

Breaking with the past

Team leaders' approaches on leadership, maintaining organizational culture and
hybridity

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ABSTRACT

As the beginning of a new decade began, the world experienced a global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to unforeseen changes within our daily lives such as social distancing and travel restrictions. However, organisations also had to adapt to new ways of doing work overnight. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate team leaders' approaches to leadership, maintaining organisational culture during the pandemic and future perspectives on adapting to a hybrid workplace. The study adapted a mixed method approach for collecting data from the chosen sample of six team leaders from two Norwegian companies. A revised version of Bass and Avolio's (1992) multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) was used to determine the leader's leadership style. The results from the survey allowed me to create the semi-structured interview guide, where more in-depth questions tackled the three research areas within this study. The results of the MLQ suggest that leaders align more towards having a transformational leadership style, with some elements from transactional leadership behaviours. As for the results from the interviews, it can be suggested that the leaders experienced some challenges with regards to their leadership approaches some of them where: maintaining informal communication and accommodating to everyone's needs. There has been little evidence from the responses that the leaders have experienced cultural change during the pandemic. However, what could be highlighted is that role-modelling and strong organisational cultural practices contribute to maintaining the overall cultural environment of the organisation. Lastly, the team leaders are open for breaking with the past by re-inventing better workplace practices, such as giving more work flexibility to their employees. The finding can help organisations to take actions where it is most needed when it comes to dealing with one of the three concepts outlined in the study and thus, contribute to the overall success and well-being of the organisation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

'It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change'.

(Darwin, 1895, in Lawrence, 2010, p. 272)

Change is a main concern for most businesses, as it is ever-present. As İkinci (2014) has stated, “the only thing that does not change is change itself” (Mansaray, 2019, p. 19). Thus, organisations need to take change into account. In order to maintain their positions and survive as a business, they need to respond to the changes in their environment. The changes can be within the market, politics or law, or caused by technological developments. In the past few years, however, we have experienced a global pandemic which has brought forward change in all these areas. How can businesses adapt to such large changes?

Adapting to change is not an easy process. The fact that only one of the 12 top companies on the Dow Jones index in 1900 have still survived today proves that adapting to change can be difficult ((Tidd & Bessant, 2020). One of the businesses that failed to survive was Kodak, which did not respond to the technological developments within the photography field (Tidd & Bessant, 2020). Thus, it is not given that it is the ‘strongest’ or largest companies that will survive and manage the changes. It is rather, as Darwin said, those who are able to adapt that will survive. Two factors are important in terms of managing and adapting to change: organisational culture and leadership. These two factors are considered to be “two sides of the same coin”, and are vital to ensure the competitiveness of organisations (Areiqat et al., 2020, p. 123).

Organisational culture is comprised of shared underlying assumptions, values, norms and artifacts (Burnes, 2004). When people share an organisational culture, they also share views on how things ought to be done and how they should behave in the work context. Some organisational cultures may be more open to change, while others may be more restrained. If an organisation has a culture that is not adaptable to change, good leaders can use their knowledge of the current organisational culture to introduce changes that will make the culture more adaptable. Since culture is constructed, it can also be changed.

Leadership is an important factor in managing change. Leaders can inspire their co-workers to take part in a process of change towards a shared vision for the company (Laub, 2018). Thus, leadership is not a static process, and leaders can adapt their leadership approach to adjust to the present trends or issues companies are facing (Mansaray, 2019). With this being said, the beginning on a new decade began with a life changing event which was the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders and managers had to act quickly and make decisions that would have had positive and negative effects on their organisation's processes (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

The global COVID-19 pandemic has introduced several changes. One of the more evident changes is that many needed to move from working at their offices to working from home. This was both due to mandatory lockdowns, travel restrictions and restrictions on the distance between people and how many could be gathered in the same room or building. This led to a proliferation of the use of digital tools to connect with colleagues, and thus companies needed to understand how they could effectively use these tools in the daily work. Remote work was not a new phenomenon, but it was not nearly as much used as it has been during the pandemic. Even though some companies had pre-designed crisis management plans, the global pandemic and the scale of changes it introduced was unexpected for many companies (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). Because the pandemic came abruptly, companies had little time to adjust to the effects of it. In Norway, the first case of the virus was registered in late February, and the first lockdown was introduced only two weeks later. The pandemic has exposed several weaknesses within companies, but also provided new opportunities (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021).

