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Organization development as Instrument to build and maintain Organizational Effectiveness in Remote mode. A qualitative inductive research.

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BUSINESS SCHOOL

Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior

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Resumo

Os confinamentos do COVID-19, impulsionados pela saúde pública, forçaram imprevisivelmente os consultores de desenvolvimento de organização (DO) a trabalharem a partir de casa em pouco tempo. Como as intervenções originais, impulsionadas por conhecimentos comportamentais e de ciências sociais foram predominantemente concebidas para encontros presenciais, a adaptação a serviços virtuais de DO era inevitável. O objetivo deste estudo era investigar como os consultores de desenvolvimento organizacional ajustaram a sua atividade laboral de um ambiente predominantemente presencial para um ambiente exclusivamente mediado pela tecnologia. Adoptámos uma abordagem bottom-up, de investigação para o desenvolvimento de conceitos indutivos, seguindo a metodologia de Gioia e colegas (2013) para estudar o processo de adaptação de 10 consultores externos e internos de DO. O quadro emergente sugere que a adaptação a um cenário virtual foi um processo complexo que ocorreu em fases mais ou menos sequenciais: (1) entramos em acção, (2) reconhecimento de limites, (3) uma necessidade contínua e evolução de uma alfabetização tecnológica e de ferramentas, e finalmente (4) a aceitação da mudança, resultando num estado evoluído do campo ocupacional. Os resultados indicam um paralelo com o famoso modelo de mudança de três estágios de Lewin (1951). Sugerimos que o nosso quadro emergente seja aplicado por outros campos profissionais (por exemplo, sector da educação, terapia, consultorias) num processo de transição para um cenário virtual. Para facilitar a transição noutros campos profissionais, delineamos um roteiro como orientação.

JEL classificação: M53,O15

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento da organização, equipas virtuais, trabalho remoto, abordagem teórica fundamentada

Abstract

The public-health driven COVID-19 lockdowns unpredictably forced organization development (OD) consultants to work from home in no time. As original interventions, driven by behavioral and social science knowledge were predominantly designed for face-to-face encounters, adaptation to virtual OD services was inevitable. The purpose of this study was to investigate how organization development consultants adjusted their labor activity from a predominantly face-to-face to a solely technology-mediated setting. We adopted a bottom-up, research approach to inductive concept development, following Gioia and colleagues' methodology (2013) to study the adaptation process of 10 both external and internal OD consultants. The emergent framework suggests that adjusting to a virtual setting was a complex process that occurs in more or less sequential stages: (1) we go into action, (2) acknowledging limits, (3) an ongoing need and evolvement of a tech & tool literacy, and finally (4) the acceptance of change, resulting in an evolved state of the occupational field. The findings indicate a parallel to Lewin's famous Three-Phase Model of Change (1951). We suggest that our emergent framework can be well applied by other occupational fields (e.g., education sector, therapy, consultancies) in a transition process to a virtual setting. To facilitate the transition in other occupational fields we outline a roadmap as guidance.

JEL classification: M53,O15

Keywords: Organization development, virtual teams, remote work, grounded theory approach

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List of abbreviations

OD	Organization development
ICT	Information and communication technology
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
GDPR	General data protection regulation

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1. Introduction

By mid-March 2020 the COVID-19 lockdowns compelled working teams all over the globe in a short time to work from home. Therefore, regardless of how those teams worked before, they were out of a sudden situated in a maximum level of team virtuality, which is characterized among others by a high dependence on communication technologies, and potential geographic dispersion (e.g., Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Thus, the access to physical tools, resources or conference rooms in the office spaces was strongly limited (Chong, Huang & Chang, 2020), leaving little but the virtual space to communicate and collaborate. One occupational group that traditionally worked onsite and was therefore greatly forced to transition to a solely virtual setting were organization development consultants.

Organization development (OD) is comprised by a set of interventions, undertaken to improve employee well-being and organizational effectiveness by applying theory from organizational behavior and psychology (Beer & Walton, 1987). Such interventions are described as a set of planned structured activities (French & Bell, 1998) and can be distinguished in their mode of intervention (e.g., training, confrontation, plan making), focus of attention (e.g., individual, group, organization), and the diagnosed problem (e.g., role definition, communication, culture & climate) (Schmuck & Miles, 1976). OD consultants typically sequence and design particular interventions individually after diagnosing the organizational shortcomings or needs (Beer & Walton, 1987). The relationship between OD consultants and their clients is characterized by a close, collaborative relationship, where the OD consultant facilitates the organization members' process of problem solving, learning and self-improvement (Huffington, Brunning & Cole, 1997; French & Bell, 1998). Thus, compared to other consulting methods the OD consultant acts as a helper or facilitator, instead of an expert advisor. Hence, OD is an unfolding, long-term process aiming to increase organizational effectiveness by tackling the human side of organizations. In doing so, it refers to the emotional dynamics of individuals which commonly call for dialogue (French & Bell, 1998). To apply interventions, driven by behavioral and social science effectively, to promote the required dialogue, and to foster a close interaction and relationship most of the collaborations so far (e.g., workshops, trainings, focus groups or onsite visits) between the OD consultants and their clients occurred in person. Virtual meetings, however, were considered as challenging for traditional OD consultants. The physical presence of all participants allows the OD consultant to read interpersonal signs of frustration, disagreement and impatience, or enthusiasm, energy, and engagement. In the virtual setting however, such cues are more difficult to recognize

(Speake, 2008). As a result, organization development interventions and methods were primarily designed for and therefore dependent on face-to-face events. Hence, with the outbreak of the pandemic many OD events had to be cancelled or postponed to an uncertain date as virtual skills, techniques and methods of both OD consultants and clients were strongly limited.

The objective of the present study is to generate a framework illustrating the process of how OD consultants adjusted to a technology-mediated setting. We apply an inductive, bottom-up approach following Gioia and colleagues' methodology (2013) to analyze the adaptation process, including the OD consultants' perceptions, actions and challenges, as well as the new implemented practices, methods, and tools. The qualitative inductive analysis is based on 10 interviews with internal and external OD consultants, to gain information from people experiencing the event of study. Furthermore, archival documents related to the adjustment process, as well as a Slack workspace of OD consultants were integrated in the analysis. Scholars developed numerous theoretical models of organizational change (e.g., Lewin, 1951), however, models on how workforce adjusted to completely virtual work did not yet emerge. The purpose of our study is to delve into the adjustment practices and processes of OD consultants that helped to deal with a major transition to virtual organization development. We propose that the emergent framework can be applied more widely by other lines of work who face a transition to a technology-mediated setting by outlining the adjustment process to virtual collaboration.

The study proceeds as follows. Firstly, in Section II the theoretical background on organization development and remote work is elaborated, resulting in the drafting of the research question. The inductive methodology is explained secondly in Section III. Subsequently, the results will be outlined in Section IV. Lastly, in Section V the limitations and ideas for future research are illustrated and practical implications on the framework of adjusting to a virtual setting are pointed out.

2. Characterization of organization development and remote work

First of all, organization development services will be clarified. Hereby we focus on the consultant-client relationship, the OD program and the values in OD. Subsequently, telework and virtual teams will be characterized, as well as its implication for OD.

2.1 Understanding organization development

2.1.1 Organization development services

Organizations need to continuously change or totally transform themselves to adapt to their dynamically changing environment (Huffington et al., 1997; Hodges, 2016). Demands of change may occur from the external environment, e.g., from competitors, customers, governmental agencies or new technologies; or from the internal environment, such as new strategic directions, need for new internal structures or obsolete services or products (French & Bell, 1998). However, managing and sustaining processes of change and keeping organizations viable and healthy in a volatile world is a complex and challenging task (Huffington et al., 1997; French & Bell, 1998). Scholars indicate organization development as an effective strategy to deal with rampant changes that occur in society and business environments (Huffington et al., 1997; French & Bell, 1998). The OD literature provides numerous definitions for it, which results in an absence of a single accepted definition (French & Bell, 1998). However, scholars generally agree on the nature of OD and its major characteristics. A traditional and commonly cited definition was offered by Richard Beckhard (1969), one of the pioneers of the field. He states that "organization development is an effort (1) *planned*, (2) *organization-wide*, and (3) *managed* from the *top*, to (4) increase *organization effectiveness* and *health* through (5) *planned interventions* in the organization's "processes," using *behavioral-science* knowledge" (p. 9). Huffington et al. (1997) add in their definition that OD processes commonly involve a change agent, facilitating that the organization manages and anticipates its own learning and development.

Many scholars agree that OD is a planned process of change (Schmuck & Miles, 1997; Burke, 1994; Huffington et al., 1997). Hodges (2016) describes planned change as a deliberate process of conscious reasoning and action. Anyhow, Anderson (2015) criticizes the focus on *planned* change as OD actions often respond to not properly planned environmental threats. While claiming that most of the points of Beckhard's definition are still contemporary, Anderson (2015) also criticizes the need to manage OD activities through the top management as organizations nowadays often tend to have less hierarchical structure. Bearing that in mind,

a more contemporary conceptualization is given by Anderson (2015) defining that "organization development is the process of increasing organizational effectiveness and facilitating personal and organizational change through the use of interventions, driven by social and behavioral science knowledge" (p.18). Hence, scholars consent that organizational and individual change is the purpose and backdrop of OD (French & Bell, 1998; Anderson, 2015). Furthermore, they agree that OD is concerned with the wider setting of an organization and that it takes a total system perspective (Huffington et al., 1997; French & Bell, 1998; Anderson, 2015). French & Bell (1998) indicate that OD provides a prescription to improve the "fit" between the organization and its environment, among organizational elements such as organizational culture, processes, structures, and strategies and between the organization and its individuals (Anderson, 2015; French & Bell, 1998). Thus, existing definitions agree that an outcome of OD is organizational effectiveness by getting organizations, teams and individuals to function better (French & Bell, 1998). The dual focus on the development and improvement of both the organization and its individuals makes OD a unique organizational improvement strategy (French & Bell, 1998). A major objective is to increase the effectiveness of organizations, teams and individual's social and human processes, hence solving important issues by confronting the human side of organizations (French & Bell, 1998). Huffington et al. (1997) claim that OD aims to improve the organizations utilization of human resources by integrating individuals needs with the organization's purpose and mission, creating a synergy of efforts. Therefore, OD is about people and their interaction and plays an important role in supporting individuals through transition (Hodges, 2017). OD is a field of applied behavioral and social sciences with regard to change deriving valid knowledge from diverse disciplines such as psychology, social and organizational psychology, anthropology, sociology, organization theory, business, and human resource management, etc. (French & Bell, 1998; Anderson, 2015). With this knowledge, interventions are developed to help individuals and organizations to change successfully (Anderson, 2015; Hodges, 2017). Therefore, if a company is forced or want to change, OD provides relevant frameworks and processes that support the implementation and sustain the change (Hodges, 2017). Such change processes that involve a collection of techniques and activities are usually facilitated by consultants (Hodges, 2017). In the following, the focus on the client-consultant relationship will be further described.

2.1.2 Client-consultant relationship

Organization development must be distinguished from other consulting methods. A basic difference lies in the role of the OD consultant and his relationship to the clients (French & Bell, 1998; Hodges, 2016), where the client can be an organization, a team or an individual (Huffington et al., 1997). The OD consultant creates a collaborative relationship with the clients that bases on relative equality as they mutually identify and take action on opportunities and problems (French & Bell, 1998). The role of the OD consultant is to help the client with a felt concern or need by structuring activities to enable organization members to solve their own problem and take advantage of opportunities. The OD consultant supports the client by finding effective ways to solve problems, and learn how to do it better over time (French & Bell, 1998). Compared to management consultants, OD consultants do not offer content advice but consultation on the process undertaken to achieve a desired outcome (Anderson, 2015). Therefore, consultants teach organization members the key knowledge and skills necessary for continuous self-improvement. The literature names that as "learning how to learn" or "self-renewal" (French & Bell, 1998, p.4). With the help of this consulting method growth, competence, learning and empowerment increases throughout the client system (French & Bell, 1998). With the previously described methods and goals, the OD consultant attempts to cause sustained, long-term, positive change in the organization (Anderson, 2015; French & Bell, 1998; Hodges, 2016). OD consultancy can either be provided externally or internally to an organization. Internal consultants provide their services to individuals, teams or a whole organization of which he/she is also an employee or member. However, external consultancy is provided by a consultant outside of the organization (Huffington et al., 1997).

2.1.3 The OD program

The OD process initiates as a leader confronts an unwelcome situation that should be corrected, such as poor morale, inappropriate organizational structure, poor team performance, low productivity, etc. (French & Bell, 1998). French & Bell (1998) suggest that every OD program consists of three major components: diagnosis, action and program management. Thus, the first component of the OD program is to diagnose the current state of the system with regard to the clients' focus of interest (French & Bell, 1998). The diagnosis consists of continuous data collection and analysis regarding the target of interest aiming to provide a concise picture of how things really are. Thus, OD programs are based on well-founded information about the status quo, contemporary opportunities and problems, as well as

consequences of actions that are associated with goal achievement (French & Bell, 1998). Based on the diagnosis, the OD practitioner sets up action plans that are particularly tailored to address issues and produce desired changes at the target of interest. Therefore, the action phase is composed of interventions, defined as "a set of structured activities whereby groups or individuals engage in tasks whose goals are organizational improvement" (Chell, 1993, in Huffington et al., 1997, p.22). Subsequently, the results of implemented actions need to be evaluated concerning their desired effects. If opportunities were not seized or problems not solved, the problem area needs to be reconceptualized and redefined to set up a new action plan (French & Bell, 1998). Therefore, the OD program consists of a repetition of a 'diagnosis-action-evaluation-action' sequence (French & Bell, 1998, p.115). Those steps are closely related to action research, a historical strand of OD, described as "the process of using social scientific research practices to gather data about groups, intervene in their processes, and evaluate the results of the intervention" (Anderson, 2015, p.130). However, besides the practical component action research requires contribution to theoretical knowledge, which is not a central objective of OD (Anderson, 2015).

Anderson (2015) divides the whole OD program into 7 phases: Entry, contracting, data gathering, diagnosis, feedback, intervention and evaluation. To ensure a successful program project management consists of all activities that come along with this sequence, such as monitoring events, dealing with surprises and complexities or developing strategies (French & Bell, 1998). As every individual, team or organization reveals its own opportunities and problems, every OD process is itself unique and not only a toolkit or standardized methodical set of fixed procedures and practices. Therefore, OD consists of a set of tools, methods, techniques, concepts, approaches and theories that support the consultant to navigate organizational change effectively (Hodges, 2016). OD is no destination but an unfolding process that refers to the emotional dynamics of people that usually require dialogue (French & Bell, 1998; Hodges, 2016).

Anyhow, Burke (2018) claims that the fundamental OD inventions (e.g., T-group, Lewin, 1946; survey feedback, Mann, 1957; Large-group interventions, Beckhard, 1967) arose mainly between 1939 and 1969. Besides the introduction of the appreciative inquiry (i.e., group dialogue that focalizes on strength; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) sparse innovation has occurred in the field. However, the world has become significantly more complicated since that and organizations face inconceivable pressure to fast change in a complex environment. Thus, scholars consent that OD has not responded fast enough to the contemporary needs (Anderson, 2015; Pasmore & Woodman, 2017; Burke, 2018). However, the role of OD

consultants is more important than ever taking the enormous impact on individuals in this context into account (Anderson, 2015). Therefore, OD headwinds now include, for instance, leadership development, change management and facilitation of work redesign (Anderson, 2015; Burke, 2018). Since technology connected the globe more and more, also OD consultants were demanded to become familiar with its challenges and opportunities. Technological developments, such as 360 feedback, data gathering for employee surveys, and individual performance and career planning tools influenced OD interventions (Anderson, 2015).

