wenger (as cited in Clark, 2000), they are the key participants in each domain. Influence and identity are two elements that affect these individuals and their adjustments to work and home. Influence means the power that the key participants have to make changes to the borders and within the domain. A study from Repetti (as cited in Clark, 2000) has demonstrated that the more the key participant has independency the more satisfied and better adjusted they are at work and at home. Identity means a strong connection between the identity and values that the key participant has towards domains and their borders. It is possible that key participants can be within a domain and not identify it. However, when the domain is identified by key participants, they can shape and commit the domain (Clark, 2000, p. 759-761).

Domain members, as well as border-keepers such as family members, play an essential role in the border-crossers capability to control the domains and borders. Domain

members who have the ability to influence greatly the domain and its borders are referred to as border-keepers. Common border-keepers are spouses and supervisors. It is common to have disagreements between the border-crosser and the border-keeper since everyone has established their own definition of work and personal life. However, the more there is communication between the border-crosser and the border keeper, the easier it is to come to an understanding (Clark, 2000, p. 761-762).

### **3.3.2 Boundary theory**

In this theory, the roles of people are acknowledged through social categories, such as home and work (Shaw, 2021). Boundary theory differs from border theory because there are more social categories in addition to home and work (Shaw, 2021). Individuals have the ability to switch roles and cross boundaries. The roles can be difficult to tell apart if they get blurred. In order to avoid this, boundaries should be kept clear and the roles apart (Shaw, 2021).

Permeability and flexibility are characteristics that boundary theory has as well. The more flexible and permeable the boundaries are the more there is an enhancement, and the less there is flexibility and permeability within the boundaries the more there is a disturbance. Employees create and develop boundaries around both personal life and work domains that diversify in strength. Therefore, the interaction between personal life and work is influenced by the strength of the boundaries. (Bulger et al., 2007, p. 365-367).

### **3.3.3 Segmentation theory**

This theory suggests that home and work are segmented and are in no interaction and have no effect on each other. Moreover, this view is one of the earliest in regards to the relationship between home and work. This separation allows individuals to separate their life in function, time, and space. Segmentation is defined as how people can restrain feelings, thoughts, and behaviors from one domain in another. Yet, this has been



proven to be no longer true and now segmentation is presented as an active process in which people create and maintain boundaries between family and work (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014, p. 3).

#### **3.3.4 Spill-over theory**

The spill-over theory emphasizes that experiences, to a certain level, in one domain reflect negatively or positively on other domains. In theory, spillover has been defined as Positive Spillover and Negative Spillover. Positive spillovers are positive experiences in one domain that are a result of fulfillment in another domain. On the contrary, negative spillover means negative experiences that result from unfulfillment in another domain (Khateeb, 2021, p. 29-30).

#### **3.3.5 Compensation theory**

Compensation theory proposes that if something is lacking in one domain, as regards to satisfaction and demands, it can be made up in another domain (Guest, 2002, p. 258). Compensation theory has been characterized as a negative relationship between work and family. The reason for this is that negative experiences in one domain affect another domain's perception positively (Khateeb, 2021, p. 32-33).

#### **3.3.6 Instrumental theory**

The instrumental theory proposes that actions and activities in one domain help achieve success in another domain (Guest, 2002, p. 259). Meaning that individuals get resources from one domain to another by carrying out certain actions and activities. In addition, this theory advocates that there is a positive link between two domains making it comparable to spill-over theory (Bello & Tanko, 2020, p. 222).

### **3.3.7 Conflict theory**

Conflict theory indicates that individuals can face conflicts, overload, and complicated choices when there is a high level of demand in all of the domains of life (Guest, 2002, p. 259). According to Khateeb (2020, p. 30) achievement in one aspect of life outcomes in sacrifice in the other aspect. This theory is based on the assumption that work and life are conflicting with each other because of different requirements and norms (Khateeb, 2020, p. 30).

## **3.4 Challenges and benefits related to work-life balance**

The work-life balance impacts everyone, regardless of gender, age, family structure, income level, job status, religion, or occupation. Individuals struggle with the stress that comes from juggling work and personal life. According to Lockwood (2003), 70 percent of employees report that they do not have a healthy balance between their personal lives and work. Moreover, the research from Lockwood (2003) states that 90 percent of working adults think that they do not spend enough time with their families, which is for 80 percent of men and women the number-one-rated work/life priority. Next, the challenges and benefits of the work-life balance will be discussed.

### **3.4.1 Challenges**

The ability to harmonize work and private life is a pressing social issue. In recent decades, the pressures of work have been growing (Guest, 2002, p. 257). Moreover, one of the biggest challenges to the mental health of the employees is a demanding work culture (Ross & Vasantha, 2014, p. 62). Previous research has demonstrated that increasing demands in both work and personal life affect negatively the balance between work and personal life (Milliar & Lioysis, 2011, p. 1).

An imbalanced work-life balance can lead to challenges that affect both the company and the employees. Moreover, the imbalances have a negative impact on both professional and personal life. From an employee perspective, the signs of having a poor work-

life balance are high levels of stress which can in a worst-case scenario lead to burnout, working overtime, decreased productivity, and taking a lot of time off from work to deal with personal matters. From a company perspective, the signs of poor work-life balance include higher rates of staff sickness or absenteeism and high levels of staff turnover (Lonska et al., 2021).

The issues that arise in the work domain can heavily affect the other domains. Negative effects such as increased amounts of stress can very quickly lead to decreased job satisfaction, low employee morale, and poor productivity (Lockwood, 2003, p. 4). This can then affect personal life and it can cause conflicts and other problems. To avoid these types of situations both employer and employees must contribute to creating and developing a better work-life balance (Ross & Vasantha, 2014, p. 65).

### **3.4.2 Benefits**

The benefits of the work-life balance are not only psychological and social but also economic (Naithani, 2010, p. 151). Companies that introduce employment policies that support a healthier work-life balance can benefit both the company and its staff. From an employee's perspective, a good work-life balance can lead to increased job satisfaction, increased productivity, reduced stress levels, feeling more in control of working life, greater employee commitment, motivation, loyalty, and improvements in employee mental health and well-being. From a company perspective, flexible working practices and work-life policies can lead to the following benefits: reduced lateness and absenteeism, improved productivity and competitiveness, employee loyalty, reduced staff turnover rates, and increased retention. Work-life balance is a key driver of employees' satisfaction. Therefore, the work-life balance must be encouraged and supported at all levels of the organization (Garg & Rani, 2014, p. 1475-1477).

### **3.5 Management of work-life balance**

It is challenging but essential for individuals to balance their professional and personal life. It is important not only for the career individuals are building but also for emotional, physical, and mental well-being (Sanfilippo, 2021). In this chapter, management of work-life balance will be introduced from three different aspects: employees' self-management, and how managers and organizations can support employee work-life balance.

#### **3.5.1 Employees' self-management of WLB**

To every individual, work-life balance means something different (Lee, 2021). Previously it was mentioned that maintaining a work-life balance helps prevent burnout and helps reduce stress (Kohll, 2021). There are multiple ways an employee can improve their own work-life balance. The first one is to create boundaries and identify priorities. Secondly, prioritize overall physical, mental, and emotional health. Thirdly, being able to unplug from work helps to recover from stress and it gives space for other thoughts and ideas. Fourthly, creating achievable goals and structuring the workday. Lastly, changing the working habits by focusing on valuable activities and delegating tasks that can be outsourced (Lee, 2021; Sanfilippo, 2021).

#### **3.5.2 Supporting employee WLB from the role of the manager**

Managers can help their employees to achieve a better work-life balance and also do a better job by supporting employees in multiple ways (Sanfilippo, 2021). Today, business leaders recognize that in order to maintain a healthy workforce, it is important to understand work-life balance comprehensively. Managers can improve their employees' work-life balance by helping them to juggle their responsibilities (Lotich, 2020).

As mentioned earlier managers can support their employees' work-life balance in multiple ways. Firstly, managers can show an example of how they find a balance between work and personal life to their employees. The ways managers can show an example include working reasonable hours, having interests outside of the organization, and

sharing personal priorities. Secondly, managers can set boundaries and teach the employees that personal boundaries are essential. Thirdly, managers can teach their employees about priorities. Lastly, committing to having a balance between work and personal life. Managers should show an example of balancing work and personal life and also commit to it in order for the employees to do the same. This can be challenging in a hectic work environment, but it is important not only to show an example to the employees but also for the managers to find the desired balance between work and personal life (Lotich, 2020; Sanfilippo, 2021). In Table 3. practical things that managers can do to help employees improve work-life balance are represented.

**Table 3.** Practical ways managers can use to help employees improve WLB

○ <i>Talk about personal interests and how these interests have helped to manage work and personal life obligations</i>
○ <i>Talk to employees about the importance of taking time off</i>
○ <i>Talk about employees' personal interests and encourage outside interests</i>
○ <i>Talk about planning and scheduling vacations in advance</i>

### 3.5.3 Supporting employee WLB from the role of the organization

Organizations have a big role in creating a foundation for work-life balance policies, and practices in the workplace culture (Garg & Rani, 2014, p. 1477). Existing literature presents five different organizational programs and policies related to work-life balance: flexible working arrangements, health, and well-being arrangements, provision of leave, organizational support and understanding, and childcare benefits or services (Zheng et al., 2015, p. 359). In the study by Clark (2000), it was stated that these programs and policies are generally considered to be positively associated with better-reported work-life balance.