1.1 The thesis' research questions and objectives

This thesis has a twofold research interest. One interest is in how leaders have managed change, in terms of which role leadership and organisational culture has played during the pandemic. This will be explored by investigating how leaders have employed different leadership approaches during the pandemic, and how they have attempted to maintain the organisational culture of the company. The second research interest is in how the pandemic affects companies in the future. I am specifically interested here in whether the companies have any future strategies related to a hybrid workplace, and how they plan to approach adaptability. Thus, my research questions are:

- *How have team leaders in two Norwegian firms employed leadership approaches during the pandemic?*
- *How have team leaders maintained organisational culture during the pandemic?*
- *Has there been any future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace?*

The research questions will be explored through two data collection methods: an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The respondents are team leaders in different departments within two Norwegian companies. As will be further elaborated, Norwegian leaders tend to align with transformational and transactional leadership styles (Hetland & Sandal, 2003). Thus, I will investigate which type of leadership style the team leaders in my sample have, and which leadership approaches they have drawn upon during the pandemic. This can give insights into how the pandemic has affected leadership, and how Norwegian leaders can manage and adapt to change. The study will also demonstrate the obstacles and opportunities Norwegian leaders have faced during this period of challenging, external changes. These insights can contribute to make leaders more prepared for future changes.

The second research question entails some assumptions. I assume here that the two case companies had a good organisational culture that was open to change. Thus, I focus on how they maintained this good culture, rather than on whether they needed to change the organisational culture to adapt to the changes caused by the pandemic. Further, I only focus on the broader organisational culture, rather than potential sub-cultures within the company. This research question can give insights into which approaches, and techniques leaders can use to maintain their organisational culture during periods of great changes. It is especially relevant for situations where the organisational culture needs to be maintained while some or most employees work remotely. These insights can help organisations to maintain their organisational culture in the post-pandemic era if they choose to continue with a hybrid workplace.

The pandemic has both presented challenges and opportunities for companies. The third research question will explore how the companies plan to learn from the pandemic by investigating their future strategies and adaptability approaches. The research question is

particularly concerned with hybrid workplace, and whether the team leaders want to adapt to this type of working situation in a post-pandemic era. The discussion on this research question can give insights into which challenges the team leaders experienced with regards to adapting to working-from-home or a hybrid workplace. It will also discuss which opportunities the changes presented, and how the team leaders weighted these considerations when thinking about the future work situation. The results will also show how the companies explore their future strategies.

1.2 Justification for study and contributions

Even though companies have faced large changes before, such as during the financial crisis, the pandemic has brought unprecedented changes (Dhakal et al., 2021). The context of the pandemic allows researchers to explore how such large-scale transitions may unsettle leadership and organisational culture, and which approaches are most effective to respond to such transitions. To learn from the pandemic, it is important to study the effects it has had on companies and how companies can successfully manage changes. This will help companies to be more prepared for future pandemics or other larger changes. Several studies on leadership, organisational culture and the pandemic have begun to emerge. There has been research on the impact of COVID-19 on leadership challenges and competencies by Talu and Nazarov (2020), which brings forward skills and characteristics that leaders, should be more protective, adaptive to change and create teamwork. With regards to organisational culture with relation to the pandemic, research by Raghuram (2021) has explored how remote work implicates to organisational culture, the chapter gives us insights on the relationship between remote work and organisational culture. However, to get a narrower picture of the situation it is useful to have several case studies.

This master's thesis aims to contribute towards understanding the impact of the pandemic and strategies to manage the impacts by collecting data from team leaders working in two Norwegian companies. The case companies are different from each other: one is a research organisation mainly focusing on food and aquaculture, while the other one is a multinational industrial company which focuses on processing natural resources sustainably.