As previously described, OD is not just rigidly following a systematic procedure conducted by consultants but involves unique dialogues, decisions, and assessments. Consequently, OD skills are not developed by learning a standard toolkit. In fact, OD practitioners rather have to internalize factors that impact the OD decisions, which are guided by a set of ethical beliefs and values (Anderson, 2015). Those values and ethics refer to how individuals should be treated, or how organizations and organizational change should be piloted (Anderson, 2015). They guide choices regarding the process, the clients and the working relationship and help to clarify position and encourage dialogue. Furthermore, they help to evaluate effort. Such underlying values additionally distinguish OD from any other consulting service or change method (Anderson, 2015). The core values of OD are strongly impacted by humanistic assumptions. Those assumptions mean that individuals are trustworthy, want to reach personal satisfaction and growth and deserve respect (Wooten & white, 1999). Furthermore, human values imply a belief in human worth and dignity, equality, and equity as well as democratic principles (Anderson, 2015).

2.2 Characterization of remote work

2.2.1 Working remotely

In March 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 was categorized as a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization, leading multiple countries to impose a lockdown accompanied by strict rules regarding vocational and private life to particularly reduce physical contact. Thus, working remotely, in this case mostly from home, became an imperative in a matter of time for many employees of occupational areas that could be performed as such. Even though information and communication technology (ICT) had already become an essential part of the organizational environment in the last decades and reduced the importance of the physical location of the workplace (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė, 2019), many employees were forced to immediately adapt to remote working without any preparation.

Originally termed telework, it lacks a commonly accepted definition. Scholars suggest teleworking is a form of flexible working that is performed outside the conventional workplace by using information and communication technology (ICT) enabling workforce to access their labor activity and communicate with it (Nilles, 1997; Bailey & Kurland, 2002). As teleworkers complete their work from anywhere at any time, it is considered as an alternative form of work that has multifaceted implications for organizations, individuals and society (Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Pérez, Sanchez & de Luis Carnicer, 2003). This could be among others the organizations' ability to recruit talents worldwide (Madsen, 2003), increased job satisfaction (Pratt, 1999), or reduced traffic congestion (Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996). Research claims that even before laptop computers, phones or other wireless devices arose, teleworkers worked outside of the office. However, telework represents an early form of virtual work (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Working from other places than the conventional office is also indicated as telecommuting, virtual work or remote work (Nilles, 1997, Bailey & Kurland, 2002). As the term remote work is more contemporary the present work uses that term in the following. Scholars examined employees' traits necessary for remote work as well as factors which predict who can work remotely (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Olson, 1983). Job suitability, including characteristics such as little need for face-to-face interaction or individual control of work pace, is considered as an indicative trait to qualify employees for remote work (Bailey & Kurland; 2002). Mokhtarian and Salomon (1996a, 1996b, 1997) propose that workers self-perceived job unsuitability restricts their choice for remote work. Hence, employees decided to not work remotely as they believed their labor activity cannot be carried out away from the traditional workplace.

2.2.2 Working in virtual teams

Remote work is accompanied by the work in virtual teams. According to Townsend, DeMarie and Hendrickson (2000, p.18), virtual teams are "groups of geographically and/or organizationally dispersed co-workers that are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish a variety of critical tasks". Scholars have extensively analyzed the use of technology-mediated communication in teams and workgroups across several domains. Early research focused on the differences between technology-mediated and face-to-face group collaboration (e.g., Wainfan & Davis, 2004), including geographic dispersion as a requisite for virtual teams. Kirkman & Mathieu (2005) contribute that member geographic dispersion probably leads to utilization of more virtual

means to coordinate tasks and accomplish work. Virtual means describe interaction modes, where group members interact and communicate virtually (email, shared calendars, videoconferencing, etc.) (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). However, co-located teams whose members interact physically face-to-face are also likely to deploy virtual tools. Thus, they remove spatial dispersion as a requisite for virtual work. Furthermore, Kirkman & Mathieu (2005) introduce the concept of team virtuality, that is composed by three dimensions. The first dimension is the frequency to which group members use virtual means to coordinate and accomplish tasks. Teams usually utilize a combination of face-to-face and computer-mediated communication so that they are located on the continuum of virtuality ranging from exclusively face-to-face to exclusively virtual. Even though continuous technical advancements in computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies have already transformed how organizational members communicate, collect, share and distribute data and changed the relationships and dynamics among team members (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004), the extent of deploying ICT within work groups increased significantly due to the pandemic. If all team members work spatially dispersed from each other, only interacting and communicating through CMC technology the highest level of virtuality is reached (Kirkham, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk, & McPherson, 2002). Secondly, team virtuality is determined by the informational value that is provided by virtual means. Informational and communicational richness refers to the information-carrying capacity of a communication medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Videoconferencing for example carries richer information exchange than e-mailing, as audio or visual cues are in the latter not conveyed that help to interpret information (Kruger, Epley, Parker, & Ng, 2005). Thus, communication channels range in their information-carrying capacity, i.e., in their information richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Technologies that convey valuable and rich information are less virtual than those affording less valuable information. Thus, the higher the informational value of virtual means, the lower the level of virtuality (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). As third dimension synchronicity of group members virtual communication or interaction impacts team virtuality (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). While synchronous mediums facilitate real time exchanges, asynchronous involve a time lag (Goel, Sharda, & Taniar, 2003; Pinelle, Dyck, & Gutwin, 2003; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Synchronous exchanges are regarded as less virtual than asynchronous exchanges, due to the missing real time exchanges between group members. No time lag exists, for instance, with instant messaging, videoconferencing or face-to-face interaction (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005).

However, Costa, Handke & O'Neill (2020) distinguish structural virtuality, which refers to the objective level of virtuality (features of communication technology or distance

measures, see e.g., Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005) from team perceived virtuality (TPV). TPV is defined as "a cognitive-affective team emergent state which is grounded in collectively experienced feelings of distance and perceptions of information deficits" (Handke, Costa, Klonek, O'Neill & Parker, 2020, p.1). The collectively experienced distance is closely linked to Wilson and colleagues' concept of perceived proximity (Handke et al., 2020; Wilson, Boyer O'Leary, Metiu & Jett, 2008). Perceived distance reflects the degree to which team members' relationships are less intimate, less affectionate, less friendly, and colder, while perceived proximity represents closeness between group member, which means they generally feel they can trust each other and like each other (Handke et al., 2020). Subjectively experienced information deficits, however, are related to perceived barriers to timely, rich and efficient transmission of information, that potentially have negative consequences for exchanging important task-related information and converging meaning (Costa et al., 2021). While the global lockdowns resulted in consistently high levels of structural virtuality, the levels of team perceived virtuality may differ among teams. The challenges virtual work poses are discussed in the following.

2.2.3 Differences characterizing virtual vs. face-to-face collaboration

Differences between technology mediated and face-to-face collaboration have been indicated to affect process and outcome (e.g., Wainfan & Davis, 2004; Berry, 2011). Regarding virtual teamwork, three core challenges are discussed of the vast majority of scholars: technology use, geographic dispersion, and cultural differences. The virtual setting strongly relies on the successful utilization of CMC technologies that enable coordination, communication, and collaboration among team members (Alaiad, Alnsour & Alsharo, 2019). Within the present work two different team types are considered: (1) Teams consisting of OD consultants working among one another and, (2) teams in which consultants collaborate with their clients.

Challenges regarding the use of technology are mainly caused by communication through media low in information richness, the use of asynchronous media, and an inappropriate task-technology fit (e.g., Curseu, Schalk & Wessel., 2008; Daft & Lengel, 1986; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005, Schulze & Krumm, 2017). Compared to face-to-face communication, technology-mediated communication is accompanied by a lack of social cues, of paraverbal and of nonverbal features. Thus, it suffers from a considerable loss in communication richness, as such cues are valuable to convey meaning and to recognize if the

given message has been fully understood by the communication recipients (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000; Miles & Hollenbeck, 2014). Even videoconferencing, which is most likely approaching the communication richness provided by physical face-to-face communication, is less rich and does not completely substitute physical face-to-face communication (Straus & Olivera, 2000; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Several scholars claim that communicating via media low in information richness can impede mutual understanding, trust development, relationship building and attentiveness (e.g., Curseu et al., 2008; Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004). Additionally, virtual group members frequently report the difficulty of interpreting the meaning of other members' silence (Cramton, 2001; Driskell, Radtke & Salas, 2003), resulting in higher levels of confusion within the work groups (Thompson & Coovert, 2003). Furthermore, the use of asynchronous media to communicate can restrict the wealth and frequency of relational messages (Schulze & Krumm, 2017), cause coordination problems (Warkentin, Sayeed, & Hightower, 1997) and can increase uncertainty, for example, due to online silence (Panteli & Fineman, 2005). Other scholars mention that group members access information at different speeds which hampers the sharing of mutual knowledge in spatially dispersed work groups (Driskell et al., 2003; Cramton, 2001). Consequently, the previous stated communication difficulties result in a decrease in mutual knowledge among group members (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Finally, scholars frequently stated that inadequate task-technology fit, which refers to the match of the communication requirements of a task with the technology (Powell et at., 2004) causes ineffective communication within a group (e.g., Maruping & Agarwal, 2004; Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 2008). Thus, as informational value and synchronicity vary between communicational channels, choosing the most efficient and effective communication medium is not a simple process and depends on factors such as the type and the nature of the team, the team members' access to technology and the team's task (Duarte & Snyder, 2001; Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004; Berry, 2011). Hence, the availability of the right virtual tools enables groups to accomplish work more efficiently (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Anyhow, group members' comfort, attitude and experience with the media may impact or distract individuals from their actual work (Wainfan & Davis, 2004). Adding the requirement that employees have to adapt to the necessary technology imposes a socialization and learning task, which is separated from the originally required team tasks (Miles & Hollenbeck, 2014). Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy approach notes that employees that learn how to use, or feel more competent in using new technologies are less likely to experience anxiety when new technologies are introduced. Research found that those three main challenges regarding technology use have fundamental impact on relationship building,

cohesion, communication, conflict, trust, team identification and team performance (e.g., Powell et al., 2004; Martins et al., 2004; Curseu et al., 2008).

The second core challenge of virtual teamwork is the geographical dispersion of team members. Face-to-face communication with team members was found to be an important source for social interaction (Baruch, 2001). Research found that compared to face-to-face teams, virtual team members tend to initially share less information (Hinds & Weisband, 2003). However, this issue seems to fade long-term (Walther, 1995). Social information exchange was found to be similar for both face-to-face and virtual communication regarding the depth of the content but sharing social information via mediated technology appeared to occur more slowly (Vroman & Kovachich, 2002; Walther, 1995). However, Andres (2012) claims that technology-mediated collaboration causes higher occurrence of misunderstandings, lags in information exchange, more incoherent messages and a decrease in information seeking attempts. Additionally, members of geographically dispersed teams find it more difficult to gather and remember contextual information about other team members (Cramton, 2001), which impedes social cohesion (Driskell et al., 2003). Thus, scholars suggest that geographical dispersion pose challenges for effective communication (Caya, Mortensen & Pinsonneault, 2013), motivation (Hertel, Geister & Konradt, 2005), coordination, relationship building, interpersonal climate (Caya et al., 2013; Gibson, Huang, Kirkman & Shapiro, 2014; MacDuffie, 2007), conflict management (Gilson, Maynard, Young, Vartiainen & Hakonen, 2015), trust development (Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007) and increases ambiguity and uncertainty (Nurmi, 2011; Weisband, 2002).

The third core challenge of virtual teams are cultural differences among team members. However, as this study is limited to German OD consultants working mostly with national clients, cultural differences are due to the limited scope of this work not discussed in depth.

In the following, the above analyzed difficulties of virtual teams will be discussed in regard to the purpose of organization development.

2.2.4 Challenges of remote work for OD

As aforementioned, organizational development intents to support change within organizations, teams and individuals by focusing on people and their interaction, hence, confronting the human side of an organization (French & Bell, 1998; Hodges, 2016). A unique characteristic of OD is hereby the collaborative relationship between the OD consultant and the client that needs to be established. As mentioned above, virtual related challenges such as

objective physical distance, subjective perceived distance among team members (Handke et al., 2020; Kiesler & Cummings, 2002) or the use of communication channels with low information richness (MacDuffie, 2007) may impede relationship building, cohesion, and trust development. Schulze & Krumm (2017) argue that varying virtuality-related challenges result in similar problems, but the causes appear to be fairly different.

Moreover, OD intents to work with and through people, thus, requiring and encouraging a lot of dialogue. However, such dialogues may suffer from reduced mutual understanding, more incoherent messages or reduced sharing of social information in a technology-mediated setting due to subjectively perceived information deficits or communication over less rich channels. Furthermore, respective dialogues often target emotional dynamics (French & Bell, 1998), but research found that emotional expression is yet not eliminated when using mediated technology but is strongly limited (Dennis et al., 2008). Moreover, earlier literature on virtuality notes that different team phases imposed different levels of virtuality, depending on the context and nature of the task (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Transition phases that include processes such as goal specification, mission analysis or strategy formulation were likely to involve less virtual tools of communication and coordination but more face-to-face collaboration (Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro, 2001). Considering the team action cycle, Schaubroeck & Yu (2017) suggest that the reliance of computer-mediated technology during critical phases exacerbates communication difficulties. However, OD consultants come exactly then into play if a leader confronts an unwelcome situation or faces a phase of change as the purpose of OD is to support individuals and organizations through transitions. Furthermore, as previously analyzed, challenges in the use of technology and geographical dispersion of colleagues were shown to impact conflict management within virtual teams. Yet, French & Bell (1998) note that intergroup or interpersonal conflict are potential topics OD deals with, making the virtual practice of OD even more challenging. Furthermore, trust is discussed as one of the core values of OD, yet, several researches claim that trust is less likely to develop or hampered in virtual teams (Gilson et al., 2015; Robert, Denis & Huang, 2009).

Consequently, the characteristics of computer-mediated communication and collaboration challenge the effectiveness of OD by affecting the collaboration between the OD consultant and the client and the collaboration within the consultant as well as within the client system.

2.3 The adjustment of OD consultants to virtual working

The COVID-19 pandemic induced the most rapid and drastic global work shift since World War II. In a short matter of time, worldwide social distancing measures and rapid economic shutdown have forced large amounts of workforce out of the office into full-time remote work. Thus, OD consultants were forced to work with both their colleagues and their clients mostly in geographically dispersed teams, leaving them no choice but communicate and collaborate in a maximum level of structural virtuality. The adaptive COVID-19 countermeasures created unfamiliar work settings disturbing the original labor activity and restricted access to physical tools, infrastructure, and resources in the office spaces (Chong et al., 2020). OD services that were usually carried out in physical face-to-face events (such as workshops, trainings, focus groups or onsite visits) were not allowed to happen. Thus, organizational development consultants had to adapt rapidly to the new way of solely virtual working to effectively fulfilling their work. Effective adjustment, adaptation and learning processes were crucial to reorganize OD and carry out consulting services virtually. This leads to the following broad research question: *How did organizational development consultants adjust from onsite work to virtual remote work?*

As the workforce never experienced such a shift before, the pandemic induced change was highly unpredictable and demanded a completely new change. Even though practitioners and scholars have developed a large number of theoretical models to describe how organizational change occurs (on a macro level see, e.g., three-phase model of change, Lewin, 1951; congruence model, Nadler-Tushman, 1983; model of organizational performance and change, Burke-Litwin, 1992; on a micro level see, e.g., change resources adaptation model, Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2013), models on how workforce adjusted to completely remote work do not yet exist. Furthermore, the existing models reveal little about how the adjustment process unfolded, how OD consultant reacted to such complex demands, and how they regulated their work behaviors while working from home. Therefore, instead of testing existing models, we apply inductive research using Gioia, Corley & Hamilton's methodology (2013) by directly approaching OD consultants to analyze their experience and perception regarding the adaptation process, as they are the experts on their lived experience. Thus, with the help of Gioia et al.'s (2013) methodology we precisely examine and delve into the adjustment process of OD consultants, that supported them to deal with a major transition to virtual organization development.

3. Methodology

The following section will focus on the methodology of this research. First, the applied qualitative inductive analysis will be described. Then, the data collection, the used instruments, the sample, and the data analysis will be illustrated. Lastly, the procedure to ensure trustworthiness will be presented.