One of the ways to improve work-life balance is to build a culture where employees feel respected and supported. Mutual expectations of inputs and outcomes in the relationship between an employer and the employees lead to better performance and higher commitment to the organization. Another way is to create a flexible work environment by allowing people to work more flexible work hours and days from another location than the office. In addition, developing a culture of trust helps to reduce the stress of the employees, asking for feedback is also another way to create an open communication culture (Peart, 2020).

The study by Zheng et al. (2015) discovered that work-life strategies and programs that are implemented in organizations have a crucial role in helping employees to achieve a balance between work and personal life. Besides the programs and strategies, individual factors such as occupation, age, marital status, and income level related to meeting lifestyle commitments, keeping up a positive attitude, and juggling personal and work-life responsibilities significantly influence the balance between work and personal life. Consequently, it is essential to re-evaluate and modify organizational work-life balance programs and policies to assure that they are tailored to meet individual employees' needs (Zheng et al., 2015, p. 371).

### **3.6 Work-life balance in remote work**

A growing number of tasks can be done and observed anytime and anywhere because of information and communication technologies and flexible work arrangements that companies offer. In the past few years, remote working was used to prevent workplace-related stress and as an attempt to cut down working hours. During the pandemic, remote work arrangements have been seen as a continuity of business activities and in addition, to ensure the safety of the employees (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2021). Even though the work landscape has changed drastically and permanently, organizations and employees have adjusted to this reality. Stewards (2022) indicates that one of the main reasons people choose to work remotely is a better work-life balance.

Courtney (2022) states organizations have insinuated that it is not essential to be physically at the office full-time in order to get great results. Remote work arrangement offers employees independence and flexibility which commonly lead to a better work-life balance (Muller, 2021). Several previous studies have emphasized that work-life balance is positively affected by remote work. Furthermore, it has been stated that reduced family conflicts are one of the positive effects of the remote work option (Akkaya et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021). Additionally, positive factors that affect the balance include having fewer interruptions, being able to concentrate better, having more time to spend with the family, and having a comfortable and quieter place to work (Muller, 2021).

However, remote work can lead to an accumulation of work, longer working hours, and overlap between work and personal life. According to Steward (2022), unplugging after work, affirming that the borders of the domains overlap, is the biggest challenge correlated with remote work. Additionally, Akkaya et al. (2021) emphasize that when the duties of domains get blurred in remote work it reduces the satisfaction related to work-life balance. However, according to Best (2021, p. 309), some employees want a strict segmentation between work and personal life in remote work whereas some are more receptive to the domains overlapping. This makes it challenging for the organization and supervisor because individual needs must be considered to be able to support the balance between the work and personal life of employees. As a result, the organizational programs and policies related to work-life balance are harder to generate so that these programs and policies help and support the work-life balance of each employee.

Because of these factors, the role of organizational factors in defining work-life balance is increasing. Organizations need to develop a transparent personnel policy to support employees who work remotely. As many employees are working remotely is important to identify the aspects that support employees in achieving a balance between work and personal life and maintaining both mental and physical well-being (Akkaya et al., 2021;

Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021). Since organizations have seen the benefits of remote work, many are planning to adopt a hybrid model (Courtney, 2022). As work arrangements are evolving it is crucial that organizations consider work-life balance policies and programs and adjust those accordingly to support both employees' well-being and organizational productivity and efficiency.

### **3.7 Summary of the theoretical framework**

This chapter presents a summary of the theoretical framework that is used in this study. This study focuses on work-life balance in remote working conditions. Remote work as a practice was introduced and thoroughly explained. As regards work-life balance, the theory that will be used to examine the research question and objectives will be the border theory. It is one of the major theories that explain the link between work and personal life. Border theory emphasizes that work and personal life are two different domains that are interactive (Clark, 2000).

In remote working conditions, both work and personal life intertwine which makes it difficult for people who work remotely to separate work and personal life domains. There are more distractions from each domain border-keepers which influence the border-crossers experiences and actions in each domain. The behaviors and thinking patterns can get mixed in the environment where domains are blurred together. To maintain and create the desired balance domains should be connected with bridges and with proper borders. People are different in this sense, and it is important to understand that some people function on a higher level when these domains are intertwined and some when these are clearly separated. Based on the theoretical framework, it can be stated that work-life balance in remote working conditions is for every individual different based on experiences, life situations, and personality.

Since Covid-19, many employees started working remotely for the first time. Now, many employees have become more used to working remotely. Even though the adaptation to the situation has happened, it does not mean that people have found a balance



between work and personal life. The pandemic has shown that work-life balance is more important than ever because for many it has been the first-time work and personal life boundaries have been blurred. Traditional working methods have been renewed comprehensively. Remote work will most likely be an arrangement in the future that organizations will utilize in order to distribute flexible work arrangements for employees retention and to attract talents worldwide.

The theoretical framework presented benefits related to remote work and work-life balance. It was discovered that remote work has multiple benefits for employees and organizations. Employee benefits of remote work included flexibility, autonomy, control of resources, having more time to spend with family, and saving time when they did not have to commute to work. Organizational benefits of remote work contain higher productivity among employees, lower real estate costs, healthier employees, being able to retain employees better, and attract a bigger talent pool. Additionally, it was determined that a good work-life balance has positive effects on both employees and organizations. Employees benefit from having a good work-life balance because it increases motivation, loyalty towards the organization, productivity, job satisfaction, having better mental health, and reduced stress levels. Organizations benefit from flexible work practices and work-life policies in the following way: improved competitiveness and productivity, increased employee loyalty, reduced staff turnover, lateness, and absenteeism.

Moreover, the challenges of remote work were emphasized. Problems that were raised from an employee perspective consisted of communication difficulties, isolation, less defined work-life boundaries, mistrust, and lack of knowledge sharing. Organizational issues that were established related to difficulties in reviewing performance, compensations, paying wages, and technical difficulties such as security breaches. Besides remote work-related challenges, an imbalanced work-life balance can have a negative impact on both professional and personal life. Employees can experience high levels of stress which can lead to burnout, decreased productivity, and work overtime. Organizations are

affected by poor work-life balance as well. High levels of staff turnover, sick leaves, and absenteeism were factors that were raised as crucial issues.

Apart from the benefits and challenges of remote work, the international perspective of remote work was introduced, and even though, globalization has made it more efficient with benefits such as diversity, broader understanding of cultures, and better time zone coverage, geographically dispersed teams are facing challenges. Underlining the challenges such as working from different time zones, language barriers, work culture differences, and communication styles highlight the complexity of having global remote teams.

Managing work-life balance is the key to a good work-life balance. It was recognized that managing work-life balance can happen from three different perspectives: individual self-management, supported by managers, and organizations. Self-management helps to reduce stress and it can improve work-life balance in multiple ways. The most crucial self-management factors were prioritizing health, creating boundaries, identifying priorities, and being able to unplug. Managers can support their employees to achieve better work-life balance in various ways. The factors that were highlighted included setting examples to the employees about balancing work and personal life, showing interest in personal priorities outside the organizations, setting boundaries and teaching those to the employees, and committing to maintaining work-life balance in a hectic work environment. An organization's support differs from the manager's support in employee work-life balance. Manager's role is more personal and is based on their individual self-management. Organizational management refers to policies and programs that have been created to maintain and improve work-life balance. The policies and programs included flexible work arrangements, organizational support and understanding, provision of leave, health and well-being arrangements, and childcare benefits or services. Re-evaluation of the programs and policies was highlighted to ensure they meet individual employees' needs better. In the next chapter, the methodological design of the thesis will be presented.

## **4 Methodology**

In this chapter, the design of the research in this thesis is presented. First, it presents and explains the research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, and research method. In addition, data collection, sample, and data analysis are provided to explain how the empirical data has been gathered and analyzed. Lastly, the reliability and validity of the study are discussed.

### **4.1 Research philosophy**

The methodological chapter begins by determining the most appropriate research philosophy. Research philosophy relates to knowledge, assumption, and nature of the study, distributing with a particular way of developing knowledge. Moreover, it is a belief about the ways how data should be collected, analyzed, and used about a certain phenomenon. This matter needs to be discussed because researchers may have different assumptions about knowledge and nature, and this chapter helps to understand these assumptions (Saunders et al., 2019).

Generally, there are four major philosophies which are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Positivism refers to phenomena that can be observed with fact-based data and measurable regularities to gain meaningful data. Furthermore, universal rules and laws help to predict and explain the chosen events or behaviors. Critical realism focuses on explaining what we experience and see, regarding underlying structures of reality that form the observable events. Moreover, the method for this philosophy can be either quantitative or qualitative. Interpretivism, on the other hand, emphasizes investigating subject meanings and social phenomena. The most suitable tool for interpretivism research is the qualitative method with small samples such as utilizing in-depth investigations. Pragmatism study refers to research that focuses on practically applied research, in which mixed perspectives are combined to analyze the data (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 144-151).

Looking closer at the interpretivism approach it examines the reality on the basis of experiences, backgrounds, and perceptions of participants. With this research approach, participants' experiences are utilized to find answers and to develop an understanding of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism was seen as the most suitable philosophy for this study because participants' views and experiences about remote working conditions and how it affects work-life balance help the researcher to create understanding from the collected data. In addition, in this study, empirical data will be gathered by using qualitative methods and in-depth investigations with a small number of respondents.

## **4.2 Research approach and strategy**

After the most applicable research philosophy is resolved, the research approach and strategy are presented. Deductive, inductive, and abductive are methodological choices from which the researchers can choose (Saunders et al., 2019). Firstly, the deductive approach focuses on building hypotheses and testing if the hypotheses are right or wrong (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015, p. 3). On the contrary, the inductive approach doesn't test theories but aims to develop a theory by observing patterns (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015, p. 3). The abductive approach, which is a mixture of the two first ones, begins with unexpected facts, and the research process is dedicated to their explanation (Dudovski, n.d.). In addition, existing literature can be altered, or a new one can be built based on the findings of the data collection.