By including two different Norwegian companies, it will be possible to explore whether the challenges and opportunities were similar or different for the two companies. Further, the

study can show whether the two companies had different approaches to leadership and to maintaining their organisational culture. The thesis can therefore contribute to understanding the practical outcomes of the pandemic.

In the quantitative data collection, the study will employ the much-used Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The results from this questionnaire can help to show whether team leaders in Norwegian companies still align with transformational and transactional leadership styles during the pandemic. The data from the interviews can further demonstrate whether the leadership styles had to be adapted as a response to the pandemic.

Lastly, the study's findings can help to inform leaders and managers on how they can adapt their leadership techniques to respond to future pandemics or another crisis. The findings can further help to provide approaches on how leaders can effectively maintain the organisational culture when abrupt changes occur and in situations where the employees work partly or all the time outside the office.

1.3 Thesis outline

This master's thesis is organised into six chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter two focuses on the theoretical background. It presents relevant theory and contributions on leadership, organisational culture and hybrid workplaces. Chapter three presents the research methodology for the thesis, along with the sample and sampling procedure and some practical and ethical considerations. In Chapter four, the results of the data collection will be presented. The results are divided into four main themes: leadership, maintaining organisational culture, the pandemic and hybrid workplace. These results will be discussed in chapter five, which will also provide the answers to the three research questions. Further, the chapter will discuss the implications of the study and recommendations for future research. Chapter six concludes the master's thesis.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter will present theoretical approaches and research related to leadership, organisational culture and adaptation to hybrid workplaces. It will further explore the relation between leadership and organisational culture, and how they affect the work processes of an organisation. The chapter will follow a funnel structure, where I begin by presenting the overarching theory on leadership and organisational culture. Then I will move on to the leadership approaches, where I will both operationalise relevant terms and adapt the Multifactor Leadership Theory (MLT) of understanding leadership styles. I will then continue by adapting two theories on organisational culture by Schein (2010) and Denison and Mishra (1995). Lastly, I will move towards explaining the overall theoretical background lays the foundation to understanding the relationship between leadership, organisational culture, and hybrid workplace, which is the main focus of this thesis.

2.1.1 Leaders, leadership, and change

Laub (2018, p. 59) proposes that a leader is a person who has a “vision, takes action towards the vision and mobilises other to become partners in pursuing change”. He describes that “leaders are not satisfied, comfortable people. They have the will and ability to look beyond a focus on self to view a world in great need and they are willing to confront this need and act towards change” (Laub, 2018, p. 45). Good leaders must thus have ideas, be able to act on them and inspire others to act together with the leader. Achieving the vision necessitates change, and therefore leaders always move towards some type of change (Rost, 1993). Laub (2018) further defines leadership as “an intentional change process through which leaders and followers, joined by a shared purpose, initiate action to pursue a common vision” (p. 62). Change is thus a central theme within leadership. The dictionary description of change is “to take a different position, course or direction to, become different or undergo transformation” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). The definition can be further elaborated with Pettigrew (1997, p. 340) description of transient change, which is actions, decisions or causes of events that can shape the product of the outcome. As evident in the definition of leadership, change is actively pursued and thus an intended outcome of leadership.

Leadership is also a dynamic process. Not only leaders but also ‘followers’ or employees play an active part in leadership. The roles of the two actor groups becomes more active within the leader’s behaviour which helps to make the employees motivated to achieve

change (Laud, 2018). They have a ‘shared purpose’, which also relates to organisational culture as they may share values and beliefs (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). The leaders and followers also ‘pursue a common vision’, and having mutual ownership of the vision is important to be motivated for adapting to future leadership change (Laub, 2018; Lonati, 2020).