3.1 Qualitative inductive analysis

To capture the participant's own perception and reaction regarding the required adjustment to virtual OD work the present study applies an approach to inductive concept development following Gioia et al. (2013). Their methodology underlies several assumptions. Firstly, the organizational world is presumed to be socially constructed. Hence, the research focuses more on how organization member construct and understand their experience instead of the number of measurable occurrences. Furthermore, it is assumed that the individuals of organizations are "knowledgeable agents" (Gioia et al., 2013, p.17), i.e., they are aware of what they are trying to do and able to outline their actions, intentions and thoughts. Thus, the informants' experience is in the foreground, and it is in the researcher's responsibility to give reasonable account to it. The approach aims to discover new concepts instead of confirming existing ones. Therefore, prior theories and constructs should not beforehand be imposed on the informants. As a result, the researcher strives to give voice to the informants from the very beginning of data gathering and analysis. The informants' voices should then be conspicuously represented in the reporting of the research.

Besides that, assumptions are made about the researcher, too. It is presumed that the researcher can discover patterns in the data, that allow her to surface relationships and concepts the informants are most likely not aware of. Such concepts can then be formulated in theoretically relevant terms (Gioia at al., 2013).

3.2 Data collection and instruments

The applied approach involves a data-driven, iterative process of simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, and seeking new participants based on information considered relevant by prior participants. Hence, data collection was conducted until no additional information important for the analysis was disclosed and theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data was gathered over three months from four different sources: (1) semi-structured interviews with OD consultants, (2) documents that are related to the adjustment process of the consultants, (3) the professional network platform Linked'In to analyze the companies social media presence, and a slack channel of a well-known German OD consultancy, which serves as a space for OD consultants to communicate, interact and exchange ideas and information.

The interviews ranged from 45 to 70 minutes in length and were recorded and transcribed with the help of the program MaxQDA. As the pandemic required a reduction of physical contacts, all interviews were conducted online through computer-mediated communication. Furthermore, participants were all located in Germany, while the researchers of this study are located in Portugal. Only one interview was conducted in English. The other 8 interviews were conducted in German, and then translated to English for further analysis. The initial interview script (see Annex B) was categorized into three major themes: changes, challenges and the future evolution of OD. The theme regarding change mainly focuses on the participants' perception on remote OD work, how they perceive changes regarding relationships and feedback and the adjustment in course of tools, practices, and methods. Challenges, however, cover the greatest obstacles that are related to the adjustment process. The last two questions serve as an outlook on how OD will evolve in the near but also far future. However, as the data is analyzed iteratively, questions of the script were alternated within latter interviews to receive more information considered as relevant during the course of action (Gioia et al., 2013). Questions like "what in particular is feeling good now?" or "what makes this challenge so awful?" were added.

In addition to the interviews, documents related to the adjustment process were collected. One company provided an anonymized print screen of an e-mail right when the pandemic started to spread Europe which illustrates first impacts on the consultancy business (C1). To indicate how consultants of company 2 were prepared for virtual interventions, another informant shared content and slides of a virtual facilitation course the consultants were taught (C2), which was later transformed and offered to clients (website). Furthermore, they (C2) provided pre-corona flip charts from interventions to illustrate how materials looked like before they had to shift to virtual OD. Additionally, a customer feedback scale from November 2019 to September 2020 was handed to the researcher (C2). Another company sent manuals on virtual energizers to their clients which we also included into our analysis (C12). Moreover, the Linked'In presence of the external consultancy companies was analyzed, as informants revealed that the presence on social media gained more importance. We focused on frequency of posts and their content. As a secondary data source (Jick, 1979), these documents afford

insights into the storyline and context of the adjustment process (Clark, Gioia, Ketchen & Thomas, 2010).

Furthermore, a Slack workspace for OD change agents provided by an innovative OD consultancy (C11) served as important source to analyze process, practice, actions and perception of OD consultants' adjustment to the virtual setting. The workspace is a space for digital exchange, where community members can meet, discuss current issues and find fellow campaigners for their projects. Ideas for formats, events and initiatives can be shared with the community. Threads posted between March 2020 and April 2021 were considered within the present analysis. Especially the in March 2020 (right after lockdown measures where imposed) created sub-channel "remote-meetings", where members share knowledge regarding remote work and virtual meetings served as an important data source. Table 3.1 shows a data inventory list, which displays all data sources.

Table 3.1 – Data inventory list

Data inventory			
Data type	**Quantity**	**Original data source**	**Original (intended) data audience**
Interviews	10	Informants	Analysis for this study
Documents/ archival data	60 slides	- PPT 'Virtual facilitation course' from company 2 in a training session for consultants	Consultants of company 2
	2	- Website on new virtual ways of working & virtual facilitation from company 2	Clients of company 2
	2	- Flip charts before the pandemic from company 2	Clients of company 2
	1	- Email from a manager of company 1	Consultants of company 1
	11 months	- Customer feedback scales from company 2	Consultancy company 2
	1	- Manual energizer & warm-ups from company 12	Clients of company 12
Collaborative software logs	Number of comments: 1560	Slack channels: general & remote (C11)	Members of the community N (remote): 207 N (general): 1.043
Social media	9 posts	Linked'In posts from companies 2,7,8	Clients & public

At the beginning, internal and external consultants were equally contacted and interviewed. However, the first 6 interviews, three with internal and three with external consultants, unveiled, that external consultants were less dependent on industry or internal cultural and structural related issues of their clients than internal consultants. This independency in turn fostered the external consultants' creativity and innovation regarding the

adjustment process. As we realized that major change happened on the external consultant side the focus of data collection shifted toward external consulting companies. From that point only external consultancy companies were considered for further recruiting of informants and collection of secondary data, which finally induced the researcher to analyze the slack working space.

3.3 Sample

The present sample consist of a total of ten organizational development consultants, characterized by their professional experience and position as such. Three of the interviewees work as internal consultants, while the other seven are consultants in external consultancy companies. The internal consultants work in organizations operating in the automotive, banking and cosmetic industry. The company size of external consultancies varies greatly from small agencies to major consulting firms such as the big four. Among the participants, six are female and four are male. All participants are employed in Germany.

Table 3.2 – Information about informants

Interviewee/ Consultancy	Sex	Internal/ external	Industry/type	Job title	Years of OD experience	Number of employees
I1/C1	Male	External	Management consulting	Junior consultant	1.5 years	13
I2/C2	Female	External	Management consulting	Management consultant	4 years	913
I3	Female	External	Management consulting	Consultant	1 year	Approx. 2.800
I4	Female	Internal	Automotive industry	OD consultant	3 years	> 100.000
I5	Male	Internal	Cosmetic industry	Manager OD & digitization	2.5 years	2.500
I6	Female	Internal	Banking industry	Head of OD & Capabilities	2 years	Approx. 3.400
I7/C7	Male	External	Management consulting	Junior consultant	1 year	12
I8	Male	External	Management consulting	Organization & Transformation Consultant	2 years	53
I9	Female	External	Big 4 company	Senior consultant people & organization, change management	4 years	> 10.000
I10/C10	Female	External	Systemic organizational consultancy	Founder	2 years	3
C11	-	External	Management consulting	-	-	48
C12	-	External	Management consulting	-	-	15

In accordance with the data collection and analysis process, the participants were also recruited iteratively. Firstly, OD consultants from the private network of the researcher were contacted. Later, the professional networking website Linked'In was used to find further participants. Lastly, participants referred the researcher to other consultants of their network.

With regard to the data protection of the respective companies and participants, important personal data will be anonymized throughout this work. Therefore, in the further course of this study, the experts will be referred to as respondents I1 to I10. Furthermore, if secondary data was gathered it is allocated to the company respectively (C1 – C12). Company 11 and 12 were not interviewed. However, company 11 is initiator of the analyzed slack workspace, while company 12 provided a useful document. Table 3.2 includes contextual and demographical information about each participant and the consultancy companies we collected data from. The informants are listed according to the timely order in which the interviews were conducted.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis of the present study relied on common procedures of Gioia et al.'s (2013) inductive research approach. In the first stage, the interview scripts are analyzed through open coding, looking for passages and phrases that referred to the adjustment process of the OD consultants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As it is attempted to adhere faithfully to informant terms, relevant segments were initially labeled with "in-vivo" phrases or terms used by the participants (Locke, 2001). To include the content of the documents into the analysis or in case there was no in-vivo code directly available in the transcript of the interview short phrases playing the message were created as first-order terms. In the first step of the 1st-order analysis 146 first-order categories emerged. As the research progressed, two discussion sessions with another researcher were conducted to continuously reduce the huge amount of data to a more manageable number. A first careful discussion resulted in 90 first-order categories. Within the second in-depth session, we finally managed to reduce the data to a total of 43 first-order codes which support to disclose key elements of the participants' meaning system (Van Maanen, 1979; Gioia et al., 2013). To look at the data at a greater level of theoretical abstraction, and to unveil dynamic relationships and patterns in the data the first-order codes were examined for overlaps and similarities in the second step of the analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). After subsuming the first-order codes, nine second-order themes emerged, which help to describe the observed phenomenon: Hands-on attitude, experiencing extra working efforts, extension of OD portfolio, need for tech & tool literacy, acknowledging interpersonal limits, experiencing nostalgic appreciation, loss perception, experience virtual acceptance, and OD 2.0 – evolving OD.

In the last step of the analysis, the nine second-order concepts were assembled into aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). This process consists of analyzing relationships

among second-order themes and distill them into more complementary clusters. The consolidation of second-order themes in this study resulted in three more general dimensions: We go into action, acknowledging limits, and acceptance of change. Only one second-order concept, the need for tech and tool literacy, was not assigned to an aggregate dimension. The entire process of coding and analyzing was supported by the qualitative software application MaxQDA. It furthermore facilitated to identify overlaps and nestings and enabled the researcher to efficiently organize, search and assemble quotes.

3.5 Procedure to ensure trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the present coding structure and the emergent theoretical concepts the supervisor of the researcher as well as other 'external consultants' were involved in the analysis of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The supervisor regarded the data at a more general level neglecting the details that are included in the vast qualitative data base. She played the "devil's advocate" as she challenged explanations and relations for emergent findings. Furthermore, she identified areas that call for more data and supported to phrase follow-up interview questions.

To assure credibility regarding the assignment of codes to adequate categories, three separate coding sessions were performed. In the first session, the researcher of this study assembled and categorized the first-order codes into second-order themes. In the second session the researcher asked other 'external consultants', who only had a short introduction to the topic of this study, to again jointly sort the first-order categories into emergent second-order themes. The researcher accompanied that session which took place in a more informal setting and provided the other coders with some background information if requested by them. Disagreements between the external consultants were discussed until they reached consensus. Within the third session, the researcher and the supervisor compared the independently developed data structures of the first two sessions, which included the assembling of first-order categories and the terming of the second-order themes. Discrepancies of both conclusions were again discussed until a unanimous data structure was achieved.

4. Findings

The data structure for the findings of the present study is illustrated in Figure 4.1. On the right side it shows the three overarching dimensions which emerged from the analyses, their associated second-order themes in the middle, as well as the first-order concepts on the left that directed the creation of those themes. The aggregated emergent dimensions contain how OD consultants went into action to adjust to the virtual setting, their acknowledgment of limits, and their acceptance and positivity toward the change. However, the relationship among the overarching dimensions and their constituent themes was not as explicit as proposed by the figure. Some events occurred sequentially, and others overlapped in time. However, most of the events were recurrent and associated to other dimensions. For example, OD consultants continued to go into action by discovering new working styles and tools throughout the whole process, instead of slacking off when recognizing limits of the virtual setting. In the following, the emergent aggregated dimensions and their components are explained individually to assure clarity of explanation, while acknowledging their interactivity and complexity. Annex A displays representative quotations which substantiate the detected second-order themes. The subsequent descriptive findings narrative uses further representative quotes from informants. Findings which are not clearly captured by a representative quote are labelled with the respective source(s) in the parentheses.

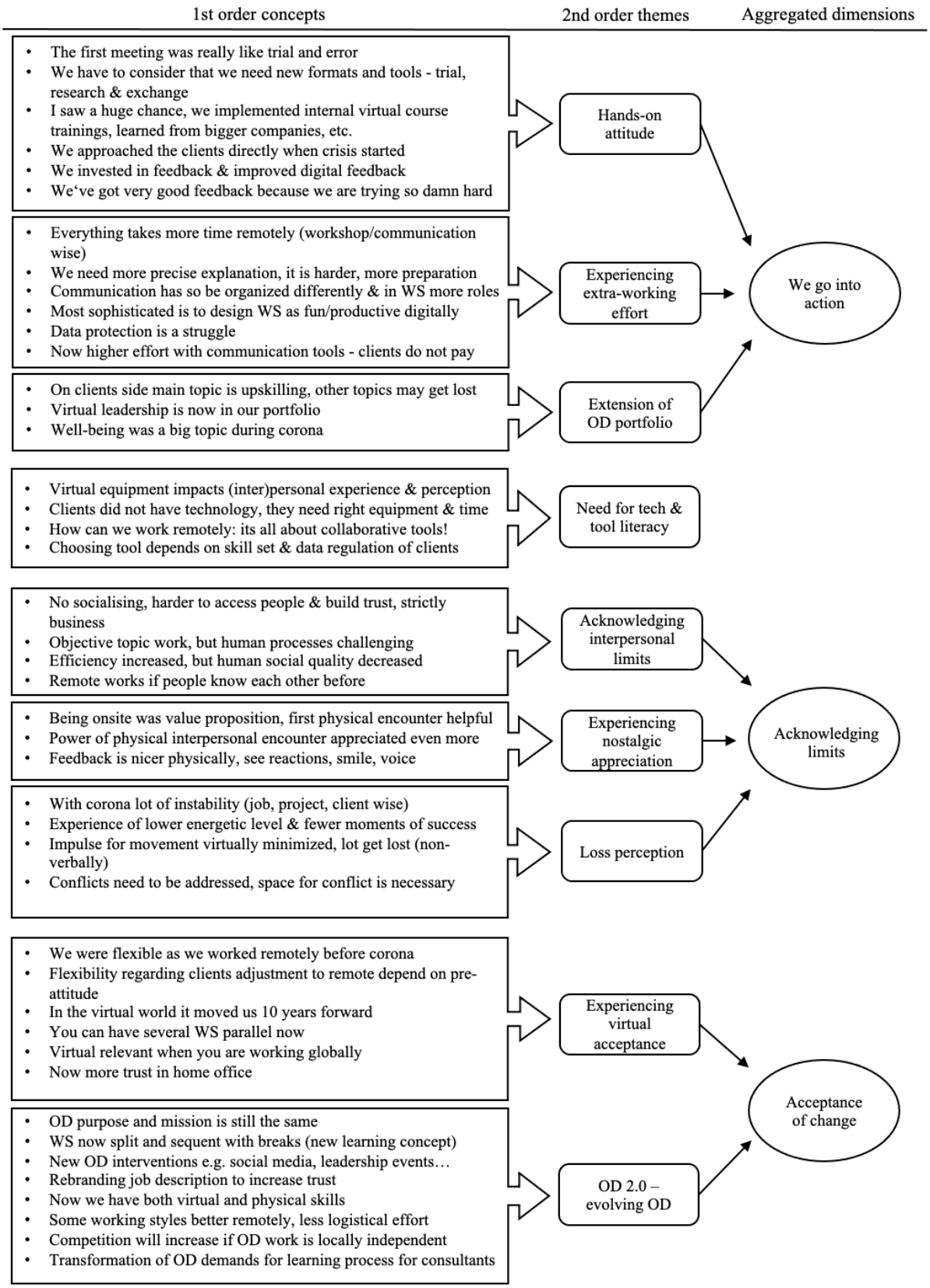
4.1 Going into action

When the pandemic compelled OD consultants to work from home, a transition of the OD labor activity to a virtual setting was required. Three elements indicate the OD consultants endeavor to go into action: their hands on change attitude, the extra working effort they experienced and the emerged extension of the OD portfolio in the virtual setting.

Hands-on attitude

Due to the pandemic-induced remote work, multiple clients across many industries put OD projects on hold, as on client side “there was a first shock (…) where everyone had to reposition themselves” (I10). Company 1 shared a print screen of an e-mail from the 13th March 2020, right when the pandemic started to spread in Europe (Annex C). The content illustrates that the client chose to put the project on hold: "I have just received info from (anonymized) that the board has decided to put all projects on hold from today on. (Anonymized) will call in a meeting Monday morning on how we proceed."