In this study, the thesis will follow an abductive methodological approach. The aim is to analyze factors that affect work-life balance of employees in remote working conditions by gathering data through semi-structured interviews. Unlike deductive and inductive reasoning, abductive research can change, explain, and develop the theoretical framework before, during, and after the research process. Accordingly, the abductive approach was seen as the most suitable option for a qualitative study with small samples.

Researchers have identified the main purposes of research strategy which can be either exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory or a combination of all. The exploratory research method aims to investigate a research problem that is not yet sufficiently researched or well understood. Furthermore, it aims to study phenomena that are under-examined which relies less on theory, and more on the data that has been collected to recognize patterns that explain these phenomena. With this method, data can be collected either from a primary or secondary source. Primary research methods that can be utilized are surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. Whereas secondary research methods gather information from sources such as studies, newspapers, and books. The descriptive research method on the other hand is used to explain the characteristics of a particular phenomenon without inevitably investigating the causes that generate it. Moreover, this method aims to understand more “what” than the “why” of the research subject. Descriptive research can be conducted with three distinctive methods which include an observational method, a case study method, and survey research. Lastly, the explanatory research method, which is the most commonly used, attempts to understand why something takes place when there is only limited information available. It is complementary to the descriptive research method, although it provides supplementary facts about the observed object and its interaction with the environment. Most commonly used research methods contain literature reviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and case analysis (Bhat, 2022).

This thesis aims to find out how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees and how work-life balance can be managed. Hence, it is crucial to understand the factors that impact the balance between work and personal life when working remotely. An explanatory research strategy is the most suitable option for this purpose and is consequently chosen.

### **4.3 Research method**

According to Patel and Pater (2019), research problems can be systematically solved with research methodology. Furthermore, the purpose is to find answers to questions with

the help of the application of scientific procedures (Patel & Patel, 2019). There are multiple ways to distribute research which include settings, place, technique, time, and purpose. The types of research vary, and all the research methods have their own significance.

Williams (2007) describes that there are three common approaches to conduct research which are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The researcher should choose the method that is suitable for conducting the research. Depending on the research question it should be anticipated what type of data is needed to respond to the chosen question. Qualitative research is a holistic approach that involves discovery. Additionally, Patel and Patel (2019) describe that qualitative research generally works when studying human behavior. According to Williams (2007), this research method is less structured in the description because it formulates and builds new theories. While on the contrary quantitative research mainly concerns the measurements of a phenomenon in terms of quantity (Patel & Patel, 2019). Hence, Williams (2007) states that quantitative research can be used in response to relational questions of variables within research. Furthermore, the findings from quantitative research can be explanatory, predictive, and confirming.

The research method used in this research will be a qualitative method. Hence the aim is to explain and explore how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed. Moreover, what impacts of remote work on work-life balance of employees, which factors affect positively and negatively work-life balance, self-management of the balance between work and personal life, and how managers and organization can support their employees with work-life balance. To get a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, individuals' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors should be further studied by using a qualitative method. The qualitative method provides deeper information on individuals than the quantitative method. In this study, it would not be relevant to discuss the phenomena in terms of quantity.

#### **4.4 Data collection and sample**

Next, the data collection method and a sample of the study will be introduced. First, the data collection method measures and gathers information on variables. The collection of the data should be done systematically in order to answer the research question and evaluate the outcomes. Furthermore, this is one of the most important stages of the study. There are two categories based on their source, primary and secondary data, from which the researcher can collect the data. Firstly, primary data is collected by the researcher themselves. This collection method is more objective, authentic, and reliable than secondary data because the data has not been altered or changed. Secondly, secondary data is collected by someone else, and it is fundamental because it captures previous development and changes (Saunders et al., 2007).

As shown above, a qualitative research method was chosen for this study. In qualitative research, the most common data collection methods are interviews, observations, surveys, and analysis of books or visuals. For this research purpose, interviews were seen as the most suitable option for the data collection method. Hence, there are three essential types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews are questionnaires with predetermined questions that are asked with no scope for follow-up and little or no variation. The questions are standardized and alike which indicates that no biases should arise during the interview. On the contrary, unstructured interviews aim to investigate in-depth a general topic. There are no guidelines or prepared questions beforehand. Therefore, these types of interviews usually take a lot of time and are difficult to manage. Lastly, semi-structured interviews consist of several important questions that help to describe the areas that are being explored. The flexibility of this approach, specifically when compared with structured interviews, allows elaboration and discovery of information that is important to the people who participate in the interviews but may have not formerly been thought of (Bhat, 2021; Gill et al., 2008, Groenland & Dana, 2019).

For this study, semi-structured interviews were seen as the most suitable tool to gather data. In this research, the purpose is to understand better how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed. To answer this question, new insight was gathered and investigated. According to Groenland and Dana (2019, p 26), qualitative methods are fitting to understand the perspectives of participants in their words and the meaning they give to phenomena. Because of the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, the questions could be adjusted and altered accordingly after pilot interviews to help to answer the research question more comprehensively. Furthermore, in order to interpret patterns from the answers of the interviewees.

When the empirical data has been collected, the next step is to analyze, describe, and deduce conclusions. Interviews are the best-suited data collection method for this research design and research question. The focus of the interviews was to understand how remote work has affected the interviewees' work-life balance. Hence, the interviews focused on the interviewee's experiences. As has been mentioned before, semi-structured interviews were seen as the most suitable tool to gather data for this study. It provides the opportunity to gain in-depth information by asking predefined questions but also to gain an understanding of factors that were not thought of before. The questions were divided into four sections which helped to categorize the findings. The appendix presents the interview questions that were asked by the interviewees. Furthermore, the questions were sent to the interviewees beforehand so that they were able to get familiar with the interview questions and to gain more in-depth information for the study.

In total, 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who work in the IT, recruitment, and finance fields. The interviews were conducted one-to-one. Two of the interviews were held face-to-face, and the other five interviews were conducted online via Zoom. The majority of the interviews were held in the native language of the interviewees which was Finnish, to assure they were comfortable and had the ability to express themselves extensively. One of the interviews was done in English. The length of



the interviews varied from 16 minutes to 1 hour and 19 minutes. The interviews were designed so that the interviewees could express their opinions and feelings freely. During the interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewees' thoughts, follow-up questions were asked if the answers were brief. Before the interviews started, all the participants gave their consent to record the interview. Hence, this gave the researcher a chance to properly analyze and transcribe the collected data afterward. For the author to provide evidence for the analysis, the most relevant comments from the interviews that were conducted in Finnish were translated into English. The purpose of the present study is to comprehensively understand how remote work affected work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed which is why the interviewees will remain anonymous.

#### **4.4.1 Sample**

As it was previously stated, 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted for the study. The age distribution was quite big. The youngest interviewee was 26 and the oldest one was 60. Big age distribution can be seen as a positive matter in the study because it enables to gain information on how different aged people felt remote work affected their work-life balance. Amongst the interviewees, there were both females and men. Most of the interviewees were women since only two of the interviewees were men. Moreover, the interviewees' life situations and households differed extensively. Among the interviewees, there were people who lived alone, with partners, and with families. This can be also seen as a positive matter in the study because it gives information on how different types of households and life situations affect work-life balance in remote work.

Of the interviewees, one worked in the IT field, one in recruitment, and five in the finance field. Conjunctive to all the participants was that the amount of remote work had increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Two of the interviewees had not worked remotely before the pandemic. Most of the interviewees were working remotely now as well.

Two of the interviewees were managers. It was crucial to interview both employees and managers to gain understanding from both sides to answer the research question and objectives. Furthermore, half of the interviewees had international work assignments and worked closely with colleagues from other countries.

The interviewees were found for this research through the connections and networks that the researcher has. Table 4. presents the background information of the participants. In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, more detailed information will not be shared.

**Table 4.** Participants

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Field</b>	<b>Remote working before Covid-19 pandemic</b>	<b>Remote working during Covid-19 pandemic</b>	<b>Remote working now</b>
1	28	Male	IT	Yes, once a week	100%	100%
2	26	Female	Recruitment	Yes, 2-3 times a week	100%	1-3 times a week
3	60	Female	Finance	No	3 days a week, during lockdowns 100%	100%
4	56	Female	Finance	Yes, 1-2 a year	4 days a week	3 times a week
5	57	Female	Finance	Yes, occasionally	100%	100%
6	26	Male	Finance	Yes, 1-2 a month	3 times a week,	3 times a week

					during lock-down 100%	
7	38	Female	Finance	No	100%	4 times a week

#### 4.5 Data analysis

A data analysis aims to identify schemes in the data. In qualitative research, data analysis is characterized as a process of systematic searching and arranging the collected data to increase the comprehension of the phenomenon. Data analysis consists of coding and categorizing the data, reducing unnecessary information, following consistent patterns, and finally assembling evidence in order to find purpose from the data (Saunders et al., 2007).