Managing organisational change is important, especially due to changes in the environment and crisis. Organisations must be able to keep up with the rapid development of technology and changes occurring within markets (Mansaray, 2019). As Alqatawenh (2018) argues, organisations must also be able to rapidly respond to crises such as the current global pandemic to ensure the survival of the organisation. To survive during the pandemic, leaders must adapt to new ways of working and they must have a clear vision in order to mobilise employees and motivate them to achieve change (Bailey & Breslin, 2021). In this first part of the theoretical chapter, I will explore how leaders have attempted to manage change, and the effectiveness of different types of leadership styles.

2.2 Multifactor Leadership Theory

Just as leaders employ numerous leadership styles, researchers have developed several theories on leadership. In this thesis with regards to leadership, I will focus on the theory of Bass and Avolio (1992), as it describes leadership characteristics that are commonly found in Scandinavia. Furthermore, the theory has been chosen for this master because it will help this research elaborate and build on the existing understanding of dealing with leadership approaches when dealing with some type of change. (Vinger & Cilliers, 2006).

Bass and Avolio (1992) constructed a theory called the Multifactor Leadership Theory (MLT). The theory comprises of three leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and *laissez-faire* (Bass, 1985). The third leadership style in MLT, *laissez-faire*, is not as common in Scandinavia, and in the master thesis it will be less focused on. The MLT is one of the most comprehensive theories on transformational and transactional leadership, which is the two leadership styles that leaders in Scandinavia often align with (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Braathu et al., 2022). Bass and Avolio (1992) understanding of the relation between transformational and transactional leadership, was adapted within this master thesis. Researchers such as Burns (1978) who have contributed to the creation of MLT described

that transformational and transactional leadership styles appear on opposite sides in a continuum. However, Bass (1985) stated that the two leadership styles are theoretically separate but appear simultaneously in the behavioural range of leadership. According to Lowe et al. (1996) research on leadership styles and their supporting evidence of the MLT predictions on leader's effectiveness stated that, a leader can experience both transformational and transactional leadership as contribution to the leader's effectiveness. Therefore, it should be noted that leaders seldom fully align with one theoretical leadership style. Leadership is also an adaptable process where a leader's leadership style may change over time (Nawaz & Khan, 2016). The literature on MLT further suggests that leaders who appear decisive, inspirational and have a clear vision in times of change are capable of leading an organisation through times of unpredicted events and crisis, in our case the COVID-19 pandemic (Dirani et al., 2020).

Previous research by Talu and Nazarov (2020) on investigating the "challenges and competencies of leadership in Covid-19 pandemic" by using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 6S (MLQ-6S) had measured transformational and transactional leadership styles. Results from their research shows that younger leaders are keener to adapt a transformational and transactional leadership approaches. It was further found that transformational leaders lead by accepting failure and trying for new solutions. There were also leaders who characterised as transactional leaders and strived to achieve their organisational objectives. However, one weakness that the leaders experienced was poor communication and impatience, which could be understood to a certain extent when leaders are faced with enormous pressure and stress to be able to get through the pandemic (Talu & Nazarov, p. 522). Therefore, as these two main aspects continuously appear within the leadership literature, they will be taken into consideration when measuring leadership approaches and maintaining organisational culture. In the following paragraph a more thorough discussion will be presented on transformational and transactional leadership styles.

2.2.1 Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles

Transformational leadership is defined as a leader who considers the group's interests over personal interests. The leader pays attention to every detail within their group and tries to inspire the employees to move in the right direction (Alheet et al., 2021). Transformational leaders lead by example, meaning that they attempt to be good role models for their employees. Alignment of the transformational leadership style within the Nordic countries

can be seen in terms of their characteristics for trust and commitment that is created and sustained with organisations (Sayeed & Shanker, 2009). Transactional leaders on the other hand, have behavioural characteristics of helping followers by identifying tasks that need to be achieved for the overall performance of the organisation (Ghafoor et al., 2011). The leader develops goals and targets to certify success, communication, and teamwork. These aspects are greatly valued to achieve the required objectives and in return the employees receive rewards for their performance (Bass, 1997). Therefore, the distinction between the two leadership styles is within that transactional leaders motivate employees to perform well and as a result receive an award and transforming leaders inspire to perform better than they are expected (Hetland & Sandal, 2003). Within the MLT there are given specific behaviours to each one of these leadership types, which can help us further understand the background of each leadership style and lay a foundation when examining the team leaders within the discussion chapter.