Figure 4.1 – Data structure



As an external consultant explained, many of the customers claimed, “we are not allowed, we don’t have money, you can’t come, like legally you can’t come”, therefore the “business went from everything to nothing over night” (I2). Besides the clients’ financial and legal conditions, the poorly evolved virtual features of OD interventions added a threat to the OD business, as an external consultant (I2) said: “I don’t think we had a single virtual training offer.” Realizing those conditions, consultants recognized the necessity to action, phrased by the same external consultant (I2) who noted: “we can’t sit around and wait, this is going to kill us very quickly, we have to do something, and something is better than nothing.” Thus, *first interventions were conducted with the help of a trial-and-error approach* as one informant (I7) said, “as I really noticed that we never conducted such a workshop digitally, let's do it, let's try it out, and for us it was also trial and error, and the next one will be even better.”

As OD interventions were thus far not conducted virtually, *OD consultants had to come up with new methods, formats, and tools*. Traditionally, when interventions were conducted physically material was created manually using walls, post-its or flipcharts (documents – C2) to involve all senses of participants, while in the virtual setting this is reduced to working on one screen (interview, I9). Thus, one consultant (I9) points out: “it is of course difficult now, because how do you want to present it virtually? You first have to rethink. Which tool can I use, can I make them usable?”. The informants described various approaches to overcome these challenges. They did research, exchanged ideas, and tested several interactive opportunities such as mutually labelling whiteboards or using virtual conference rooms (interview, I1; I4), while an external consultant (I1) observed that “fortunately more and more tools are coming up”. One consultancy offered their consultants already in mid of April (one month after remote working was announced) *a virtual course training* named “Facilitation of engaging virtual meetings” (C2, document 1) to teach practical methods on virtual facilitation. Within the same company, some consultants became experts of different tools to then train others on the respective tools (Interview, I2).

Most of the consultants saw a big chance and showed flexibility toward trying new formats and tools, with one underlining that consultants (I7) “are also somehow a pioneer for the customer (…) not be[ing] trapped in structures.” He further pointed out: “we are very flexible in experimenting how you can implement things even cooler digitally”. Another informant (I10), founder of a smaller OD consultancy, underwent training to become a certified online trainer, being now able to educate new trainers in a B2B format regarding working with different virtual tools. She further sought inspiration on virtual facilitation by attending *virtual remote festivals* of a bigger OD consultancy (C11) and used the previously described Slack

space to exchange, discuss and promote ideas. Within that space, a new channel for remote meetings was created at early stages of the pandemic to "share what tool combinations are currently celebrating success, how facilitation skills are rethought and what methods can be turned to virtual" (Slack channel). The same informant (I10) realized quickly that clients, but also other consultants required remote training for effective virtual work to succeed in the new setting. She said: "it was totally clear that they now have to learn remote work and that I can pour that into a product quite well." Recognizing this chance, she set up remote trainings for other companies and promoted them on different platforms. In the Slack channel she posted the following: "C10 is also galloping virtually. I have just set up a couple of remote trainings with the University of Frankfurt, which I give on the side. I'm giving a training on "Remote Culture" (07.07 - 10-12:30) and one on "Virtual Moderation" (08.07 - 10-12:30) in my network. The costs are 45 Euro, but if you want to participate without company support, I will gladly let you in for free" (Slack channel). However, according to her, "many consultants naturally sensed the opportunity and somehow came up with a product or a training course. Some earlier, some later, some more innovative, some less innovative."

Furthermore, in early stages of the new remote environment, *OD consultants actively started to get in touch with clients* to maintain old or establish new relationships with two different approaches. They either approached the clients explicitly asking questions like "How are you? Do you need support? Where are you struggling?" to offer help in an "one-on-one conversation" (I9) or increased the use of social media to position themselves and gain visibility. A consultant (I10) argued "there are no more events or meetings, no networking meetings or anything like that. That's why it is a lot on Linked'In." Another (I7) added "we hired someone specially to take the helm for us on XING, Linked'In and Facebook and so on, and we have also posted qualitative contributions there when we held workshops, for example with pictures (…) for more marketing and business development (…) it is now definitely more important than ever."

As another part of relationship maintenance but also to develop virtual skills, *OD consultants invested resources and time in feedback and improved digital feedback*. The fact that feedback is collected throughout the collaboration process has not changed, however, the perception about feedback in the virtual setting is mixed. During interventions, voting tools and feedback surveys were recognized as efficient as they can be directly integrated, edited by the clients, and the results are easy to evaluate and to record (interview, I1; I9; I7). One consultant (I9) emphasized: "You send one or two questions via *SLIDO* during the conversation or workshop where you can see the results directly." However, some consultants

perceived that especially debriefing sessions are not as fruitful virtually, as one (I8) pointed out that "there is often utter silence. People are waiting, you are perhaps a minute over time, the next *Zoom* meeting is starting. That's why it's often not as rich." Meanwhile, others recognized that if feedback is gathered actively via e-mail or calls after interventions it is even richer than in person, as one (I7) phrased: "we talked to the [person in charge] for an hour after the workshop to get feedback (...) in person you don't have time to sit down afterwards." Consultants also realized that feedback from clients generally turned out well, and *average client feedback was even better post corona* for one consultancy, as the invested effort was appreciated by the clients (C2 - evaluation tool results, Annex E). When the consultant (I2) sent the customer feedback scale she added the following comment:

"In April, May and June, we really managed to shift towards digital interactions and were exceeding our customers' expectations as they expected everything to be cancelled – but we could still have workshops and other interactions virtually (and maybe even in some cases it was more efficient!)."

Experiencing extra working effort

The informants shared the feeling that the shift to the virtual setting demanded a more intense preparation of interventions. As the informants repeatedly noted: "it is much, much, much harder and you have to prepare so much more" (I2) or "I have to say it takes more effort than you think to try to convey things digitally in exactly the same way as face-to-face" (I7). Besides preparing the tools and whiteboards precisely, also the interaction with participants during interventions must be accurately planned, as interaction has to be actively encouraged. A consultant (I2) noted: "you only have interaction when you are prepared and when you have purpose of what you are talking". For OD interventions to be successful and to keep participants engaged, digital interventions need to be designed as fun and entertaining, which turned out to be highly sophisticated for consultants. One informant (I7) described: "*so the most challenging thing is for all the people to design it, to keep people happy in such a way that it is digitally just as productive as it would be in real life*, so that's the challenge and that's why we also try to recreate the flow of a workshop in real life as well as possible digitally." As interventions are nowadays few hours slots squeezed into normal workdays, it is even more important that they are distinguishable to other meetings. As one consultant (I1) said: "that's now three hours slot between many other meetings. That's why we actually try to keep the

added value for these sessions as high as possible." To achieve that, consultants came up with different solutions, which are captured in the following statements:

"I think the first thing is the check-in things that we do, which I would say are different, so they reach a different depth or are funny or, yes, somehow (unintelligible) also takes a lot of time in comparison, so everyone has the opportunity to express themselves (...) So we actually spend more time on different check-in exercises, just to get to know the participants and to get them out of their shell, so that the whole thing doesn't get such a stiff or mechanical aspect". (I8)

"We also use tools like *mentimeter* or *kahoot*, which is *ehm* probably more *ehm* (.) more like gamification-ish, but that is also like a good way to trick people into *ehm* (..) thinking it is fun and being engaged." (I2)

Furthermore, one consultancy company (C2) published posts with practical advice to create engagement digitally (Linked'In), while another provided a manual with energizers and warm-ups for more entertaining digital meetings (C12). Thus, interventions need to be conducted interactively, which in turn generates commitment from clients (interview, I1).

Moreover, *clients need to be prepared more profoundly in advance for OD interventions. Coordination effort increased as consultants needed to draft emails more precisely, and were forced to explain tools and tasks extensively* with the help of digital onboardings or preparation lists, as is evident in following comparative statements:

"We now probably formulate emails more extensively, in more detail." (I1)

"What I remembered in between is that before this workshop we also did digital onboardings [...] that means we guided all participants in several appointments through the digital tools, explained them and also tested if it works technically with all of them and *ehm* the most important thing was that the digital whiteboard works." (I7)

"We wrote a list 'Please check that you have a mouse [...] please look at this tool, here you have a preparation board where you can already try out or see that you have Firefox or Google Chrome as a browser.' We provide such simple things in advance to the participants that they can be simply prepared." (I9)

Besides the additional preparation effort and the challenge to design interventions with an amusing flow, consultants realized that to engage the participants in virtual interventions "*communication has to be organized differently in the virtual space*" (interview, I10). In the virtual setting the perception of the counterpart is different as intercommunication and body language are strongly minimized (interviews, I4; I9). This affects both the communication between the consultant and the client and between the clients themselves. Thus, feelings and thoughts of the counterparts must be inquired with specific questions, as one consultant (I4) realized: "I really don't experience [the feelings and thoughts] in such an intercommunicative field as I did in face-to-face events, I really have to ask the questions explicitly." Another one (I9) mentioned: "rather, as a trainer, you don't get direct feedback if you don't ask. If you ask, of course, are you all doing well, then of course everyone answers. But you have to ask for it." Moreover, virtually it is more difficult compared to face-to-face to recognize if someone wants to speak, as one consultant (I4) said: "so because face-to-face they also look at each other and know that the other wants to say something, you can tell that from the body language." Even while someone is speaking, additional attention should be paid to pick up the unsaid as outlined by one informant (I1): "and when others are talking, I look very closely at facial expressions to maybe pick up on things that someone can quickly miss, now in virtual collaboration." Anyhow, another challenge in the virtual space is to involve everyone. One consultant (I8) said: "we have to ask more actively, we have to pick up people more, i.e., also address them specifically." Within the adjustment process, the consultants deployed various methods that assured the participation of all, such as popcorn style, assigning numbers or calling on someone explicitly (interview, I10).

There is accordance between the informants that besides the preparation *the conduction of OD interventions is also more time consuming in the virtual setting*. In the virtual space more breaks are necessary, "more time must be allowed for substantive discussions" (I4), and as one consultant (I8) pronounced "all the bingo games [like] technical problems or user difficulties" require further communication coordination and therefore higher expenditure of time. Therefore, evolving as a new role, a technician who works in the background to compensate for such technical difficulties was recognized as efficient especially in big workshops. One consultant (I4) outlined: "we always joined [workshops] with two at a time the first few times. Two consultants. One took over the technology." However, the timely aspect is still perceived to be a challenge, as one (I8) emphasizes: "I think one mistake we still make is actually not planning enough time [for workshops]."

Apart from that, the consultants experience extra working effort as they need to consider that the application of virtual tools when *designing interventions is dependent on the data privacy regulation of the clients.* As one external consultant (I7) explained, "[it depends on] which customer we work with and what is possible in terms of data protection. So, some also say that we are not allowed to use this tool, or like that one is compliant, that one has to be checked, and so on and so forth." Consequently, consultants have to be flexible regarding the tools they work with and present a lot to the clients (interview, I7). Another (I9) said^: "we always adapt to the customer, but of course we also have to buy licenses, which can be delayed, and then we have to check with GDPR […] which of course takes longer than when you meet in person."

Despite everything, *clients did not consider this extra effort for consultants which caused a discrepancy regarding their cost assumptions and the pricing of the OD service.* A consultant (I10) mentioned that "clients (...) don't necessarily want to pay for this extra effort" and that they even assumed "as it is online, it has to be cheaper" (I10). Nevertheless, for some tools that require above average arrangement-effort one consultant even added a markup if the clients desire to work with such tools (interview, I10).

Extension of OD portfolio

The pandemic did not leave the clients' side unaffected. There was a widespread sense that *clients mainly focused on operative business and upskilling while traditional OD topics fell by the wayside.* In contrast, the adjustment process on client side to the new work circumstances demanded a shift of OD topics reconciled to the clients' needs, as one consultant (I6) assessed that "the focus has shifted a little".

One topic which was greatly underdeveloped in practical terms before the pandemic was virtual leadership (interviews, I4; I6). On the OD side (I6) questions arose like "How do I make my managers fit to manage remotely?" Especially internal OD consultants proactively engaged in collaboration with leaders to elaborate methods for virtual leadership, hence *integrating virtual leadership into the OD portfolio.* As one internal consultant (I4) said: "we set up discussions with the managers and asked them what methods they use. How did you do it in the first place? What are the best practices?"

Moreover, *well-being and psychological safety of employees emerged to be more relevant on clients' side.* To develop managers in this domain, those topics were also prioritized "in order to make managers a bit fitter" (I6).

4.2 Need for tech & tool literacy

The virtual space is largely dependent on well-working technology. Some participants pointed out that they were initially struggling if they were only working with one screen. A second screen simplifies simultaneous moderation and coordination and allows the consultant to see the counterparts in online meetings continuously (interviews, I3; I4). The consultant of the big four company (I9), however, said that internally they were "technologically very well equipped, […] had a stable internet connection, […] didn't have the problems that any of the computers couldn't provide the performance [and] video telephony worked for [them] without any problems." Anyhow, *the consultants share a common feeling that many customers are fairly struggling with such technological aspects*. One says (I9): "at customer side actually it was a lot that the video telephony did not work, the servers were overloaded, videos were not turned on or was just no technical capacity for it on the computer, […] the software were partly not there, and the licenses had to go through very difficult long processes to be able to be purchased. And of course, it slowed down and hindered a lot at the beginning". Another external consultant (I2) indicated that such problems did not just occur at the beginning of the virtual work phase, as she said: "for some of our customers we can see, that they are still really really struggling *ehm* if they like have […] stationary computers and stationary phone and they used to walk over to their colleagues and have a routine." However, the *technological equipment, internet stability and the ability or will to turn on the camera impacts the interpersonal perception and experience during interventions*. One consultant noted (I9): "Many customers do not turn on a camera. Which is sad of course, because sometimes you see people you've never seen before and you don't have a picture of the person, and yes, that does make a difference interpersonally."

When switching to the virtual setting, the demand of the consultants was to convert the original methods into digital solutions, as one consultant (I1) noted, "in principle, of course, you want to replace everything analog as much as possible digitally." As the consultants could still partially deploy their general OD knowledge and experience, there is accordance between the informants that besides a well-working technology, *using and be proficient in the right tools were the main challenge to meet this demand.* One consultant (I8) explained, "there were a lot of aspects that we knew, so we know how to design workshops, we know how to run workshops, we know how to facilitate, and then ultimately it was a trial and error, like is the connection stable, is the tool stable?". Another one (I10) emphasized "of course, you have to master the tools. So, I'm laboring that point now. But that's simply the biggest difference."

Thus, to replace initial face-to-face OD methods with digital solutions several virtual tools were tried out by the consultants (Interviews, I1; I7; I9; I10). When combining video communication (e.g., *zoom, skype for business*) and other creative tools (e.g., *Mural, Miro*) OD methods could be successfully transformed into the virtual space, as one informant (I10) noted, "via these breakout rooms or breakout sessions […] plus […] a creative tool where people could also work, you could actually super-fast rethink these whole formats into digital." However, working with less platforms simultaneously simplifies the workflow, as the same informant (I10) mentioned: "I really try to be on as few different platforms as possible. I'd rather stay in one universe, so if *Miro* now, for example, also had a cool video function like *Zoom* does now, then I would say I really only need one tool." Over time, more and more digital tools popped up, which "change[d] the digital landscape" (I7). The consultant (I7) gladly explained: "I think such things are just emerging and they will remain with us, even if physical encounter is of course important in some cases, many are now realizing that digital can also compensate for a lot and *ehm* my opinion is that not everything will go back to exactly the way it was before but that such opportunities will then also be used further." However, *the skill set of the clients as well as the preference of the clients impact which tools can be used during interventions*. Furthermore, the use of innovative tools is often even more restricted by the clients' GDPR. One consultant (I7) realized that "most of the time, of course, the ones that are less privacy compliant are the ones that are the coolest and work the best." Another consultant (I3) explained the situation as a "empowerishment", as clients are not allowed to use modern tools due to their DRPG.