According to Bengtsson (2016, p. 10), content analysis is one of the methods of data analysis. It can be used in qualitative or quantitative research and with this method verbal, written, or visual documentation can be systematically analyzed (Wilson, 2016, p. 41). Furthermore, content analysis aims to discover the meaning of the data that has been collected and to derive practical conclusions from it (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 8). Sources of data in the content analysis can be for example interviews, conversations, or books. The primary intention is to analyze the characteristics of the content (Bloor & Wood, 2016, as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

One of the methods that can be used is content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016, p.10). The content analysis method can be used quantitatively or qualitatively for systematic analysis of verbal, written, or visual documentation (Wilson, 2016, p. 41). The aim of content analysis is to arrange and discover meaning from the data collected and to draw practical conclusions from it (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 8). Furthermore, the source of the data can be from interviews, conversations, open-ended questions, or any occasion of informative language such as books. The intention is to illustrate the characteristics of the content

by analyzing who says what, to whom, and with what effect (Bloor & Wood, 2016, as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The interviews conducted for this study, with the respondents' approval, were recorded and saved as audio files. After the data is recorded, the researcher can decide to transcribe the collected data partially or entirely or to make conclusions instantly from the data. According to Bengtsson (2016, p. 11), even though the process would be done as transparent as possible to ensure the quality of the analysis, human mistakes are always possible. These mistakes include personal biases and errors in interpretations. To avoid these mistakes in this study the interviews were first transcribed and coded and then conclusions from the data were made. For this study, the collected data was transcribed entirely. Moreover, direct citations from the interviews were used to analyze the content. Most relevant and important citations were put in logical and proper order to allow the identification of differences and similarities in interviewees' responses. The findings are presented in the next main chapter after discussing the trustworthiness of the study.

#### **4.6 Trustworthiness of the study**

Qualitative research embraces multiple quality standards, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility and validity cannot be fully utilized in the studied phenomenon which is why the quality of this study is evaluated by trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the concept of trustworthiness to better meet the qualitative nature of research. The concept consists of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This concept created parallel criteria to the conventional validity and reliability quantitative assessment criteria (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3).

Credibility refers to assurance in the truth value of the data and interpretations of them. Lincoln and Guba (1985) demonstrated that credibility includes two aspects. The first aspect is carrying out the study in a way that complements the believability of the findings. The second aspect is taking steps to illustrate credibility to external readers

(Morrow, 2005, p. 252). To ensure credibility, before the interviews began, it was said to the interviewees that if the questions are not clear, the researcher can rephrase the question or explain it further in order to ensure that the interviewees understood the question meaning correctly.

Transferability refers to qualitative findings being applicable in other groups and settings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is the researcher's responsibility to supply sufficient descriptive data. Hence, readers can evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). Therefore, sufficient information is provided in this chapter so that the readers can evaluate the transferability of this study.

Dependability refers to the cohesion of the data over time and over conditions. Furthermore, in order to achieve dependability, the research process should be logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). Consequently, this chapter describes the research process thoroughly to show that it is logical and traceable.

Confirmability refers to objectivity. It relates to ensuring that the findings of the research study could be confirmed by others. Furthermore, the study's findings are not based on potential researcher biases but based on the participants' words and narratives (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). To support confirmability in this study, the representation of the findings is supported with quotes from the interviewees so that the readers can judge the objectivity.

## 5 Results and Analysis

In this chapter, the findings of the interviews are presented and analyzed taking into consideration the literature review. The study's focus was on finding how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed. Following the research questions, the findings are divided into three sections: the impacts of remote work on work-life balance, challenges and benefits of work-life balance in remote working conditions, and management of work-life balance from the perspective of self-management and support that managers and organizations can offer for employees.

### 5.1 The impacts of remote work on work-life balance

As mentioned before, as a practice, remote work has been used prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The usage of remote work within companies was fairly limited because of multiple reasons (Wang et al., 2020, p. 17-18). Reasons such as not having space or equipment and companies not having an IT structure that supports remote work practice are a couple of factors that have affected the limited usage of the practice (Levanon, 2020). Even though this practice was used before the pandemic, it has been gaining a new meaning since Spring 2020 when the pandemic started. Hence, multiple companies and employees had to adapt to the situation. For most of the respondents, remote working was a familiar work practice before the pandemic. Only two out of seven respondents had not worked remotely before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the digitalization process for many companies, and it pushed many traditional offices to utilize remote work in order to continue business. The interviewees have seen the shift in a positive light.

*"It is incredible that we have been given this opportunity. It has taken a lot of IT work to make all of our systems work at home. It is also a huge trust*

*that our company is showing towards us if thinking that we are working with such sensitive information.” (Respondent 3)*

*“I have only seen remote working as a positive matter.” (Respondent 5)*

*“Everyone is saying that we got that push into digitalization, and our server can now run so that everyone can be at home working at the same time. This is the new standard that people can stay and work from home.” (Respondent 6)*

During the pandemic, all the respondents worked from home, but different factors affected the number of days per week worked from home. A couple of the respondents shared that it depended on the Covid-19 situation how many times per week they worked from home. During the worst times, they worked fully remotely and when the situation got better, they worked 2-3 days from home. Besides the Covid-19 situation, a couple of the respondents shared that they tried to go to the office a couple of times a week and it was to be able to see their subordinates who were working from the office.

It was discovered that only two out of seven of the respondents had a dedicated office space at home. Others were working from spaces such as the living room or bedroom. In addition, a couple of the respondents worked from the kitchen table or island when they work remotely. Everyone said that the space where they work remotely is peaceful. At the beginning of the pandemic, some difficulties affected the ability to focus on work.

*“At the beginning (of the pandemic) it was hard to focus on work because my boys were also doing remote school and they needed help with their homework. But now that the boys are back in school it is easy to focus on work.” (Respondent 7)*

*“In the beginning, I had a hard time understanding what I had to do.” (Respondent 6)*

According to Yang et al. (2021), it is unlikely that companies will fully return to their pre-work plans, instead, companies will most likely convert to some type of hybrid model. The future of remote work was briefly discussed with the interviewees, and they shared their opinions and hopes on what it could look like.

*“I wish it will stay as an opportunity in the future. That there would be a freedom to choose which days I want to work remotely and discuss this with my manager.” (Respondent 5)*

*“I would prefer being only at the office. Of course, depending on your role and the nature of your work it puts standards of how flexible you can be.” (Respondent 6)*

*“I hope that the hybrid model will continue. Many of our employees appreciate that they can save the commute and have more free time. The opportunity to work remotely enables me to work also from the summer cottage or some other city. You do not have to be tied down to only one spot to do your work when flexibility is involved which I see as a positive factor.” (Respondent 4)*

As mentioned earlier, work-life balance affects everyone (Nwachukwu et al., 2021, p. 30). It is something that every employee tries to achieve, and everyone faces challenges in finding the right balance. Work demands, life changes, and changes in the work environment are factors that affect the work-life balance of the employees. Remote work has brought both changes in employees' lives and also blurred the boundaries between work and personal life. Despite the stated factors, Stewards (2022) indicated that one of the main reasons people choose to work remotely is a better work-life balance.



At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, three out of seven respondents shared that it was harder to keep work and personal life separate. It was because there were distractions that they were not used to because of the change from an office environment to a home environment. However, at the moment, generally, the respondents felt their work-life balance is in a good shape. Because remote work has gotten more and more normal in their organizations, many of the interviewees felt throughout the time that the balance has gotten better. Some of the respondents were more comfortable with remote work and work-life balance whereas some raised difficulties that affect the balance.

*"I think that mine is pretty good (WLB), I separate work and personal life."  
(Respondent 1)*

*"I do think that it is good, surely it is different when you work from home all the time and live in the same space." (Respondent 2)*

*"It has been for some time so that my workdays are almost 10 hours long, almost too often this happens. Of course, it is my own responsibility to pay attention to this and keep the boundaries, but I should pay more attention to how long my workdays are." (Respondent 4)*

*"I do think that the balance is not that great now. When we first started working remotely because of Covid-19 I really tried to stay on top of it (work). I tried to only work from my worktable in the bedroom to keep work and personal life separate. But as time passed it became harder and harder to be strict with the boundaries because you can do everything at any moment. I nowadays also work from the living room while watching TV and at the dining table after hours and work. Work and personal life have been blurred for me at least." (Respondent 6)*

In this thesis, as regards work-life balance, border theory was chosen to examine the research question and objectives. According to Clark (2000), border theory emphasizes that work and personal life are two different domains that are interactive. All the interviewees felt that work and personal life are connected. Both positive and negative factors related to the connection were raised by the respondents.

*“Those (work and personal life) are strongly connected. It is maybe harder to disconnect from the work environment and change to free time mode when working from home. There doesn’t come the same type of feeling when you leave the office.” (Respondent 2)*

*“They (work and personal life) are connected because I might do so that I go for a 45-minute walk with my dog during the workday, which I could not do from the office. Then I need to take into account that my workday gets 45 minutes longer.” (Respondent 5)*

In addition, the separation between work and personal life was discussed with the interviewees. It was discovered that the respondents utilize psychological, physical, and temporal borders to keep work and personal life separate. Many interviewees felt that work and personal life are separated even though it might be harder to recognize it when working from home.

*“They (work and personal life) are separated on the level of mind. For me, it helps that I have a dedicated office space at home.” (Respondent 5)*

*“Some days those (work and personal life) are overlapping and some days there is a strict line between work and personal life, it depends on the day, work situation, and deadlines.” (Respondent 7)*

For all the interviewees, the amount of remote work increased rapidly because of the pandemic. Since then, most of the interviewees have worked remotely mostly. The impact of remote work and how it has affected the relationship between work and personal life has been gaining a new meaning during the pandemic. The interviewees had noticed that there is more free time now that they are working from home since they do not have to commute to the office. A couple of the respondents shared that because they can sleep longer, they do not feel that the mornings are stressful, as they would be if they would have to go to the office. Furthermore, one of the respondents elaborated that she hasn't used an alarm in two years, which has been good for the mind and the maintenance of the work-life balance.