2.2.2 Behaviours associated with the two leadership styles

These behaviours have been conceptualised by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was constructed by Bass and Avolio (1992). Starting with the transactional behaviours there have been two behaviours associated to this style within the MLT by Bass and Avolio (1992). The first one is contingent reward involves the exchange of practices between the leaders and followers and the followers are rewarded for their effort and performance (Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders clearly define duties and obligations, which can make it easier for the employees to know which tasks need to be completed to maintain the common objective of the organisation (Sims et al., 2021).

As for the second behaviour which is management by exception is described to be more on the black and white side of leadership where leaders provide constructive criticism, negative feedback, and even negative reinforcement (Northouse, 2001). Diving a bit into previous literature on this leadership type, it has been stated that transactional leadership is dependent highly on the ability of the employees (Moey, 2016). Therefore, whereas a transformational leader will first focus on supporting and encouraging its employees, but their ability is low than that leader will re-consider adapting a transactional leadership approach (Moey, 2016, p. 601).

Transformational leadership on the other hand, has four behaviours. The first behaviour is idealised influence or charisma, which cause strong admiration for the leader by followers. This according to Northouse (2001) is due to the leader's ethics, moral and actions of leading. Northouse (2001) further elaborated that the leader is also conceived as accountable and trustworthy, so followers trust that they can count on the leader.

The second behaviour is called individualised consideration and is used to describe leaders who support and encourage the employees with their day-to-day tasks. The leader here is comparable to a coach, in that he or she gives guidelines, advice, and feedback on the performance of the employees. The leader is making sure that their employees progress is on the right track and if they need additional help (Avolio & Bass, 1998). Linking this behavioural type to the Norwegian context we can look at a research called the GLOBE conducted House et al. (2004) on 63 countries measuring "culture leadership and organisations". The study measured different dimensions within these aspects such as uncertainty, avoidance, collectivism, performance orientation, power distance and so forth Warner-Söderholm (2012, p. 2). What became evident within the context of Scandinavia is their score on performance orientation. The dimension also includes focus on achievement, taking initiative and job-relation accomplishments. Thus, Norway, Sweden and Denmark all scored relatively high on the performance orientation of the study (Warner-Söderholm, 2012). House et al. (2004) suggested that high scoring countries are more focused within their organisational approaches with setting high performance targets, values of education and learning and lastly initiative taking.

The third behaviour is intellectual stimulation and refers to the leader tackling problems effectively and inspires the employees to approach issues by seeing the problem from different viewpoints (Yukl, 1999). The final behaviour is inspirational motivation. This includes being able to communicate the organisation's vision for the future (Avolio, 1994). The leader needs to actively speak and have individual communication with his/her employees to be able to inspire and motivate them which can lead to having support from the employees when there are future processes for change (Vinger & Cilliers, 2006). The use of this behaviour was integrated within the interview guide for question 3 which can be seen in Appendix 3. Being able to communicate effectively with employees can be considered a major factor within the transformational leadership style. Research by Vinger and Cilliers (2006) suggests that when leaders are being able to be involved in two-way communication and

adopt an open-door policy, would lead to developing trust and loyalty among his/her employees. Eventually, if this is practiced by all the leaders in an organisation, then this will become a standard way of leading.

Throughout the many years of research on leadership and the assessment of the MLT the theory has received some criticisms that need to be outlined. This will help us grasp better how leadership styles work and help me as a researcher to discuss the analysed data within my discussion section. One criticism is that transactional leadership can be seen as a bargaining process, where the leaders and employees, just try to gain from their transaction. Thus, the relationship can quickly collapse, as employees will lose the motivation of performing well as the rewards are not sufficient enough that the theory has received is with regards to the transactional leadership style (Macit, 2003, p. 95). As for the transformational leadership style, it has particularly criticised the behaviour of idealized influence.