4.3 Acknowledging limits

In the course of time consultants experienced limits of virtual organizational development. The analysis shows that three factors contribute to the acknowledgement of limits: The recognition of interpersonal limits in the virtual setting, a perception of loss throughout the adjustment phase and a nostalgic appreciation of face-to-face encounters.

Acknowledging interpersonal limits

The informants share the perception that a high level of virtuality impacted the interpersonal experience and sensation with the clients. Due to limited face-to-face contact, *the clients are less accessible*, as one consultant (I9) noted: "It's not as easy to reach people as it used to be [...] people crossed your path [...], you could meet them, and now they're in the

virtual space, so to speak." According to the informants, informal communication is strongly reduced in the technology-mediated space, resulting in an absence of interaction between the counterparts: "So *socializing is sometimes a bit lacking*, the small talk. So that's something the informal communication with the customer suffers from" (I10). The consultant (I10) further mentioned the impact of missing connectivity on the consultant-client relationship as she said: "it's very, very challenging to still maintain that dialogue with the customer and also create that closeness." Minimized social interactions slow down the process of building a relationship, as perceived by one (I8) informant: "I notice that customers come very quickly to the point, and that changes a bit, that one builds up or is able to build up a deeper relationship. I would not say that it is gone or is prevented, but it is rather slower to build a relationship." Regarding the development of relationships, it was perceived as *supportive if the consultants knew the clients or if the clients knew each other already* before switching to the virtual work (interviews, I5; I8). However, according to one external consultant, video calls impact the perception of the relationship and the trust level, as she (I9) said: "If you do a lot of video calling, then it's not an issue. And if the customer is also open to such things. But of course, many people find it difficult to work together virtually, and *then it is more difficult to build up trust*, when you don't see some people anymore." In line with that, another consultant noted higher levels of reluctance on client side during digital interviews within the diagnosis. He (I7) said: "There were some people in a defensive posture that also stood out directly and I would say that it's also a question of trust." Consequently, a consultant (I5) observed that the client-consultant relationship „has become much more distant and anonymous". While another one (I2) described it as "more professional and more superficial", which is perceived as a "downside" of the virtual work (I2). As a result, external consultants have put more effort in making an impression virtually on the client side (interview, I2), to reduce the risk of being replaced by others, as noted by one (I2): "next call, next consultant".

According to one informant (I5), the *efficiency of meetings in general increased*, which is supported by another consultant (I2) who noted that the content of meetings is "*strictly business*". However, related to OD purposes the consultants realized that *objective topics work, but the virtual setting has limits regarding the work on human*. The informants share the sensibility that they "can't really grasp the non-verbal aspect" (I6) and are not able to "interpret certain attitudes, how people are feeling" (I8). One consultant (I8) felt frustration as he lamented: "the sixth, seventh perception, how do I sense the client, how do I sense the person opposite me, what do I perceive about him, that is somehow completely lost, unfortunately." One informant (I8) summarized: "with everything that runs digitally, we concentrate very

strongly on the matter and less on the change and the attitude of the people, to change them or to support a change simply because it is only possible within a limited framework." Thus, non-perceived body language, attitudes and feelings, as well as missing non-verbal cues impede change processes (interviews, I6, I8). Another consultant (I1) added, due such missing perceptions, "it is more difficult to let people experience what we want them to experience." As a negative consequence he (I1) observed that team-building workshops for example, are "only possible to a limited extent now." However, consultants attempt to reduce the impact of missing non-verbal cues, as one (I3) phrased: "I pay more attention to the mood I convey than I do in person, i.e., my voice itself […] because the aura only comes across verbally, not at all non-verbally." However, the consultants were critical towards emotional work that requires mutual intuition, in a solely virtual setting, which is evident in following comparative statements:

"But I always think that the more critical or the more emotional a topic is, it is still difficult for many to do that only virtually" (I6).

"We simply have this organizational process, which requires a lot of direct interaction and also reactions, or actually also on the energy level, for example, simply taking note of the people who are involved, how are they? I find this feeling essential, […] you work with these energies, emotions, and you get a lot when you simply walk through the hallway. And that is a quality of the work that was lost at the beginning when we went into the home office" (I5).

Thus, especially in early stages of remote work some consultants skeptically questioned: "How can you really do organizational development close to the people remotely?" (I8). With more upcoming digital solutions the skepticism faded to great extent over time. However, one still pondered in what way it is even possible to virtually reach a relationship to a human, to be perceived as an OD process facilitator instead of an expert (interview, I8).

Loss perception

The pandemic implied a *lot of instability within the sector* due to many postponements and cancellations of OD services (interview; I1-I10, Slack channel). Moreover, several events to network, exchange ideas or other OD related initiatives where OD consultants could participate were put on hold. Company 12, owner of the Slack channel posted mid of March 2020:

"Our concern is to create a safe space for the community - unfortunately, in the current situation, we cannot guarantee that according to our wishes. Therefore, we have decided to postpone all [anonymized] events until April 30, 2020, including Community Day. We are monitoring the situation closely, working on alternative plans and dates to bring these meetings back and will keep you informed with all the details."

The order situation and the incapacity to provide services provoked concern and anxiety on consultant side, as one external consultant (I1) said uneasily: "Yes, I was worried about the projects happening at all. I was worried about my job. You have to say that, if everyone comes, put everything on hold you don't know how it will go on. What the annual turnover will be. How you will still be needed in the background as a junior consultant." Another one (I2) said: "You just shifted from very detailed focused like oh 'am I going to the office on Friday' to, oh 'will I even going to have a job'." In the first phase of the pandemic, the clients needed time to organize themselves, focusing mostly on their core business. Some projects remained on hold for several months, until they were adjusted to a 100% virtual interaction project (e-mail from C2). Some clients slowly took up contact again with the consultant (interview, I10). One external consultant (I10) noted gladly that after a few months "they got in touch themselves and said, 'we want to do it'", she adds that "most of them said, 'we don't want to let it slide, we want to do it anyway', or some of them even now." However, even though the demand for OD services slightly increased again, the OD consultants faced a lot of unpredictability over a longer period, as many projects got postponed in the nick of time: "So I think […] since March, when I estimate I've got like 10 projects moved last minute to a later point in time and before it was like 1 or 2 projects max" (I2). Frustratedly, she adds: "I wish it would be like it was before, when you could plan, […] now it is just like crazy." Being unable to foresee and plan project progression had severe consequences for consultants on organizational and individual level. If the unpredictability remains OD consultancy companies may alternate their contract arrangements with the clients: "I think in that case we have to find new ways, like making contract, like you are in or you are not, and if else you pay a fee because we then have nothing else to do" (I2). Furthermore, individual learning and growth was inhibited, as an informant (I2) noted dissatisfied: "Still I have goals that I am only achieving when I am on projects so on a personal level, every time [a postponement or cancellation] happens it is a bit of a crisis, so that is a challenge for sure, this unpredictability."

Moreover, the consultants perceived to *experience fewer moments of success within virtual interventions as well as a lower personal energetic level*. The above-mentioned limited

perception of the clients' feelings and attitude hindered the OD consultant's ability to evaluate their own performance, as one informant (I2) phrased it: "It is impossible to (..) judge yourself *ehm* if it like in a crowd with 15 cameras, if they were just smiling because they are nice to you or if they are really interested but you could in a physical setting tell that immediately. It is very hard to tell […] if you really succeeded or if it was ok. This was very frustrating." Another (I8) claimed that in the virtual setting his personal energetic level is reduced, as he noted: the energy is lost or is there to a lesser extent".

Additionally, the informants agreed that virtual conversations are accompanied with more silence. As said by one informant (I10): "In virtual communication you have much more silence. Because there are simply a few senses missing or they are not as strong. And then there is simply less tension, either this impulse to look at someone and think ah yes, ok, now I'll say something, or he wants to." Vivid discussions are often impaired virtually (interview, I8). Therefore, *impulses for movement and development are often minimized.* Therefore, consultants must seek for resonance (interview, I10) even more carefully. However, some clients even show a lack of commitment due to the missing non-verbal behavior (interview, I6; I10) and the inhibition threshold to express oneself is discerned to be higher in the virtual setting, where people tend to seclude themselves (interview, I8).

Referring to a lately read article of a scientist, one consultant said: "it can be as technically perfect as possible. Virtual communication is communicatively imperfect, and the conflicts do not come to light." Another informant (I1) also said that the "conflict threshold is higher in the virtual space" as the potential of misunderstandings is higher. Thus, *conflicts need to be coordinated and mediated with more sensitivity*, as explained by an external consultant (I9):

"Conflict resolution workshops, of course, this is more sensitive than doing it in presence. Because as a trainer or a coach you don't feel directly 'oh, he has an issue with what has been said', now I can respond to this person. Because you only see him, if you are lucky. Instead, you have to focus on listening and query the said, and you have to ask for lot more feedback: Is everybody doing okay now? Did everybody say something? So, you can't rely so much on your feelings, because you don't have the people right in front of you. And that, of course, makes it more difficult to resolve the conflict."

However, conflicts are considered to be important and necessary for development, as noted by an external consultant (I10): “This friction is also very important in order to somehow advance and initiate change. […] In the best case you have this attitude [to improve things] and would at least like to make a suggestion for change. But this often requires a space of friction, where you first talk a bit with yourself or with others about it.” Therefore, conflicts must be addressed and encouraged in the virtual space. To support that she (I10) introduced a digital “tension memory” where clients can not only write down conflicts, but also “ideas, wishes, inspirations”.

Experiencing nostalgic appreciation

The almost exclusively virtual work led the informants to appreciate even more physical encounters. OD consultants detected benefits of physical encounters along the whole OD process. Especially the first kick-off meeting was evaluated as valuable as face-to-face meeting to get to know the costumer. As one external consultant (I2) said: „*It is better that you meet physically first* […] when we start working with new customers if it‘s possible we try to meet at least once [physically] and have a kick off and then going into virtual mode, because even if you work tighter [virtually] together, seeing someone on television and then meeting for the first time, you are like wow is that how you look like.“ A physical meeting at least at the beginning of a collaboration positively influences trust between the costumer and the consultant (interview, I4; I2; I7). One external consultant (I2) noted moreover that financial topics are preferably discussed in person, also not underrating the joy that comes along with physical encounters: “for important cost-based conversations of money or whatever I still think that people want to meet in person and also because it is like more fun and then you can go for dinner afterwards.” Moreover, *feedback is perceived as more valuable face-to-face* as nonverbal cues are missing in the virtual space (interview, I3).

An internal consultant (I5) realized *the importance of brief encounters and talks on-site* as he said: “that's why it's also the case that I'm actually here on-site a lot right now to simply see someone very briefly, to perceive how you are, who you are as a person, what moves you? And that's something that I'm doing and appreciating much more consciously now compared to the time before, and I'm even more sensitive to it.” He further noted: "many see home office as an employer advantage, I see it in the meantime as an advantage if someone offers presential work.” The external consultant (I8) however, acknowledged some virtual aspects but still expected that for greater parts OD will be conducted physically in the future. He said: “we will

certainly all weigh up better in the future, do we drive to the customer or why do we drive to the customer and what can we also do virtually, but I think there will be a movement back."

4.4 Acceptance of change

During the process of adjustment to virtual organization development services, the consultants developed a certain positivity toward several virtual aspects. Two elements indicate the consultants' openness to change: The acceptance toward virtuality that emerged over time, and the evolved new edition of organizational development, the OD 2.0.

Experiencing virtual acceptance

Some OD *consultants worked before the pandemic off-site at the clients' company or even remotely from other places* several times. For that purpose, they already needed well-working information and communication technology to access and communicate with their consultancy company. As noted by an external consultant (I9): "My project before, I was actually on the road three to four days a week, so really sitting at the customer site in the office and working with the customer. Nevertheless, we had of course our digital equipment, we had to be operational no matter with which customer. We were technically very well equipped, so to speak." Especially at the beginning of the adjustment to the virtual setting, being well technically equipped was a great benefit for the OD consultants. Furthermore, OD consultants are used to work on several projects at the same time, requiring a high level of flexibility as phrased by one informant (I2): "We are consultants and we are so used to work in projects, sometimes we do it like that, sometimes we do it like this, we don't have that many habits." Therefore, especially external consultants had good pre-conditions that facilitated the adjustment to an exclusively virtual working mode. But not only favorable pre-conditions on consultant side eased the adjustment, also the *pre-setting and attitude of the clients played an important role*. More flexible clients, who for example tried new tools were easier to collaborate with (interviews, I1, I2, I7, I10). One consultant (I4) acknowledged: "I think that we as consultants have the challenge of making people understand that it also works, that they see an added value in it." Furthermore, internal consultants recognized a difference between those clients who already worked globally and those who rather work on-site, as noted by one informant (I6): "Some people need to be together from time to time, I think. And I think it's less of an issue for people who work in global setups, i.e., who don't have that physical encounter anyway. But there are also many teams that always sit together in one room, in an

open-plan office, and for them it's a bigger challenge. I think you always have to look very closely at how people have dealt with remote working so far. Do the people know it, are they not used to it?".

Over the course of time, OD consultants and their clients started to acknowledge several benefits of virtuality independent of their pre-conditions. A major benefit for OD consultants is that split interventions and ceased travel times do not block the entire day, leaving time for other tasks, workshops or even more work life balance, which is captured by informants in the following statements:

"If you have a 3 hours 4 hours training, you can still work on other things afterwards. In the past, that was completely blocked." (I1)

"For a practical reason I don't have to get up at five, I don't have to struggle with like 'oh how am I going to put my life puzzles together' so that's much easier and we save a lot of time so you can focus on *ehm* yeah (..) working" (I2)

Thus, *workshops can be conducted nearly parallel now*. Moreover, the logistical effort is far lower for virtual interventions than for physical ones, making it easier to organize virtual meetings at short notice. As one consultant (I2) phrased: "For a physical meeting you have to plan a lot, for a virtual meeting you can squeeze it in tomorrow because transport costs are zero." Furthermore, room and materials do not have to be prepared on-site, and virtual material can even be duplicated. The consultant (I2) further said: "Another benefit is that before we had like 5 days in a week we could do like three trainings, because we have to go from Denmark do Munich, and we have to prepare the room, and now this spread-out concept, you can just copy paste it and you could like, I have already done it twice, if you want a training tomorrow, that would be possible and that would never have been possible before because then you would be like, 'oh do you have a room, oh no', *ehm* so it's much easier to organize all kinds of training now."

In general, the fast digital acceleration across many industries is perceived as positive and valuable by the informants, as one noted: "*In the digital world it moved us 10 years forward*" (I4). Due to a prolonged time of remote work and the accompanied digital evolution, the general acceptance toward remote work arose and benefits, such as *trust in working from home,* were acknowledged. As phrased by an external consultant (I9): "So I think a learning is

that we do not always have to be on site. You can actually do a lot remotely, […] which is a relief. The employees don't have to travel somewhere all the time, you can work at home, which is also great from an environmental point of view. So, we have good opportunities to work remotely. We don't have to do everything in person."

Furthermore, the *virtual advancement and improvements are highly appreciated in the global set-up* both on consultant and on client side. As one consultant (I2) said: "Virtual is relevant if we're working with people from all over the world." While another one (I6) mentioned: "Yes, that is appreciated [by the clients], because many teams are not even in one place. They are remote and international anyway, and then the costs, it's also a cost thing. If you have to fly employees from A to B, then they have to stay in a hotel, and so on and so forth. So, I do believe that for reasons of efficiency, they will also say 'okay, what can we perhaps do digitally, do we all have to meet now?'". Overall, virtual OD is fairly accepted by major parts of the consultant, as it is worded by one informant (I2): "you can do that pretty much one to one virtually and I think anyone would have thought (laughing) that before but yeah I would say in general for us as an organization been a positive surprise given the shock that we all had at first."