A more flexible work schedule allows employees to mix work tasks and daily routines (Blue House Technologies, n.d.). Even though many employees feel that they can focus more easily on work tasks when they work from home, there can be different kinds of interruptions than at the office. One of the interruptions is home chores. Five out of seven of the respondents shared that they do housework or take care of personal responsibilities during the workday. The respondents elaborated that doing housework creates the needed breaks for them.

*"I might do some laundry during the day, but I think it in a way creates the breaks for me." (Respondent 1)*

*"I do put dishes in the dishwasher during the workday. Sometimes I cook during the lunch hour but also during meetings where I am not supposed to interact. I try to prioritize what I hear but probably I am not hearing so good. I also sometimes during lunch breaks, if I have a gap in my calendar in the middle of the day, I go downstairs and get a haircut, because I don't want to wait with ten other people after office hours to get my haircut. And then, of course, I work longer. I'm kinda working and doing everything throughout the day." (Respondent 6)*

*“I do think that because I need to take a break, I stop my work with housework. I think that working remotely is more consumptive because those breaks don’t come spontaneously, and that is why I sometimes put the dishwasher on to create myself a break. The breaks are beneficial because you get a little distance to your work.” (Respondent 7)*

However, the interviewees did not feel that work and personal life have been mixed significantly when they work from home. One of the respondents described that for her, the most essential change that helped with the separation was moving from working in the kitchen to a dedicated office space at home. Another respondent expressed that at first, it was difficult to separate work and personal life because her boys had remote school but now, she feels that her boys are one of the reasons she can keep work and personal life separate because she cannot work overtime.

According to Ustinov (2020), employees are having a hard time preserving healthy boundaries between work and personal lives. Nonetheless, six out of seven respondents maintained their work-life balance in remote work by sticking with the working hours and having routines. However, one of the respondents shared that he is not maintaining a balance between work and personal life.

*“I don’t think I maintain it. I feel like if I can manage to do my work, I can manage to be happy. I kind of feel like everyone around me as well thinks that I am delivering whatever I am supposed to, and that is why I think I do not have to maintain it. I just follow my routine and hope that I get feedback from the outside if they feel it’s not the way I should do it but until that, I think I adapt to the things I feel like are most suitable for me.” (Respondent 6)*

To conclude, all the respondents have gotten adjusted to remote working. They feel that they have a quiet and peaceful space to work from when working remotely. Many highlighted that they were very happy to have the opportunity to work remotely even though now for everyone there is an opportunity to work from the office. The ability to be able to work remotely is a benefit that everyone hopes to continue. However, respondents shared that it is important and good that people need to go to the office. By going to the office people get to meet new people, grow their network, learn new things, and get tacit knowledge. Furthermore, because remote work has become a new norm, the respondents have felt that it has made it easier to maintain the balance between work and personal life. However, some of the respondents felt that as time has passed it has made it more difficult to maintain the balance. Most of the respondents felt that work and personal lives as domains are connected but in order to maintain the balance, it is crucial to keep the domains separate with routines and sticking with the working hours. Housework was seen as a way to maintain the balance better because it created the needed breaks during the workdays that were seen necessary because remote work is more consumptive than working from the office. Despite the majority of respondents wanting to maintain the balance, not everyone sees it as the right fit for them, and it is also something that needs to be acknowledged by the individuals but also the organization. Next, findings related to work-life balance challenges and benefits of remote work will be presented.

## **5.2 Work-life balance challenges and benefits in remote work**

One of the important aspects of this study to answer the research question is to understand what type of challenges and benefits remote work has on work-life balance. Since employees need to be autonomous and are responsible for being productive when working remotely it is important to understand from their perspective what kind of challenges and benefits, they have recognized. First, this chapter focuses on work-life balance challenges following the benefits of remote work.

### 5.2.1 Challenges

The challenges that the interviewees raised during the interviews could be divided into three sections: individual challenges, managerial challenges, and general challenges. First, the individual challenges will be presented. Some interviewees did not have challenges with work-life balance in remote work anymore. However, at the beginning of the pandemic, several respondents shared challenges that were not relevant anymore.

*“At the moment, I do not have challenges. At first, when the pandemic started, the challenge was that if there was not enough to do or it was not busy during the workday, I would have wanted to do some home stuff.” (Respondent 1)*

*“At the beginning (of the pandemic) it was hard to keep work and personal life separate because I worked from the kitchen. Since I started working from dedicated office space at home, I haven’t had any challenges.” (Respondent 5)*

One of the respondents highlighted that it has been harder to disconnect from work when working remotely. Furthermore, because it is harder to disconnect, work matters revolve in your mind.

*“When I leave the office and go home, there is that transition time, which enables me to reset and disengage from work matters, but when I am at home, and there is no transition time after the workday it is a very challenging thing.” (Respondent 2)*

One of the challenges that were mentioned was working longer hours when working remotely.

*"I think my biggest challenge is that I cannot stick to the working hours. I easily work overtime and think it is by far the biggest challenge." (Respondent 4)*

*"If there are a lot of deadlines it easily goes so that you work after working hours, but I try to avoid these situations. If my workday got longer, I tried to utilize the overtime hours during the same week." (Respondent 7)*

Another challenge that was mentioned was inactiveness. One of the respondents shared that during the lockdowns exercising was minimal. However, it has been a continuing challenge.

*"Especially in the lockdown with everything closed I think it's been more inactive, and I think I've been feeling the laziness of going outside and doing stuff. It is more harder to get motivated and go out when you have been working from home. Sometimes after a workday at the office, you might go and see your friends, go to a grocery store, and just feel very efficient which I have not felt that much when working from home." (Respondent 6)*

Moreover, one of the challenges that were raised in the interviews was communication. Communication with colleagues was seen as a challenge that affects work-life balance. Also, maintaining relationships with colleagues was seen as more challenging. However, some of the respondents felt that their colleagues disturbed and distracted them more when working from the office.

*"One of the challenges in remote work is that you do not see your colleagues, there is not the same kind of communication with them, of course sometimes it is good but sometimes it creates challenges. It lightens the workday when you get to work together with someone and talk about work stuff." (Respondent 2)*

*"I didn't keep the relationships with the colleagues alive in the same way as I would have if I were at the office and I kind of had to start over with those. Also, communication within the team has changed. It is different and sometimes draining because it is not as fluent as when you are in the same space. Even though you have the camera on, it is not the same, there is no physical interaction. The social part of it (working) is kind of missing. These are the people I spend the most time with during the week, and actually in my life probably at the moment." (Respondent 6)*

*"There are no spontaneous conversations as there is in the office. It might be that tacit knowledge or important information is not as easily available as it is in the office environment." (Respondent 7)*

Now, managerial challenges will be introduced. Two respondents who have managerial responsibilities mentioned challenges also related to communication. The challenges were related to video meetings not being the same as meeting in the office and also not having enough time for team members was highlighted.

*"Sometimes I have a bad conscience when I haven't been able to reach out to different team members enough. I do not want anyone to feel that they are not considered. The days are so busy and sometimes I am busy for many days in a row, and I feel that it is a challenge that there is not enough time to do that." (Respondent 4)*

*"Even though we have the videos on during a meeting you cannot see all the facial expressions or nods or shakes of the head. Those tell a lot and I miss that the most. At the office, I have been listening to a lot of my team members and that has defaulted." (Respondent 3)*



Lastly, some general challenges in work-life balance in remote work were discussed in the interviews. The challenges that were mentioned were related to time management skills and autonomous skills. Some of the respondents thought that for some people it might be very hard to stick with the working hours when working remotely. Furthermore, some thought that if you do not have autonomous skills, it is difficult to plan your work-days. Lastly, space where remote work happens, and disruptions were mentioned. If there is no calm space to work and the workday gets disrupted many times with personal matters the borders of each domain get blurred which makes it challenging to be productive when working from home.

Three out of seven of the respondents felt that the challenges that they mentioned in the interview would not appear if they would be working from the office. However, one of the respondents disagreed.

*“Yes, I wouldn’t be doing housework. Usually at the office when there is not so busy you do something useful like study something related to the field.”  
(Respondent 1)*

*“I do feel that those challenges would not appear if I would be working from the office.” (Respondent 2)*

*“I do not think that the challenges would disappear, because the same work and to-do lists need to be done from there as well.” (Respondent 7)*

### **5.2.2 Benefits**

Next, the benefits that were raised in the interviews will be demonstrated. The respondents highlighted four benefits that they thought impacted the most work-life balance in remote work. The benefits included saving time by not having to commute to work, being able to concentrate better, having more time to do own things and spending time with the family, and being able to sleep longer.

*“One benefit is that you save time when you do not have to commute. Also being able to concentrate without distractions, is in my opinion, the biggest benefit.” (Respondent 4)*

*“When I do not have to commute to work, I get the feeling that I have more free time. I do think that remote work has had a bigger impact on me. How I work, how I am motivated, how I am excited, how I am energetic, it has been bringing me comprehensive well-being when I have been able to work remotely.” (Respondent 5)*

*“I can concentrate better when I work from home. Also, when I work remotely and I am done with the workday, I am immediately available to my sons, which has been a big benefit. Also, having more time with the family, in general, has been one big benefit.” (Respondent 7)*

*“One of the biggest benefits is to be able to sleep longer.” (Respondent 2)*

In addition, benefits such as flexibility were mentioned. The respondents thought that it is nice that there is such flexibility for example if there is a need to take care of a personal matter during the workday. Moreover, to be able to choose whether to work from the office or remotely was seen as a benefit.