OD 2.0 – evolving OD

Even though working procedures and methods changed with the transition to virtual OD work, the informants shared a mutual feeling that *the purpose of OD is still the same*. The interventions still give strategic direction, that help the clients to solve their problems themselves. As one consultant (I6) phrased: "So the managers have to formulate on their own what is not going well and what should go better. And then I am the catalyst, so to speak, or can effectively show them how they could get from A to B. But insofar that is, I say, order clarification. Order pickup. It actually has not changed." The other one (I7) noted: "Overall, the way we do it is that we follow the strategy of allowing the executives themselves to build their own solutions." Moreover, the value of OD is estimated to be the same or even higher due to the pandemic, as an informant (I9) said: "I think it continues to be super important. Because our world is becoming more and more VUCA and volatile and complex. And people need, above all, the meaning that has to be conveyed. Why do you work for this company in the first place? And how can you implement that? How can you, so to speak, still constantly reflect on yourself in order to become better or apply new concepts in order to become better, in order to remain marketable?". Furthermore, consultants do not expect artificial intelligence or machines to replace OD, which further increases its importance in the future (interview, I9).

Especially in the remote context, the role of the digital facilitator is perceived as more important for effective collaboration (interview, I10). Even though the set-up changed fairly, the manner of OD kept the same, as phrased by an informant (I9): “As an organizational developer, you have a huge suitcase of methods and simple games and exercises, and you can also use them quite normally in virtual space. You can work very interactively and then there's no difference whether it's in a room or not.” Furthermore, the informants share the sensibility that kick off with clients, the preparation of the clients for interventions, the diagnosis and follow-up remained methodologically fairly the same. As an informant stated regarding the diagnosis process: **“**Apart from the fact that the preparation and the tools are different […] whether that's digitally or in person, it makes it harder but not different.” Regarding the processing of material conducted in workshops, a big advantage was acknowledged virtually, as digitally all material is automatically saved (interview, I4).

However, the scope of workshops changed virtually as *full day interventions are split into several smaller units*. An informant (I2) justified that adjustment as she said: “No one can sit in front of the laptop and learn for eight hours.” Therefore, a “completely *different learning concept*” (I10) that entails “asynchronous learning” (I10) is introduced, where clients are encouraged to do homework or group work between the sessions (interview, I1, I10). An informant described this approach as “self-empowering”, which “strengthens the autonomy in the team” (I10). This approach is perceived as effective, hence, it transformed the concept of workshops in the long-term, as phrased by an external consultant (I1): "So we have now been forced to implement something that we actually already knew before: small learning units but more often are simply more effective. If you work continuously on things, maybe less, it is better than spending a lot of time on something once. And the strategy here is also being expanded more and more in our projects and programs. And I think that we will probably not really find back to three day events, to or two to three day events. That is, we get there once for a big block of time and then leave again that's I think also in the customer collaborations the biggest learning.”

Furthermore, virtual workshops require more breaks and loosening up activities, because according to an informant (I9) “virtual work is of course very exhausting”.

During the remote working phase, several new working methods emerged. The consultants raised their visibility on social media to network, approach clients, share insights, and so forth (interview, I4; I7; I10, Linked’In). One informant conducted a Linked’In event with 85 participants. She (I10) noted: “I don't even know if I would have thought that it would

be worth it [face-to-face]. This effort. And that is cool." The same informant furthermore used her acquired digital knowledge to develop a remote specialist in the clients' company. The knowledge was passed on to a young employee, considered as digital native, who would take over the responsibility to promote remote working. *The consultant rebranded her job description*, as she built up a cooperative relationship between the consultant and the employee *trust was fairly increased* (interview, I10).

Because of the prolonged remote phase, *OD consultants nowadays possess both virtual and physical skills*, that can be offered to the clients. As noted by an informant (I2): "We now have a much better virtual offering, so then we will say we are experts so that's also like yeah now we have both." Thus, the informants express the wish to evaluate in future if physical encounters are requisite: "In the long-term future, I hope that we can then you know we have our physical offers when it makes sense and when it's like a human element, and when it's like yeh we go there and we have dinner together, or like other benefits of meeting, then we will do that" (I2). Furthermore, she (I2) added: "Just for 1.5 hours, if we only need to complete this and this task, I think no one will travel anymore", which also has a positive impact on the environment. Moreover, *some interventions are perceived to be even more effective if conducted virtually*, as one consultant (I5) explained: "Actually the big conferences where it's all about information, I think worked even better virtually than as a face-to-face format." Therefore, another consultant (I3) added optimistically: "That's why I think it would be a good idea to keep [meetings with many people] online".

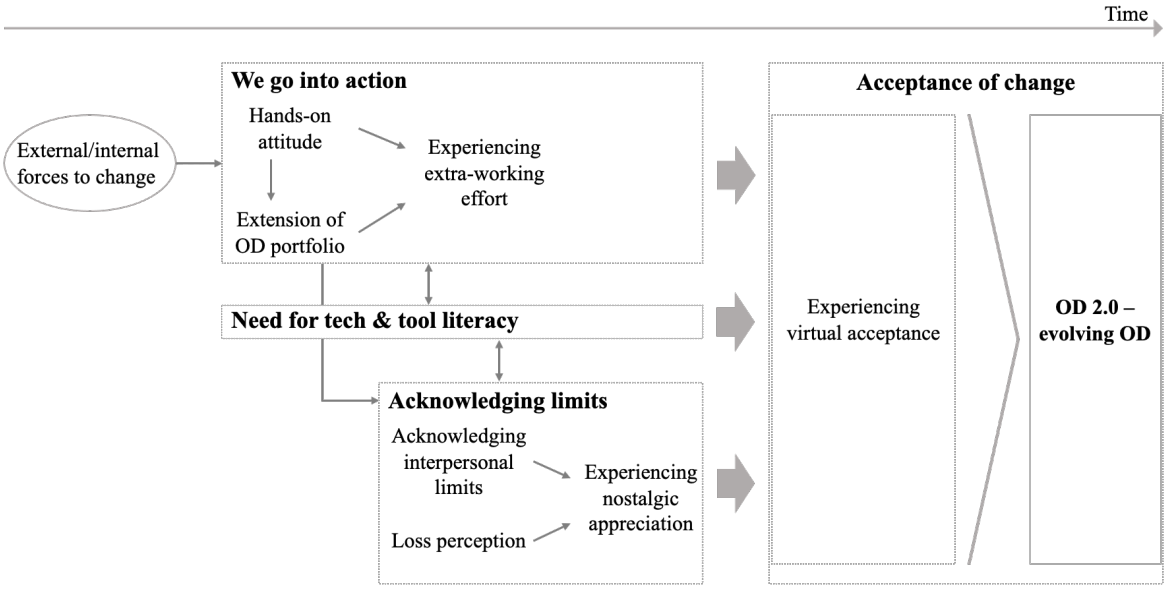
The informants had a common feeling that virtual *OD will result in higher competition among external consultants*, as clients can compare OD consulting firms globally, as phrased by an informant (I4): „It also makes competition greater, of course, when it is no longer locally bound."

Virtual OD is unfolded, as worded by an informant (I1): "I simply think that we are now moving more and more in the direction of digital moderation and the use of tools. And yes, there is actually a lot going on at the moment, because now many, many tools are come to be known that we can use." However, the challenge for consultants is to find the right balance between physical and virtual encounters. The transformation of OD demands continuously for a learning process of the consultants, as said by an informant (I5): "I think we need a good balance, what's face-to-face, what's virtual but that's something I think we really have to learn first." He (I5) added: "But we are still at the very beginning of a learning process."

4.5 Emergent framework of adjusting to technology-mediated setting

Before discussing the implications of our observations, we recapitulate the individual steps and phases the OD consultants undertook and experienced as they shifted from a face-to-face to a virtual setting. Figure 4.2 shows the framework that emerged from our study.

Figure 4.2 – Emergent framework



The process began as the COVID-19 lockdowns forced OD consultants and their clients to work from home, resulting in a maximum level of structural team virtuality. As OD services were to a great extent dependent on physical encounters, forthcoming planned interventions and events were cancelled or postponed indefinitely. As several OD projects and activities were put on ice, the workload of the consultants was strongly reduced. However, after a short rigidity, especially external consultants decided actively to go into action to counteract to the externally forced change to keep up their business. With their hands-on attitude they approached their clients to proceed with their services, invested in research and exchanged ideas to find new formats and methods that work in the virtual setting, and followed a trial-and-error approach to learn and get acquainted to the virtual environment. Promptly, the consultants realized that they need a profound technological and tool literacy to transform and apply their existing OD knowledge and practices virtually. Several collaborative tools were tried out and tested regarding their suitability for virtual OD. However, the consultants noted that besides their skills, the clients' attitude toward virtual work, their technological equipment as well as data regulations impacted virtual OD practices. Apart from the additional investment

in technology and tools, the consultants experienced extra-working effort, for instance, for preparation of interventions and the communication with the clients within and beyond interventions. Furthermore, the pandemic provoked the emergence of new topics on clients' side such as virtual leadership or well-being. Thus, the consultants were demanded to extend their OD portfolio accordingly. Anyhow, within the process of going into action the OD consultants acknowledged limits of the virtual OD work. Due to reduced informal communication and socializing, relationships to the clients took more time to develop and trust was more challenging to build. Consequently, interpersonal limits were acknowledged. Therefore, processes that put human on center and focus on human processes were perceived to be challenging in a technology-mediated setting. Furthermore, the consultants experienced a perception of loss as they witnessed lower energetic levels, as well as fewer moments of success within interventions, as resonance of the counterparts was strongly reduced. Moreover, they perceived a minimized impulse for development, change and movement on client side in the virtual space. Therefore, conflicts needed space given by the consultants and must be actively addressed. Due to experienced limits of the virtual OD work, the consultant developed a sense of nostalgy as they started to appreciate physical encounters more.

However, with the ongoing experience the OD consultants began to accept several aspects of remote OD work, such as a possibility to conduct more interventions in a shorter time frame, or in a global set-up, as logistical efforts are largely reduced. Finally, a new state of OD evolved, termed OD 2.0. As the purpose and the mission of OD remains the same, OD 2.0 is an upgraded version that involves both physical and virtual formats, methods, and skills of the OD consultants, as well as new virtual interventions.

5. Discussion and conclusion

By applying a research approach to concept development following Gioia and colleagues (2013) we investigated and delved into the adaptation process OD consultants underwent to transition to virtual organization development. As models on how workforce adjusted to entire remote work do not yet exist, a main contribution of this study is the emergent framework that helps to understand how OD consultants adapted to a completely remote way of working. The findings indicate that adjusting to a predominantly technology-mediated setting was a complex process for OD consultants that encompasses different stages occurring over time. The three aggregated dimensions of our developed framework broadly capture those stages: (1) the OD consultants' motion of going into action to react on the external forces to change, (2) the acknowledgement of limits of the virtual setting, and finally (3) the acceptance of the change, that led to an evolved state of the field of activity, OD 2.0. While the purpose of OD kept the same, OD 2.0 entails among others new learning concepts with smaller learning groups and asynchronous learning.

On a micro level the present study supports several aspects that already have been addressed within the virtual team literature. For instance, the notion that consultants perceive a lack of informal communication in a technology-mediated setting is not surprising. Indeed, team communication has been identified as a fundamental challenge for virtual collaboration (Alsharo, Gregg & Ramirez, 2017). According to Herbsleb & Mockus (2003) informal communication in co-located teams amounts up to 75 minutes of a working day, which often occur during 'coffee talks', spontaneous encounters in hallways or other unplanned workplace interactions, or after meetings (Armstrong & Cole, 1995; Wainfan & Davis, 2004). Furthermore, scholars found communication in virtual collaborations more task-related and less social than in co-located teams (Krauss & Bricker, 1967; Berry, 2011). Thus, the limited opportunities to exchange unintentional or informal information diminish the ability to share knowledge in virtual teams (Berry, 2011; Gressgård, 2011). Furthermore, in accordance with the findings of this study, prior literature discovered that communication technologies take more effort and time to communicate information effectively (Wainfan & Davis, 2004).

Moreover, our finding that virtuality impacts the development of trust is consistent with the literature. Indeed, Gilson and colleagues (2015) identified in their review, that trust is one of the most studied variables in the virtual team literature. Sirkka Jarvenpaa especially researched on trust in global virtual teams extensively in the last three decades, finding, for instance, that communication behavior was found to facilitate trust in virtual teams, such as

frequent communication enhances early trust among team members and feelings of cohesiveness. Furthermore, the effect of virtual trust depends on the teams' structure, such as trust has a lower effect on teams with strong structure, as lower uncertainty reduces the process of interpretation, thus minimizing the role of trust (Jarvenpaa, Shaw, & Staples, 2004; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Robert et al. (2009) claim that virtual teams are significantly less likely to develop trust. Additionally, other researchers found that geographically dispersed teams have greater difficulties to establish and maintain trust (McDonoough, Kahnb, Barczaka, 2001, Olson & Olson, 2006; Sarker, Ahuja, Sarker & Kirkeby, 2011). The lack of strong relationships and reduced in-depth personal interactions resulting from the absence of nonverbal cues were identified as notable reason (Cheng, Fu & Druckenmiller, 2016; Eisenberg & Krishnan, 2018). Furthermore, the previously described reduced informal contact was found to be important to facilitate trust (Ågerfalk, Fitzgerald, Holmstrom Olsson, Lings, Lundell, Ó Conchúir, 2005).

Furthermore, the literature investigated the impact of virtuality on conflict management. According to our findings, scholars claim that geographic dispersion adversely affects conflict management (Cramton & Webber, 2005) and team members are more susceptible to task-based and interpersonal conflict (Mortensen & Hinds, 2001; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Wakefield, Leidner & Garrison (2008) suggest that virtual team leaders play an important role in abating the effect of conflict, a role taken on by the consultants.

Corresponding to consultants' perception that a first physical encounter is beneficial, scholars suggest that a face-to-face introductory meeting is supportive for virtual team success (Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). Furthermore, the experience that virtual meetings with many participants are more effective than physical meetings is consistent with Lowry, Roberts, Romano, Cheney & Hightower's finding (2006) that virtual teams overcome challenges that are linked to bigger team size easier. It is moreover not surprising, that the consultants noted the benefit of virtual skills in the global set up, as virtual teams can be built with less regard to geographic location (e.g., Martins et al., 2004). The consultants' notion that onboarding of clients need more time is as well consistent with the literature, as scholars suggest that team members of virtual teams require more preparation beforehand to accomplish objectives (Straus, Miles & Levesque, 2001). The same applies for the perception, that the success of virtual OD services depends on the client's pre-attitude, experience, and comfort with the media, which is supported by Wainfan & Davis (2004).

On a macro level parallels between the findings of this study and organizational change theory can be drawn. The adjustment process of the consultants to virtual OD shows

considerable similarities to Kurt Lewin's (1951) three-phase model of organizational change. Within the framework of this model, organizational change is described as a process of (1) unfreezing, (2) changing, (3) refreezing. According to the three-phase model, to change prevalent organizational practices they must be unfrozen or released first. After the change occurred, the practices must be refrozen to become newly adopted usual practices (Anderson, 2015). Lewin added that the two forces of promoting the status quo and promoting the change work together to maintain a balance. Thus, change only occurs if the forces of change are stronger than the forces to sustain the status quo (Anderson, 2015). Moreover, in organizations, change can either occur proactively or reactively. With the COVID-19 lockdowns, the external environment incited organizations to change. As both the consultants and the clients did not themselves decide to change, but were pressured by external forces, the change was reactive and unplanned (Pierce, Gardner & Dunham, 2002). On client side, this is, for instance, apparent, as they were mainly focusing on their operative business and upskilling, while investing no efforts in OD measures. At consultant side, when several OD projects were cancelled or postponed, the external forces to change were considerably greater than the forces to maintain the status quo. Thus, the consultants recognized quickly that they must free themselves from previous practices and embrace something new (Anderson, 2015). With the drive to 'go into action', the consultants released themselves from prior practices. The hands-on attitude, the fact that they experienced extra working efforts compared to previous work, as well as the extended OD portfolio they dealt with, show that they *unfroze* prevalent OD practices. As the consultants *changed,* they became aware of the value of a profound technology and tools literacy. Hence, they invested time and effort to improve their skills and upgraded technology and tools. Additionally, they identified limitations of performing OD virtually. The value of physical encounter was nostalgically appreciated, and interpersonal limits as well as personal and field-related loss was perceived. However, after a certain time when newly evolved practices, such as new methods, formats and tools were implemented, the consultants *froze* several of the new practices with an attitude of acceptance, which is supportive to sustain the change. For instance, they showed among others acceptance toward the use of an extended tool kit with an improved tool and technology competence, the inclusion of social media and its ability to carry out events and network, and the new OD learning concept with shorter and sequent interventions. Therefore, what consultants were initially forced to do, they are now choosing voluntarily to do, as such aspects evolved their field of practice, leading to the emergence of OD 2.0.