*“It is nice that there is a possibility to be flexible with the working hours if needed. If there are some personal matters, I need to take care of I can freely go and do them, which is a huge benefit.” (Respondent 1)*

During the interviews, the respondents shared that they have learned new skills. Since these new skills were seen as a positive matter, it was important to highlight those as well. According to Morgan (2020), it is essential to learn new skills to further advance a

career. Furthermore, there are multiple benefits of learning new skills such as keeping the mind engaged and increasing adaptability.

*“I have learned a lot during remote work. I have learned how to share my screen and all this kind of stuff that I have not been able to do before.”  
(Respondent 3)*

*“I have learned for example basic communication skills because you cannot just quickly say or ask something from the colleague next to you. Sometimes I have had to think about how to contact someone so that I do not disturb them. Also, my organizing skills have gone to the next level. I use different types of apps that remind me of certain tasks, so I keep track of what needs to be done and when. Additionally, I have learned to use new tools such as Teams and Zoom.” (Respondent 7)*

Remote working has also been a benefit for companies. One of the respondents shared that their company has been able to save a lot of money and also been able to act more ecologically. Moreover, remote work has enabled the digitalization of many processes and work instructions which were seen as a benefit.

*“We have learned not to print everything because of remote work. It has saved a lot of money for the company, and it is amazing because there were a lot of things that we just printed and thought is this necessary? We have been able to work in an environmental-friendly way when we haven’t used paper in the same way as before the pandemic. Also, many work instructions have been moved to excels and other digital forms which have been actually more reasonable.” (Respondent 3)*

To conclude, both challenges and benefits were found related to work-life balance in remote work. However, it was seen from the interviewees that the benefits outweigh

the challenges. Many of the respondents shared that they were very happy to be able to work remotely. In addition, many of the respondents who had struggled at the beginning of the pandemic with remote work told that the challenges have disappeared overtime when they have gotten used to this situation. The challenges were related to workloads, communication and relationships with colleagues, and inactiveness. On the other hand, the benefits were related to having more free time, having more flexibility with the work schedule, and being able to concentrate better. Some of the respondents felt that if they would work from the office, the challenges would disappear, but some did not feel this way. Furthermore, new skills and ways of working were seen as a benefit that positively affected work-life balance. Next, the findings related to the management of work-life balance will be presented.

### **5.3 Management of work-life balance**

In order to maintain a work-life balance, it is important to manage it. In this chapter, the findings related to self-management, managers' role, and also the organization's role in supporting employee work-life balance will be discussed. The balance affects both private and professional lives and it is crucial to understand how it can be managed in remote work conditions.

#### **5.3.1 Self-management**

In the interviews, the respondents shared that they manage their work-life balance with routines, sticking with the working hours and breaks, prioritizing, planning, and organizing the workdays. Some of the respondents felt that it is easy to manage the balance, whereas some of the respondents had challenges with it.

*"I keep track of my working hours, even though I should utilize it more for example in order to keep the breaks, but it often slides in remote work. But I do think that time management is the tool I use the most to manage it."*  
(Respondent 2)

*“In the beginning, I really had to motivate myself. I started to prioritize my work and I also did as much as possible, I think people noticed that, and then I felt I was doing the right things It was just a high five to yourself that you’re doing remote work, it didn’t work well in the beginning and now you’re like crushing it.” (Respondent 6)*

*“I think very carefully what I need to do when, and where, and what tasks require a certain type of brain capacity, and what time of the day it should be done. I think it is important to use the time to organize your work.” (Respondent 7)*

One of the respondents shared that having enough time to exercise after the workdays has a big impact on the management of work-life balance. The respondent also shared that it is important to pay attention to exercising when working remotely because otherwise, you might just sit all day at home.

*“I should hold on more to my hobbies because now I might just work overtime and not for example go for a walk. The meaning of exercising has a huge role in having enough energy while working.” (Respondent 4)*

Also, it was discovered that keeping in touch with colleagues helps the management of work-life balance. The respondents felt that staying in touch with colleagues helps to reduce stress and it is a possibility to share work tasks. Moreover, being able to spar with colleagues helped in organizing and prioritizing the work tasks.

*“I think it is important to stay in touch with the colleagues with WhatsApp or Teams, to be able to share work matters.” (Respondent 2)*

One of the respondents shared that she had learned throughout her work experience to be able to organize and manage the working hours.

*“On a basis, it should be so that you do your workday and that is enough. For me, this has come through work experience. I have realized that my work will not be finished so that I work till 10 pm and think that my table is clear. I think this skill comes to everyone at some point in their career.” (Respondent 5)*

### **5.3.2 Managers’ role in supporting employee work-life balance**

Now, findings related to managers’ role in supporting employee work-life balance will be presented. The findings will be discussed from the aspect of how managers have supported their employees’ work-life balance and how it could be enhanced. Manager’s role is essential in juggling all the responsibilities and maintaining a healthy workforce (Lotich, 2020). Six out of seven of the respondents felt that their manager has supported their work-life balance. One of the respondents shared that his manager hasn’t supported this aspect and explained that he had been working remotely already before the pandemic and said that the working style is very independent within the company which probably are the reasons why he hasn’t gotten support with this aspect.

Other respondents highlighted that their managers have shown an example of how to stick with the working hours, how to prioritize, and how to organize their work. Furthermore, the respondents felt that their managers have been very supportive and approachable when they have been working remotely.

*“First thing that comes to my mind is setting an example. My manager sticks with the working hours, he starts at 8 and ends the day at 4. He has been supporting us with sticking with our working hours.” (Respondent 2)*

*“We have gone through the length of the remote days, calendaring, and prioritizing with her. It is hard to prioritize sometimes, and we both know it as we both are managers. We set an example to each other and unfortunately, we are the worst at obeying these things.” (Respondent 3)*

*“My manager has been asking about how are you doing, how are you feeling at home, are you anxious, can you work from home at all. There is this open conversation with her.” (Respondent 7)*

One of the respondents felt that the support he has been getting from his manager was different than what he got when he was working from the office. However, the change was not seen in a negative light and the respondent felt that his manager had been using a lot of resources for the respondent to be able to work well remotely.

*“It has been very different compared to the office. At the office, we spoke on a daily basis but sometimes when I worked remotely more, we spoke only once a week. I know my leader thinks that I'm doing really well with my job and I'm doing more than I should also because I'm working more than I should. We talk about priorities and how to work at home and he also helped me with this kind of thing, how do you prioritize when you are at home. So, I suppose he's been really good for me also because it was my first full-time job and he's actually investing a lot of time in making me thrive.” (Respondent 6)*

Another matter that was highlighted was the feedback that the manager gives about the performance when working remotely. Although the managers give feedback on the performance it was emphasized that the responsibility to take the needed actions is still on the person who is working remotely.

*“My manager has been giving me feedback from working longer than I should and also told me to pay attention to it. We have also discussed if there are some meetings I could skip or if I could share the workload with my colleague. Occasionally, my manager raises this concern during our meetings. It is more about yourself and how you can restrain the working hours.” (Respondent 4)*

Additionally, to this section, it was asked from the respondents that are in a managerial role how do they support their employees’ work-life balance when they work remotely. The respondents shared that they have been keeping in touch with their team members, at the beginning of the pandemic more densely, and as time has passed less frequently. Also, both respondents keep in the workweek a moment with their team where they can talk about non-work-related stuff.

*“When all of this (the pandemic) started I was constantly keeping in touch with my employees through Skype and asked them how they are feeling. We have also discussed if they need to borrow some equipment from the office. I think that it has been very important to have the cameras on so you can actually see how they are doing. Now that the time has passed most of the employees think that remote working is the best thing that has ever happened to us and because of that I haven’t been worrying too much.” (Respondent 3)*

*“Besides the monthly one-to-one conversations, I try to have quick calls with them. I try to ask how they are doing and how they are feeling. I think it is very important to reach out to those who do work remotely mainly.” (Respondent 4)*

The interviewees were also asked if their manager can enhance their support related to maintaining work-life balance in remote work. Also, the interviewees were asked if they



could come up with some better ways that their manager can support and help to maintain the balance. The respondents felt that there are no better ways that their manager could support their work-life balance. The respondents felt that they had gotten more support than they could've asked for. Furthermore, most of the respondents felt that in the end, the responsibility for the balance is theirs. One of the respondents shared that it is almost impossible to support employees when they work remotely because the manager cannot see if the employee is doing the required amount or more. However, this respondent elaborated that the manager needs to be listening and observing the situation.

*"I think it is more between your ears to take care of the balance. Yes, the manager is supporting it (work-life balance), but I do not think she could do anything more." (Respondent 4)*

### **5.3.3 Organization's role in supporting employee work-life balance**

Next, the findings related to organizations' role in supporting employee work-life balance will be introduced. The findings will be discussed from the aspect of how organizations have supported their employees' work-life balance and how it can be enhanced. As has been mentioned before, organizations can have different types of policies, practices, strategies, and programs related to work-life balance. Moreover, both organizations and employees benefit from having work-life balance initiatives implemented in the company culture (Garg & Rani, 2014). Hence, regarding the research question, it is crucial to understand what type of support the interviewees have gotten with work-life balance in remote work.

All the respondents felt that their organization has supported them in multiple ways. The factors that were raised the most were flexible work hours and arrangements, wellness vouchers, and getting the proper equipment to work remotely.