Longstanding, technology was considered as a "context", which implied that mainly fixed features of technology constrained teamwork in a determined way (Larson & DeChurch, 2020, p.3). Theories, such as Kirkman & Mathieus' (2005) three dimensions on team virtuality, for instance, assume that the technologies shape a teams' collaboration and communication, due to their physical design (e.g., filtered cues). Very contemporary research, however, views technology with a different perspective, namely technology as sociomaterial practice (Orlikowski, 2007; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). This approach postulates "the constitutive entanglement of the social and the material in everyday organizational life" (Orlikowski, 2007, p.1438). It considers team members intentions in using the technology, and how individuals interact with and make sense of it in different situations. Sociomateriality suggests that the intrinsic properties of neither individuals nor technology are stable but influence each other as they interact. A basic assumption is, that the function for a technology is created when individuals or teams assign a meaning to it, hence, creating different purposes and functions for different situations, humans, and teams. Within this perspective, teamwork is shaped jointly by individuals, teams and technology, where technology is considered as a mean, while individuals take on an agentic role, both interacting as mutually dependent ensembles. Nevertheless, digital technologies possess properties that inspire the individual or teams, which are characterized and described as technology affordance (Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

If we look at the findings of this study in the view of technology as sociomaterial, functions of technology and tools came about as the consultants' intention to transfer OD services into virtuality met features of digital technology (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). It must be considered that even though various consultant-client teams used comparable technologies at a high degree, their experience of virtual teamwork could have been greatly different. For instance, if the consultants and the clients used functionalities, such as using emojis in their e-mail conversation to compensate the missing non-verbal information both counterparts could have felt more understood or could even use irony. Or if they for instance, used more informal language or even disclosed private information they felt a closer connection to the other counterpart. Furthermore, creating group chats, for example, may facilitated information sharing to work on interdependent tasks, and reduced the feeling of being lost. Thus, a different interaction with the technology may lead to a different experience of the user. Therefore, virtuality underlies social construction dimensions, as each team uses the affordance of technology differently to build and construct certain functions. The experience, hence, depends on the function that is given to the technology, and how individuals and teams use it.

Furthermore, scholars suggest that collaboration of team members for a prolonged time and possession of autonomy regarding the structuring of their work reduces negative effects of technology use, or even dissolves them completely (Gibbs, Siyunen & Boyraz, 2017; Handke, Schulte, Schneider & Kauffeld, 2018; Handke et al., 2020). The literature explains such findings with temporal and social influence on technology (e.g., adaptive structuration theory, Desanctis & Poole, 1994). It is assumed that with more experience, team members generate relevant knowledge regarding other team members, their tasks, and the used technology to accomplish the tasks, which in turn aids in improving how information is both send and received. Consistently, over the course of time the OD consultants adjusted their use of technology, hence, such social processes helped them to improve their perception as well as their experience of performing OD virtually.

5.1 Limitations & Future research

A possible limitation of this work was the limited provision and access to documents and archival data from the participants and their companies. As a result, the main data source was interviews. However, in every qualitative research that uses interviews it must be considered that the informants' memories regarding past occurrences can be dampened. Furthermore, our sample consists of a small homogenous sample, which minimized the generalizability of our findings. Beyond that, our findings display the adjustment process of OD consultants. Due to their job description, consultants need the ability to manage and structure intensive workloads, define problems concisely and grasp new concepts quickly. Also, the project work requires high levels of flexibility and adaptability. These pre-conditions probably influenced the approach as well as the pace of the adjustment to the virtual setting. Thus, it needs to be questioned how far the framework is transferable to occupations that comprise fewer of these listed attributes.

Another limitation of this study could be that even though the consultant-client relationship is usually not discussed as such in the existing literature we considered the consultants and their clients as a team. Teams are commonly defined as "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and common approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1994, p.45). Consistently, OD is supposed to be performed with the clients in a close collaboration, both working interdependently instead of externally implementing interventions.

Moreover, it also needs to be considered that the sample of this study merely consisted of German OD consultants, hence, representing the German working culture. Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions are helpful to interpret our findings on a cultural level. With a comparably low score (35) in the power distance dimension ("the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally", Hofstede Insights, 2021) Germany is characterized by a highly decentralized structure and comparatively extensive co-determination rights. Regarding our findings, these properties probably encouraged the German consultants to move on and initiate change autonomously. In comparison, consultants from countries with higher power distance (e.g., Portugal, China, France) would have been more dependent on their leaders, and probably more inhibited in embracing change. Thus, it can be assumed, that the first phase of the change, namely the 'we-go-into-action'- phase occurred more quickly compared to countries with higher power distance.

Another relevant cultural dimension to better understand our findings is uncertainty avoidance ("the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these", Hofstede Insights, 2021). With a rather high score (65) Germany demonstrates mild preference for uncertainty avoidance. To create certainty, Germans tend to construct a systematic overview in their way of thinking, planning, or presenting, in order to proceed. However, this slight preference to avoid uncertainty did not hamper the consultants to spring into action, as they tend compensate higher uncertainty with reliance on expertise. China, for instance, scores very low on uncertainty avoidance, thus, being more comfortable with ambiguity and more adaptable. However, Portugal, for instance, has a very high score (99), hence, showing a rather rigid behavior and intolerance towards irregular ideas and behavior. Thus, while Chinese teams would have probably initiated change or adjusted to it even faster than German teams, Portuguese teams would have been rather inflexible.

As a last dimension, the long-term orientation of Germans ("how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future", Hofstede Insights, 2021) may have influenced our findings. With a high score (83) Germany, as a pragmatic country, can easily adapt traditions to changed conditions. Thus, the German OD consultants managed to evolve a new state of OD, in fact OD 2.0, induced by a pandemic. In comparison, Portuguese teams, for instance, stick more to traditions with a relatively low score (28), hence, being more impeded to adapt to external changes and for new evolvements. Thus, the findings might have been considerably different for samples from other

cultures. However, as organizations tend to work more globally, teams become more intercultural. Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to take such cultural factors into account and investigate the influence of cross-cultural teams on the adjustment process.

Within our study, we, moreover, witnessed the recent emergence of several collaborative tools and technologies, which are hardly considered in the literature. However, the level of structural virtuality will probably remain high in the future, hence, the use of tools and technology will be even more intensified. Thus, future research may focus on analyzing the applicability of such emergences to keep up with practice. Going even beyond that, this study does not disclose how the OD consultants interacted with and used the technology and tools, to improve their and their team members' perception and experience of virtual collaboration. Therefore, future studies might focus on specific interdependencies between human and technology, namely on practices how teams can interact with technology to create an enhanced virtual experience.

5.2 Practical implications

The present study offers a framework on how OD consultants adjusted from a predominantly face-to-face to a technology-mediated setting. While this research focused specifically on organization development consultants, we suggest that the emergent framework can be applied more globally to teams, who confront a transition into the virtual space, as it helps to understand the process of adjustment to virtual collaboration.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization took a big step forward in various sectors and occupations. With the continuous emergence of innovative technologies, we are more and more developing into a digital society. Remote work has recently gained more acceptance from employers and its positive impacts on sustainability, family and leisure time, or real estate costs are appreciated by employers, employees, and society (Nakrošienė, et al., 2019). We are, however, just in the midst of an era of fast accelerating digital transformation. Thus, evolved information and communication technologies will continuously move our society. Due to that evolvement, it can be assumed that individuals operating in various sectors and occupations will at some point in the future enter a situation where they face a structural shift from physical to virtual work. Considering the OD consultants and their clients as a team, we suggest that our evolved framework can be well applied in various occupational fields, that show similar relational structures. Analogies can be in particularly identified to the education sector (teacher-student relationship), to various types of therapy (therapist-patient relationship)

and obviously to other types of consultancies (e.g., strategy consulting). Besides that, it can be transferred to several white-collar jobs, as the framework also supports leaders and their teams in a transition process to a virtual space.

Thus, this work provides leaders, teachers, therapists, consultants (in the following named as protagonists), and their supervisors with a roadmap that helps to guide them through the process of adjustment. As a result, decisions and actions in regard to the adjustment process can be planned and adjusted appropriately with respect to the needs of students, patients, clients, or team members. In the following, recommendations regarding supportive actions are given for each stage of the change.

The first phase of change, namely the unfreezing, is a cautious approach to an unknown setting or environment, as the protagonists slowly releases themself from common habits. As the path is not laid yet and rather unforeseen, several actions need to be tried out, while errors are detected and corrected during the process. Such an iterative trial-and-error process fosters collective learning about exploration streams (Sosna, Trevinyo-Rodríguez & Velamuri, 2010). Thus, supervisors should provide safety for trial and error and coach staff members if required. Experimentation and failure should be encouraged in the interest of developing and learning. Concurrently, time and resources should be provided to research new virtual formats and methods applicable and appropriate to the field of occupation, and exchange ideas with collaboration partners and internal team members, who find themselves in equal terms. As the protagonists enter a new territory (the virtual space), they do not yet possess experience and know-how. Thus, our findings indicate that trainings, such as, for instance, a 'virtual teaching training' are supportive, in this case for teachers, to gain knowledge and confidence in virtual teaching. Additionally, trainings on "remote culture" (which was given by a consultant to other consultants) can be helpful for both parties (e.g., teachers and students) to accustom them to remote values, norms, and working styles. As the protagonists are at the beginning of the shift not experienced in performing their work virtually, chances of improvement are high. Therefore, gathering digital feedback from the receivers (e.g., students) is essential. Furthermore, regular digital feedback should be introduced to maintain relationships. However, especially at the beginning of shifting to the virtual space, the protagonists will experience extra-working effort, as preparation for virtual sessions as well as communication with the other party take more time. To reduce time pressure, supervisors, or the protagonists themselves should include this extra-effort in their task planning. Furthermore, supervisors must consider that in some cases virtual sessions demand for more personnel resources (e.g., facilitator and technician), as the coordination and technical effort are higher, and not

manageable by a single person. Thus, this personnel effort should be considered in personnel planning. Furthermore, the protagonists might be taught or teach themselves work-home boundary work tactics, which can be behavioral (e.g., prioritize important and urgent home demands and work), temporal (e.g., controlling work time), physical (e.g., create physical borders, such as workspace), or communicative (e.g., managing expectations in advance) tactics (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2009).

While changing, a competent tech & tool literacy of all team members plays an essential role. As a primary requisite, both parties must be technologically well equipped. Furthermore, collaborative tools, as well as technology must be mastered very well by the protagonists, and properly by the receivers. 'Tech & tool onboardings' given to both parties support them to feel more competent in using them, which reduced the experience of anxiety (e.g., self-efficacy theory, Bandura, 1997). However, it has to be considered that GDPR may inhibit the use of some tools.

At a certain point in time, it is very likely that team members will acknowledge limits of the virtual work, or even develop a sense of nostalgic appreciation of the physical encounters. To abate this, the protagonists can apply different measures. As ICT filters relevant cues (e.g., body language), the protagonists must actively focus on receiving resonance from their encounter, to grasp important signals. Thus, feedback and opinions must be gathered more regularly during virtual sessions. Moreover, conflicts need space and a more sensitive mediation in a virtual setting. According to our findings, developing trust and building up relationships are impeded in the virtual space, due to missing informal communication and social interactions between team members. Therefore, 'get-to-know-each-other'-sessions or other interactive social, virtual events and activities that promote informal communication and socializing between team members are possibilities to tackle that. Furthermore, team members can plan first kick-off sessions as face-to-face encounters to get to know each other, to facilitate the development of trust and their relationship. However, scholars found that millennials may see physical encounters as an unnecessary barrier or waste of time (Gilson et al., 2015). Therefore, if a first physical encounter is helpful or rather perceived as useless depends on characteristics of the team members.

In the last phase of change, as some practices freeze again, acceptance toward aspects of virtuality can be expected. For instance, the reduced logistical effort, such as commuting, preparing physical materials, or local independence may be appreciated. Our findings show that some working methods, or meetings are virtually as effective or even more effective as physically (e.g., brainstorming sessions, big-group meetings). However, human processes were

found to be more difficult to work on virtually than in face-to-face collaboration. As both parties (e.g., teachers and students) will possess both physical and virtual skills, they are able to choose which way of working together is more effective. Thus, the protagonists must evaluate individually for every encounter what is more appropriate for the respective case. Furthermore, supervisors should give them the required flexibility and responsibility to enable them to do so. To officially anchor the new practices written norms or policies might be integrated in the strategic planning or the human resource management of the institution.

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Appendix

A: Representative quotes

Representative quotes underlying second-order themes	
Hands-on attitude	
The first meeting was really like trial and error	"But I was really surprised by how ehm and maybe there was maybe my partner at the client side that was saying, we gonna start sharp no matter what, i don't know what has been communicated but so the first meeting was really like trial and error."
We have to consider that we need new formats and tools - trial, research & exchange	"So it was really difficult at the beginning, but now I know the tools and we really put 2 months into it until we got to know all the virtual tools. We tried them out, exchanged ideas, did research and everything. Then we got ourselves fit."
I saw a huge chance, we implemented internal virtual course trainings, learned from bigger companies, etc.	"I didn't have time to bury my head in the sand. It was no option at all. It was so fast and you just had to react quickly and rethink. And I saw more of an opportunity in it." "Some of the experts in virtual they put together a course and taught all other consultants, so what you do is ehm, you have to log in beforehand and make sure your mike is working and you put on some music and you greet the first participants, like really low practical stuff but that makes a big difference, so that for me was a positive thing that came very quickly and enabled us to not to say to our customers: oh we can't meet physically so then there is no workshop."
We approached the clients directly when crisis started	"But [we] explicitly approached clients at the beginning and asked them: How are you? Do you need support, where are you struggling? We can help you, more in a one-to-one conversation."
We invested in feedback & improved digital feedback	"We do a lot of feedback anyway, whether with or without remote working. With remote working, however, you have more permission to do so. So you can do an online survey more quickly, most of the time everyone is at the computer anyway. So it's easier to actually do online surveys and get feedback online, which you can then also evaluate, because otherwise you just get verbal feedback and you don't remember everything. Not everything sticks in our minds, so online is actually better." "But then we also work a lot with the customer in such a way that we call them again, just to ask for their opinion. And then we also get a lot of email feedback. That means you have to gather it a bit from all corners. But I'd say that's also part of cultivating the relationship and I'd say we're pretty much working on it and it's also very important."
We got very good feedback because we are trying so damn hard	"We get like' wow, this was the best virtual training so far' ehm very good feedback, because we are trying so damn hard."
Experiencing extra working effort	
Everything takes more time remotely (workshop/communication wise)	"Sees everyone is on mute, or muted, or we can't hear you, or problems with the camera, are all the bingo games, that actually happens quite often (laughing) so technical problems or user difficulties, that also has an impact on the time aspect." "It takes longer because the coordination effort is also bigger."
We need more precise explanation, it is harder, more preparation	"Above all, we had to be much more precise in the conception of our intervention. Because you can't see the questioning faces any more. Be it the formulation of tasks, instructions are now also on the slides that we show, simply much more precise and much more formulated. So that it is idiot-proof, in inverted commas, and everyone understands it immediately, right down to the details that you have in mind yourself. In other words, we put a lot more effort into making sure that what I think or want others to think comes across exactly the same way."

Communication has so be organized differently & in WS more roles	"There's the role of the moderator, then there's the co-moderator and then there's also the technician who is somewhere in the background in case of doubt. If they are really big workshops."
Most sophisticated is to design WS as fun/productive digitally	"So the most challenging thing is for all the people to design it, to keep people happy in such a way that it is digitally just as productive as it would be in real life, so that's the challenge and that's why we also try to recreate the flow of a workshop in real life as well as possible digitally."
Data protection is a struggle	"And when you work with a lot of tools, it's always very annoying in the meantime, so to see who's allowed to do what, which one do you use?"
Now higher effort with communication tools - clients do not pay	"So there is actually a higher effort in communication formats that you might not otherwise need so intensively, which you now actually have to be able to pull in quite quickly. This is also difficult regarding payment, because the customers don't necessarily want to pay for this extra effort."
Extension of OD portfolio	
On clients side main topic is upskilling, other topics may get lost	"Things also fall down. So right now everyone is just looking at upskilling."
	"We don't manage our topics and that's why we don't do the workshop, ehm because we have to work through our operational business first."
Virtual leadership is now in our portfolio	"We have now actually adapted our training portfolio in such a way that we have now also included virtual leadership with one or two bits."
Well-being was a big topic during corona	"So some things have taken place far less often, where you say that you have to do something again, some things that are really not that interesting, which have been pushed back. Or prioritized in order to tackle these other topics more, such as well-being, in order to make managers a bit fitter."
Need for tech & tools literacy	
Virtual equipment impacts (inter)personal experience & perception	"I make sure that I really look into the camera when I speak, which I never did before. And when others speak, I look very closely at their facial expressions to maybe pick up on things that someone can quickly miss. Now in virtual collaboration."
	"I need sometimes, sometimes you need two screens. If you have a presentation and you want to see the people, then you need more equipment. And as a consultant you just have to be fit and you have to get the equipment."
Clients did not have technology, they need right equipment & time	"Then of course it's also difficult, everyone has to have the technology at home. Many people don't have a mouse for their PC, so it's difficult to work interactively on these boards, you often have to make postings or such things, and without a mouse it's difficult so it's simple equipment like that that's the problem."
How can we work remotely: its all about collaborative tools!	"You need a tool for communication you need a tool for filing and you need some kind of tool for organizing your work and if you don't have any of that, apart from email, then you're really screwed."
	"And anyone who doesn't feel comfortable with this as a consultant, because they don't have access to these tools or platforms, is really quite (...) I don't want to be in their shoes."
	"And now it's all about how you can work remotely, how you can use the tools. So it's very much about tools."
Choosing tool depends on skill set & data regulation of clients	"We do not have like: you have to use this tool, it depends on what the costumer likes."

Acknowledging interpersonal limits	
No socialising, harder to access people & build trust, strictly business	"However, it is very hard, to build up trust and (..) also yeah like, be like you chose us as your partner, ehm because it is much harder to relate to people that are on your screen if its in person you can be like you know Smalltalk at the coffee machine and so I think it is, we are being more compared to competitors now." "The relationship is then created through the informal and that is just less there or not there at all."
Objective topic work, but human processes challenging	"The execution itself, when we actually have workshops that are virtual, ehm they are of course much more challenging. Especially when it comes to working on cultural issues, it's really a lot about interpersonal issues, and it's much, much easier to pull yourself out of responsibility virtually when you're perhaps also working on unpleasant issues. That definitely has its limits and must be structured in a completely different way." "So it has become more objective, but the emotional component is something that cannot be transported remotely." "So the biggest deficit is definitely that, that a lot of things happen through interpersonal experience; mistakes, interpersonal approaches, conflicts, conflict resolution and the like and you can replace that to some extent you can replace that virtually but you can never replace it completely."
Efficiency increased, but human social quality decreased	"Efficiency has increased insanely, even to say, for example, we have meetings that are much better in substance, but the human and social quality suffers."
Remote works if people know each other before	"Yes, so I mean, as I said, it's relatively easy with people you know or with management teams who already worked together. If you now have a group you don't know at all then it gets difficult."
Experiencing nostalgic appreciation	
Being onsite was value proposition, first physical encounter helpful	"But you also notice that this meeting, in our opinion, is very important to build trust, right at the beginning when you have a new client." "This is a day getting out of normal work and learning something new, so that was our value proposition."
Power of physical interpersonal encounter appreciated even more	"Yes, simply appreciating the other person. And the direct human interaction and the power behind these encounters and to value these encounters in a completely different way and not to use them for some larifari efficiency issues but to actually have the human encounter more in the foreground again." "But I still think that people want to for important cost based conversations of money or whatever i still think that people want to meet in person and also because it is like more fun ehm and then you can go for dinner afterwards"
Feedback is nicer physically, see reactions, smile, voice	"Because feedback I think is always nicer when you can see the reaction of the other person directly, both also positive feedback, but especially when it goes into the negative, I think it's just against nature that you say something without somehow seeing a back- back ...reaction. and positive feedback is of course also nicer when someone smiles at you while doing it."
Loss perception	
With corona lot of instability (job, project, client wise)	"With the clients is a bit special, I would say because simply the Corona situation was difficult at the beginning. I would say that the consultant projects were simply scaled back a bit due to the financial difficulties. That is, everything went completely quiet at first and then gradually built up again." "And all that business went from blooming to nothing." "So I think you always have to look at it in terms of time, especially at the beginning of the Corona situation, a lot has changed, of course, it has somehow slowed down from a hundred km/h to zero, that was at the beginning of the Corona situation, so basically for all advisory activity."
Experience of lower energetic level & fewer moments of success	"It's just the experience is just very different when another person is in the room with me."

	"Oh it goes like this, I still find it frustrating and I feel like I have fewer success experiences."
Impulse for movement virtually minimized, lot get lost (non-verbally)	"In workshops and when you train, you get a lot of feedback, so implicit feedback and you see how people interact, how they behave. You can read a lot from body language. Of course, you don't have that in the virtual space. That's why you have to ask for a lot of explicit feedback: "Are you still okay?" Or you make little quizzes in between to ask if they have understood, so you really have to proactively ask for feedback, which you can otherwise experience more in the mood of the room." "So I think that you understand these impulses, this one also with yes somehow movement in organizations, that this is actually greatly minimized by this virtual space. So I have to pay more attention here to getting resonance from the teams as a pull."
Conflicts need to be addressed, space for conflict is necessary	"So I think you have to make sure that conflicts are discussed. Because that is something that the virtual space or remote working through the video format does not quite promote, that there is straight talk, i.e. in a workshop in particular."
Experiencing virtual acceptance	
We were flexible as we worked remotely before corona	"Who are very agile as a company, so we always say that but we actually are, then I would say, now we can cope with all the situations, so it's not perfect but it somehow works out." "We are very very flexible, and so that has been a huge benefit, because in the remote mode, the less routines you have the easier it will be to adapt."
Flexibility regarding clients adjustment to remote depend on pre-attitude	"I also discussed this with my customers from March onwards, so I kept offering to do it virtually. But no one accepted. That is, they could not imagine being able to conduct such a workshop virtually."
In the virtual world it moved us 10 years forward	"But in the virtual world, especially in Germany, it has really brought us 10 years forward somehow. Everyone can now work virtually in some way."
You can have several WS parallel now	"And you can have like several parallel which would be impossible before."
Virtual relevant when you are working globally	"And when its like a global team or whenever we now have a much better virtual offering, so then we will say we are experts (laughing)."
Now more trust in home office	"There is now also more acceptance that you don't always have to be in the office, people trust the staff more. That's how I also generally see it at the client's. Now, maybe before, when you weren't allowed to do home office work, it's now also accepted to be in the home office."
OD 2.0 - evolving OD	
OD purpose and mission is still the same	"The result of such a workshop is, so to speak, a strategic direction for organizational development, which can then be followed by measures and that does not change whether it is digital or not."
WS now split and sequent with breaks (new learning concept)	"No one can sit in front of the laptop and LEARN (emphasized) for eight hours" "So we do workshops as usual, but in a virtual space and just as interactive. What you have to plan are more breaks sometimes. Because this virtual work is of course very exhausting, you often have to plan a 5-minute break and tell people to stand up, move around a bit, open the remote, leave a bit more space, because it's more exhausting than actually sitting in the room with people. But otherwise we do everything normally."
New OD interventions e.g. social media, leadership events…	"For example, we have now offered leadership dialogues, we are setting up a social intranet and we are also trying to go other ways, to find other consultative approaches." "I think the consultants have also found importance in terms of visibility. They have started to position themselves more strongly on social media, which they did not have before."

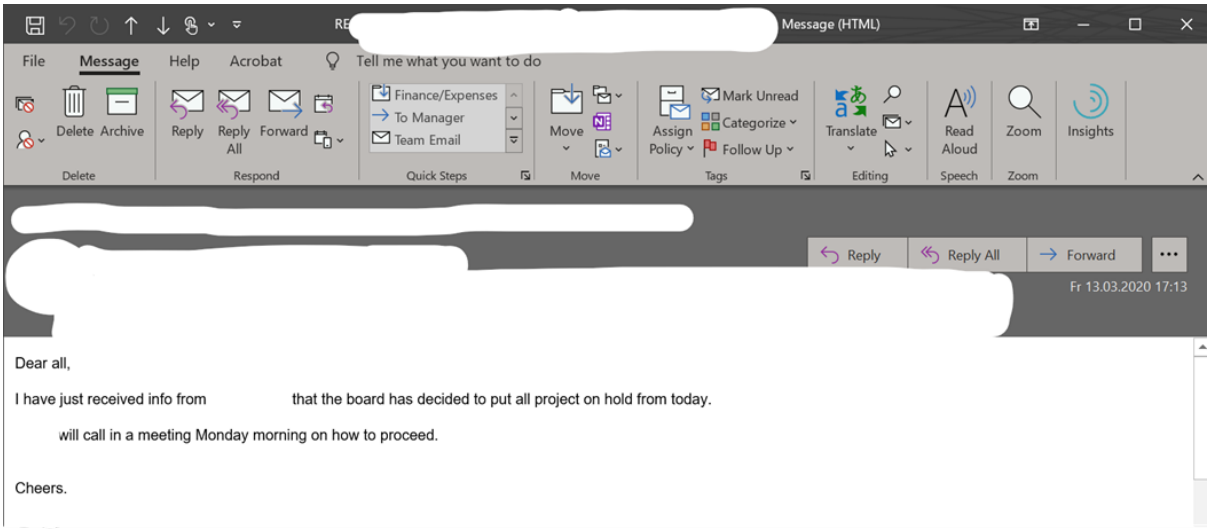
Rebranding job description to increase trust	"And it feels a bit like working with young people who are there because they are digital natives and have been chosen to somehow advance remotely. And that actually works quite well, because you can position and build up a lot of knowledge internally with people in a short time, and it also strengthens trust, because you are more likely to enter into a partnership relationship, into cooperation, than this service provider relationship. And of course that works better when you have more complex organizational consulting projects and works less well when you somehow sell training or something."
Now we have both virtual and physical skills	"Yes, something like that will remain, or one has to consciously decide what kind of meeting we have, and the toolbox has simply become bigger."
Some working styles better remotely, less logistical effort	"So I think what you take away is that you don't always have to be on site. You can actually do a lot remotely, and on the one hand it relieves the workload. So the employees don't have to travel somewhere all the time, you can also work at home sometimes, which is of course also super good from an environmental point of view. So we have good opportunities to work remotely. We don't have to do everything in person."
Competition will increase if OD work is locally independent	"I think it is, we are being more compared to competitors now." "The international consultancy market worldwide is now becoming more and more mixed. That means that a consultant in Brazil can also get an assignment somewhere in the world if everything is in English and um... I think it depends on how and what you offer? Yes, and this ehm extra-special methods. And now I've been doing it for 15 years with the same methods. It's not going to work anymore."
Transformation of OD demands for learning process for consultants	"You do training sessions, sometimes everyone turning off their video. You ask a question and then there is silent for a minute because no one answers, which is sometimes a bit uncomfortable. But we're still at the very beginning of a learning process, and I'm convinced that we can still do a lot and actually involve people quite well."

B: Interview script

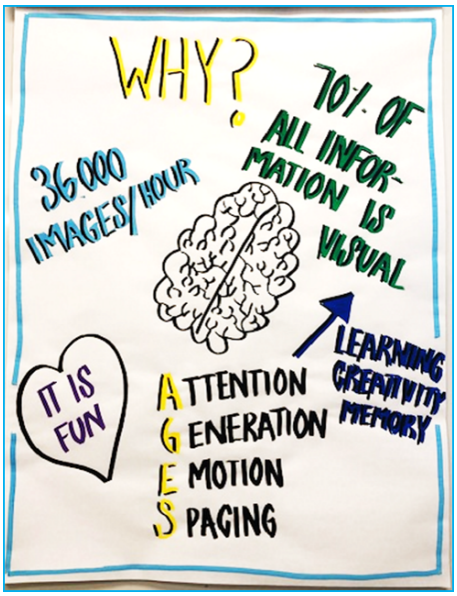
Theme	Questions
Changes	In general, what is your perception about remote work as OD consultant?
	Could you describe a normal day when you were working in the office? Now tell me about a typical day when you are doing OD remote?
	Can you tell me about your thoughts and feelings when remote working mode was announced?
	What changed in interventions? • How is it different for different kinds of interventions (diagnostic, process, …) • And how is it different for different clients (regarding tools, methods, preparation, preparation time…)? (Get some information about online work!) • (What issues/actions/events are you paying attention to now because of remote work, that you weren't attending before?) → What do you pay more attention to now (issues, actions, events) that you didn't focus on before?
	How do you initiate a kick-off meeting with your clients?
	BACK UP Questions (if not yet covered and if they make sense:) • How did you prepare for the first services/workshops? • How did the first service/workshop work? Tell me!
	What changed in the relationship with the client?
	What changes in the way you provide feedback?
Challenges	What were the greatest obstacles when switching to remote mode?
	What do you still consider as obstacles?
	How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about remote working changed from the start of this situation?
	How did you assure that your clients are prepared for your OD services?

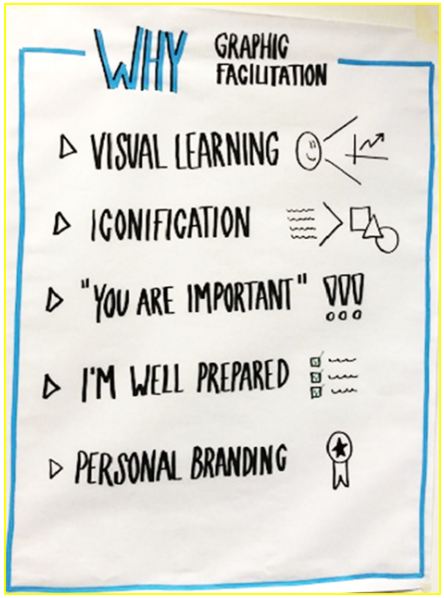
	How do you create trust and motivation among your clients?
OD processes	Will aspects of remote service be carried over into your everyday practice when COVID-19 allows us to work back in the office?
	How do you see the near but also distant future of OD consulting?

C: E-Mail print screen (company 1)

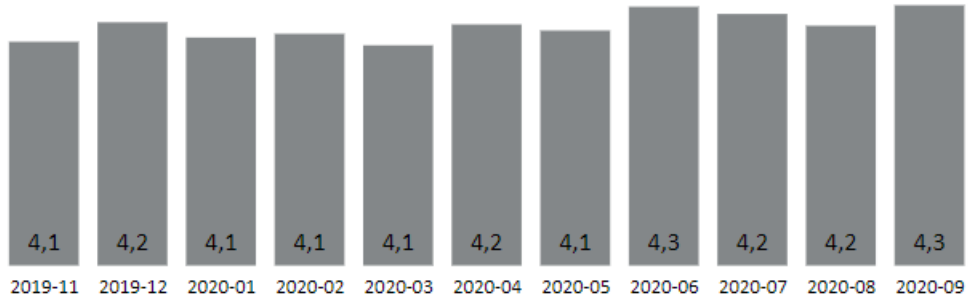


D: Flipcharts before the pandemic (company 2)





E: Customer feedback scale (company 2)



Comment on customer feedback scale:

“In April, May and June, we really managed to shift towards digital interactions and were exceeding our customers’ expectations as they expected everything to be cancelled – but we could still have workshops and other interactions virtually (and maybe even in some cases it was more efficient!).“