*“At least flexible working hours is one of the things that has supported my work-life balance. Also, exercising is supported by our company.” (Respondent 1)*

*“Remote work enables to work from other places than home as well. You can for example work from your summer cottage, so it of course brings flexibility to the direction of free time.” (Respondent 2)*

*“I think our organization has supported us excellently. We have wellness vouchers, a work well-being team that has supported work-life balance, and our occupational healthcare has been closely involved with everyone moving to remote work if someone needs help with challenges or pacing the workdays. I feel that flexible working hours are a big factor in people’s wellbeing.” (Respondent 5)*

*“The flexible work arrangements have been very good; I like the opportunity to choose if I want to work from home or the office. From our organization, we have gotten remote working guidelines that have all kinds of advice related to remote work. We have also been asked if we need a second screen, a chair, or USB connectors.” (Respondent 6)*

Additionally, one of the respondents shared that she has been very happy that the organization has given the opportunity for the employees also to work safely from the office during the pandemic. It was also seen as a flexible work arrangement.

*“Our organization has supported us by being able to go to the office safely during the pandemic. The workspaces had been arranged so that there is no risk, and it is safe to work from the office.” (Respondent 4)*

The interviewees were asked about enhancing the support by their organization related to their work-life balance in remote work. Also, it was asked if they could come up with some better ways that their organization could support and help to maintain the balance. Five out of seven of the respondents felt that there are no other or better ways their organization could support their work-life balance better. Moreover, these respondents were very happy with the support their organization has provided to them.

*“There is nothing more I could have asked or demanded. Our organization has already done so much.” (Respondent 3)*

*“I have gotten more than I could’ve hoped for.” (Respondent 6)*

*“No, our organization is so big that there are already many features and different types of tools that can definitely support remote work”. (Respondent 7)*

Two of the respondents felt that their organization could support better their wellbeing. One of the respondents shared that it would be nice to have a wellness hour during the workweek because it would be an investment in well-being. Another respondent highlighted that it would be nice to have more wellness vouchers because it would improve the well-being of the employees even more.

*“One good way could be to have one hour a week during the workday a wellness hour that would be related to exercising or wellbeing.” (Respondent 2)*

*“Wellness vouchers is one of the essential matters that the organization could probably support with more. The wellness vouchers give the employees freedom to use them as they wish.” (Respondent 5)*

To conclude, self-management and support from the manager and organization are all important and inevitable in balancing work and personal life in remote work. Self-management has the most important role in balancing work and personal life because, in the end, the responsibility to maintain and manage the balance is on everyone to themselves. Managers and the organization can support it in many ways such as observing and listening to the employees and creating practices and policies that suit individuals' needs in remote work. Developing and maintaining an organizational culture that supports and enables possibilities to have a proper work-life balance is essential. Furthermore, it benefits both the employee and the organization.

## 6 Conclusions

This chapter concludes the study. First, a summary of the empirical findings is provided and an answer to the research question is given. Next, the theoretical and managerial contributions of the study are presented. Additionally, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are demonstrated.

### 6.1 Summary of the key findings

The aim of this study was to understand better how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed. The study was conducted because the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted employees' work-life balance by forcing many companies to work remotely. Even though signs of adoption to the situation have been transpiring, the adjustments of employees to the remote working environment in the "new normal" are important and should be further investigated. This study focused on exploring what kind of impacts remote work has on the work-life balance of employees. More specifically, the study aimed to provide comprehension of the challenges and benefits that the employees face in remote work. Additionally, to understand what kind of self-management tools employees can use to manage their work-life balance, and how can their managers and organization support the balance. Hence, the managers' perspective was seen as an important part of the study to gain comprehension of both employees' and managers' aspects.

The findings indicated that remote work has affected the respondents' work-life balance mainly positively. Flexible work arrangements and having the freedom to choose whether to work from home or from the office were seen as a big benefit towards having a better balance between work and personal life. However, the respondents felt that it is crucial to go to the office to gain tacit knowledge, expand the network by meeting colleagues, and learn new skills. Hence, the results revealed that having a hybrid model would be the most suitable option to be able to maintain the balance between work and personal life. In line with this, Knilans (2022), 97.6 percent of remote workers would like

to have the opportunity to work remotely at least some part of the workweek, for the rest of their careers. Therefore, the transition to a hybrid model in work cultures is gaining more and more popularity (Knilans, 2022).

The theoretical base as regards work-life balance in this thesis is the border theory. According to Clark (2000), the border theory underlines that work and personal life are two different domains that are interactive. In this thesis, the results revealed that having work and personal life as separate domains makes it easier to maintain the balance between work and personal life. However, in the remote work environment doing housework was seen as a way to get the needed breaks during the workday. Additionally, the results revealed that having a dedicated office space at home made it easier to maintain the balance between work and personal life. Although most of the interviewees thought that having work and personal life as separate as possible makes it easier to maintain the balance, some thought that it has become more challenging to maintain the balance as time has passed. In line with this, Clark (2000), the challenges are related to mixing the domains and impacting the ability to prevail the domains separately.

The findings illustrated that there are both challenges and benefits when it comes to work-life balance in remote working conditions. Existing literature indicated that the biggest challenges with work-life balance in remote work are longer working hours, not being able to unplug after work, and reduced satisfaction with work-life balance because the roles and duties are blurred (Akkaya et al, 2020; Best, 2021). Many of the interviewees agreed with not being able to unplug after work and working longer hours. The results revealed also that communication with colleagues is seen as a major challenge. Moreover, inactiveness was also strongly connected to impacting negatively on work-life balance because of remote work. However, all the interviewees were, regardless of the challenges, happy that they were able to work remotely and agreed that the workloads would be the same at the office.

Based on the findings it can be argued that the benefits of remote work exceed the challenges. Similar to the findings of the present study, Bataineh (2019) reported that work-life balance has a positive impact on employee well-being and significantly affects employee performance. As mentioned earlier, all the interviewees were happy about having the opportunity to work remotely. According to Muller (2021) factors that affect the balance positively include having fewer interruptions, being able to focus better, and being able to spend time with family, partners, pets, and friends. The biggest benefits that were raised in the interviews were related to not having to commute, having more free time, being able to concentrate better, having flexibility with the work schedule, and being able to sleep longer. Furthermore, the empirical study revealed that the interviewees have been learning new skills such as IT skills during the remote work and it has positively affected their work-life balance.

According to Sanfilippo (2021), it is difficult but fundamental to balance professional and personal life. The findings of the present study revealed that self-management is the most important tool to balance work and personal life. As many of the interviewees highlighted, it is their own responsibility, in the end, to take care of it. Hence, it is important to use self-management tools to be able to maintain balance. Most of the interviewees were using self-management tools such as time management, organizational skills, and prioritizing work and personal tasks. It could be argued based on the findings that being able to utilize self-management tools makes it easier to balance work and personal life. According to Sharma (2021, p. 1), self-management tools are helpful practices to maintain a balance between work and personal life. Furthermore, a positive work-life balance is as beneficial for employees as it is for employers.

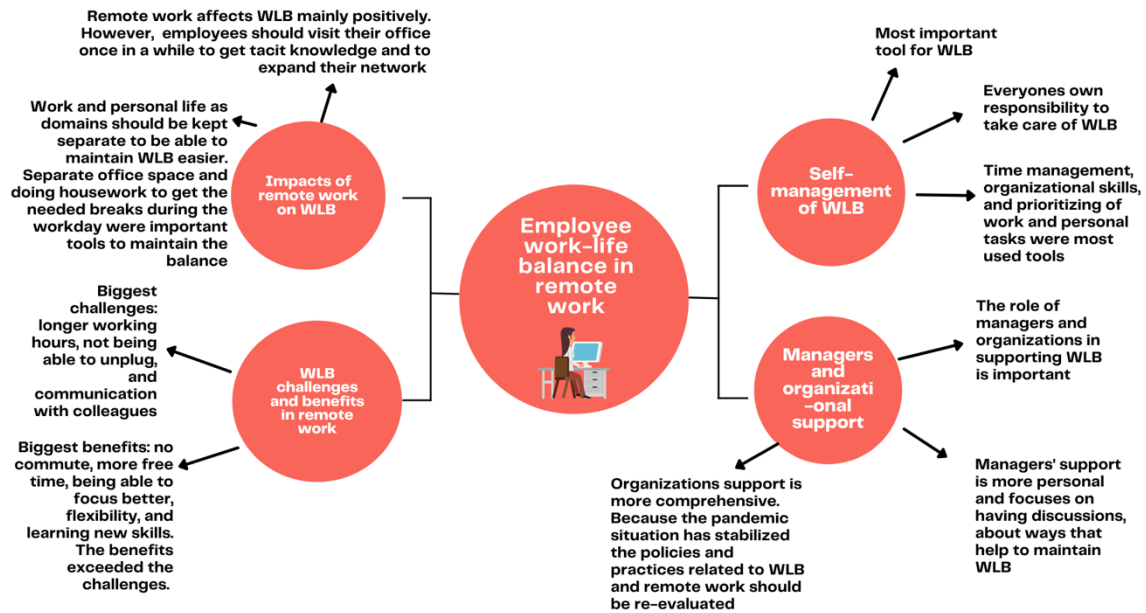
However, managers and organization support should not be underestimated based on the findings. In line with this, Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) have reported that the role of both the manager and organization are significant in supporting employee work-life balance. The interviewees revealed that both managers and the organization have been supporting their work-life balance. Most essential support that was highlighted by the

interviewees included having discussions on how remote work is going, showing example, teaching how to prioritize, and teaching time management skills. All these answers are in line with the existing literature (Lotich, 2020; Sanfilippo, 2021). Furthermore, many of the interviewees felt that they are getting enough support from their managers and organization. However, some of the interviewees felt that their organization could do more in order to improve work-life balance. The improvements had to do with organizations investing more in employees' well-being by implementing a wellness hour into a workweek and distributing more wellness vouchers. It could be argued based on the findings that at the beginning of the pandemic the support from the managers and the organization was crucial. However, because the situation has stabilized the support is not as intensively needed but it is still important to check up on the employees and see how they are maintaining their work-life balance in remote work. From an organizational perspective, the policies and practices including flexible working arrangements, well-being and health arrangements, and organizational support and understanding should be re-evaluated in order to meet the needs of the employees better.

In conclusion, this study gives additional in-depth evidence on how remote working conditions affect work-life balance of employees and how can work-life balance be managed. This research gave interesting insights from the perspectives such as the impact of remote work on work-life balance, challenges, and benefits of work-life balance, self-management of work-life balance, and managers' and organizations' support for employees' work-life balance in remote working conditions. It needs to be highlighted that work-life balance is a subjective experience, which makes it difficult to generalize the results. However, the interviews gave an understanding of employees' insights about remote work and work-life balance in such work. Furthermore, participants who were in a manager position increased the overall understanding of the subject by sharing their insights on how they have supported their employees' work-life balance. Figure 1 presents the key findings in one mind map. The following section presents more practical recommendations on the topic.



**Figure 1.** Summary of the key findings



## 6.2 Theoretical contributions

This study increases the knowledge of work-life balance of employees in remote working conditions. As was mentioned earlier, remote work has been gaining a new meaning since the pandemic and the impact of how it has shaped the experience of work-life balance hasn't been studied comprehensively because it has been a quite new phenomenon (Wang, et al. 2020). As time has passed the remote working has become a normal work arrangement. Hence it is important to understand the impact of remote work on work-life balance. This paper identifies that at the beginning of the pandemic, employees had struggles getting accustomed to the pandemic situation. However, throughout time employees have gotten used to remote work which has been affecting their ability to maintain the balance between work and personal life. The findings from previous research suggest that flexibility of work arrangements is seen as a positive factor (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Ferreira et al, 2021; Mulki et al., 2009). This study agrees with the previous ones and identifies that flexible work arrangements are a positive factor; however, this study highlighted that it is important for the employees to go to the office in order to get tacit knowledge and to expand networks.

In this study, it was also discovered that having work and personal life as separate domains has a positive effect on maintaining a work-life balance. According to Clark (2000), work-life balance can be defined as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home. Opposed to the already existing literature, this paper emphasized that there does not always need to be good functioning between work and personal life in order to create the desired balance. The study identifies that blurring the borders of each domain does not constantly create imbalance. Additionally, the study highlights that sometimes it is more beneficial to blur the borders to be able to be more productive at work. However, the study confirms that keeping work and personal life separate helps to obtain the desired balance.

The paper confirms Akkaya's et al. (2021), Best's (2021) and Steward's (2022) findings of challenges related to remote work and work-life balance by addressing that the biggest challenges are unplugging after work, blurred lines between the domains, and longer working hours. Furthermore, existing literature suggests that there are multiple benefits related to work-life balance in remote work such as being able to focus better, having fewer interruptions, and being able to spend time with family, friends, pets, and partners (Muller, 2021). The findings of the present study are mainly in line with the previous studies. However, unlike former studies, this thesis identified that being able to sleep longer and learning new skills were also factors that were seen beneficially related to work-life balance in remote work.

This study emphasizes that self-management is the most important tool to balance work and personal life. Existing literature indicates that creating boundaries and identifying priorities are important practices in order to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Lee, 2021; Sanfilippo, 2021). The findings of the present study are in line with the previous studies. Furthermore, in this study, it is discovered that support from the manager and the organization related to work-life balance in remote work is fundamental. However, this study highlights that managers' and organizations' support is limited because in

remote work setting it is difficult to observe how employees are maintaining the balance between work and personal life. Nevertheless, this paper identifies that checking up on employees regularly and re-evaluating the practices and policies within the organization helps the employees to keep the desired balance between work and personal life.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is gaining a comprehensive understanding of work-life balance in remote working conditions from the aspects of the impact of remote work on work-life balance, challenges and benefits of work-life balance in remote work, and self-management and support from the manager and the organizations. Earlier, these factors have been studied separately, but not in one study. Therefore, the study contributes to the theory by combining these factors that affect work-life balance of employees in remote working conditions.

### **6.3 Managerial implications**

This section summarizes managerial and organizational support mechanisms that were found useful in supporting employees' work-life balance. As the research was not done for a specific company, the guidance is more general and useful for companies regardless of the field. In this section, managerial and organizational support mechanisms will be discussed separately.

As it has been earlier stated by Lotich (2020), the manager's role is crucial in maintaining a healthy workforce. Manager's support is more personal than organizational support and its impact on employee work-life balance is important. Therefore, the managers should be aware of the negative and positive factors and how those impact employee work-life balance. The study indicates that when employees work remotely it is important that the manager checks in with the employees regularly. More specifically, when the manager checks in with the employee, it is essential to have the video on for the manager to see and observe how the employee is doing. Additionally, regular training about how to succeed in remote work is necessary so that the employees can adjust their work habits if they find it necessary. All in all, communication with the employees

is important, and the manager should be actively listening, giving the employee their full attention when they are discussing, asking questions, and working together towards a solution. These are ways the manager can support employees' work-life balance remotely.

Organizational support, on the other hand, is more comprehensive. An organization's role in employee work-life balance is to create practices, policies, and work culture that promotes better work-life balance. The study indicates that diverse support mechanisms influence positively work-life balance. Organizations should consider reshaping toward a hybrid model and not go back to the model that was used before the pandemic. As was highlighted in the analysis, all the respondents were happy to have the opportunity to work remotely. Therefore, it is suggested that companies should adjust the support mechanisms to a hybrid model. Flexible work arrangements are seen as a positive factor toward work-life balance and organizations should utilize them in the future in order to be able to support the employees' work-life balance effectively.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the study**

As studies typically, this research has some limitations. The first limitation concerns the sample group. Although participants had different levels of experience and worked in different fields the findings cannot be generalized. The second limitation concerns having previous remote work experience before the Covid-19 pandemic. Almost all the participants had some remote working experience before the pandemic which means that the shift to working remotely full-time or mainly was not as prominent as for employees who have limited experience or no experience of remote work. The third limitation concerns country-specific generalization. Even though there were few participants from other countries in addition to Finland, country-specific generalizations are difficult to draw because countries have had different restrictions and policies regarding remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, even though the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic has been settling down it is hard to understand the long-term impact of remote work based on the pandemic on work-life balance. Because of this, the results

of this study focus on a short-term perspective about remote work's effects on work and personal life. Finally, because the participants were from Nordic countries the findings cannot be generalized to other, different contexts. The next section elaborates and gives further research suggestions.

## **6.5 Suggestions for future research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions for future research will be demonstrated. Because the study focused on people who lived in all types of households, future research could investigate more in-depth people who live in single households. It would be interesting to understand more in-depth what kind of impact remote work has on work-life balance for people who live alone.

Another future research idea could be to study the subject with a larger target group from different countries. This way, the quantitative research method could be utilized to investigate the subject. Furthermore, this way cultural differences toward work-life balance in remote work could be further studied.

One interesting research topic would be enhancing self-management of work-life balance. Many of the participants felt that it is the most crucial tool to balance work and personal life. This type of study could also help the employees who struggle to find balance when working remotely.

Another idea is also to re-assess the study with different work-life balance theories. It could bring interesting insights to the topic and bring out different types of impacts that remote work has on work-life balance.

The topic could be studied in a new context. Now that the hybrid model is becoming an opportunity that organizations can utilize in the future it would be interesting to investigate how it affects work-life balance. This would also give a long-term perspective on the

topic. Moreover, it would be interesting to understand how this phenomena's findings differ from the findings of this study.

Lastly, one of the respondents mentioned that it will be challenging to get the employees back to the office when it becomes relevant. Now, they have become used to this flexible work arrangement benefit. It would be interesting to investigate the industries where this phenomenon is happening and how it affects the employee's work-life balance when the employees do not have the opportunity to work full-time remotely anymore.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

#### Background questions

- Age
- Gender
- Work field
- Work title
- Marital status
- Do you live alone or with someone?
- If with someone, who is included in your household?

#### Remote work questions

- Have you worked remotely before Covid-19 pandemic? How often?
- During the pandemic, have you worked remotely? How often?
- Do you work remotely now? If yes, how many days a week?
- Do you have a dedicated office space at home?

#### Work-life balance in remote working conditions questions

- In general, how do you feel about the balance that you have between work and personal life?
- If thinking of your work and personal life as domains in remote work – How do you think they are connected? How do you think they are separated?
- What has changed in relation to your work-life balance since you started working remotely?
- Do you feel that you get more interrupted by work or vice versa personal life when doing both from the same place?
- Do you feel that work and personal life get mixed significantly when you work from home?
- How do you maintain the work-life balance in remote work?

#### Work-life balance challenges and benefits questions

- What are the biggest challenges related to work-life balance in remote working conditions in your opinion?
- Do you feel that these challenges would not appear if you would be working from the office?
- What are the biggest benefits related to work-life balance in remote working conditions in your opinion?

**Management of work-life balance questions**

- How do you manage your work-life balance? Which self-management skills do you use to manage the balance?
- How has your manager supported your work-life balance (managerial support meaning setting example, setting boundaries between work and personal life, teaching about priorities)?
- *Question for manager:* How do you support your employees work-life balance when they work remotely?
- How has your organization supported you work-life balance? (Organizational support meaning flexible work arrangements, health and well-being arrangements etc.) Are there any specific programs or policies that you are aware of that help to maintain the balance?
- If thinking of the support you get from your manager, are there any additional ways you could think of that would help to support your work-life balance better?
- How about organizational support - Do you think there are additional ways your organization can help you to support work-life balance better?