Transformational leaders with high charisma may tend to misuse their power at work and consequently neglect their employees. Furthermore, the criticism goes further to elaborate that when leaders lack moral values and ethics, than unwanted results may occur at the workplace. (Hall et al., 2002). Therefore, in order to be fully transformational leader then leaders need to have fully adapted behaviours of moral foundation. In this way then the leader will be able to bring about change, with fostering moral values of honesty, loyalty and fairness towards his/her employees (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 192).

In conclusion of this section, Anwar (2017) states that the two leadership styles complement each other with their components. Like Bass and Avolio's theory who view the two leaderships on the same continuum, this broadens the effect on effort and performance. With this in mind, a leader may use both leadership styles but just in different times or situations and therefore this created a leader that can implement both styles within their line of work (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). The intention of this section is to lay foundation to the response of the first research question which is: *How have team leaders in two Norwegian firms employed leadership approaches during the pandemic?*

2.3 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is a complex and broad phenomenon. A simplified definition is that organisational culture is “the glue that holds organisations together and stimulates employees to commit to the organisations performance” (Van den Berg & Wilderom, 2004, p. 571). This involves many elements, such as values, norms, practices, experiences, and beliefs. Because of the importance of achieving or maintaining a good organisational culture, the phenomenon has been widely researched and scholars have constructed several theories on organisational culture (Schein, 2010). Complex situations such as globalisation and now a global pandemic has also led to increased attention on how organisations can facilitate for an organisational culture that adapts to internal and external changes (Mason et al., 2012). In this thesis, organisational culture will be identified and theoretically described with regards to organisational behaviour and leadership styles.

2.3.1 Conceptualising Organisational Culture

Organisational culture within companies and organisations is very closely knitted to the national culture of a country. According to Singh (2013) national culture is what makes nations distinctive from each other, whereas organisational culture is limited only to the difference between organisations. Other researchers, state that is impossible to have a culture free workplace as our behaviours, attitudes and practices are greatly impacted by our culture (Pinho et al., 2014). Therefore, it is of much greater importance for the corporate world to have a set of cultural values, beliefs, and practices that employees can relate to and working capacity can be improved (Alvesson & Berg, 2011). Furthermore, within the research there has been a merge of national and organisational culture studies, the reason behind it is that there are common features and values that connects these two fields (Leidner et al., 2006).

Stahl (2013) states that as organisational culture comprises of shared values and practices, often people in the same occupation and organisation tend to share these cultural values. Additionally, research shows that individuals may be affected on various levels within organisational culture, but this aspect is also dependent on how strong the social component with combination to their moral values (Karahanna et al., 2005). However, what needs to be explored briefly are the different dimensions of organisational culture and how these dimensions are directly linked to organisations structure.

2.3.2 Competing value framework

This framework was created by Cameron and Quinn (2011) and up to this day has been considered the most used theory for characterising organisational culture. The framework shines light on how different values are associated with the organisational effectiveness, organisational life cycles and leadership roles (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981). There are four dimensions according to the competing value framework: hierarchy culture, market culture, clan culture and adhocracy culture. What could be noteworthy for this research is acknowledging the Scandinavian organisational culture, which has been characterised as having corporate values of high innovation, and teamwork. Linking this to previous research, it has been implied that Scandinavia appears to have both a clan and adhocracy culture (Mielniczuk, 2020). Clan culture with regards to involving employees, building strong ties and leaders acting as mentors. As for adhocracy, it has been linked to Scandinavian companies being innovative, creative, and strong emphasis on flexibility (Mielniczuk, 2020). Additionally other characteristics of the Nordic region and culture is considered to be highly egalitarian, and the management is closely considered to be more collectivist rather than individualistic, as teams and groups appeared to be internally loyal and having a strong will of completing a common goal (Warner-Søderholm, 2012).

However, the framework has been criticised that even though organisations should reflect all four cultures to some degree, there is always one culture that appears more dominant. Thus, one argues that the culture is manifested more consistently throughout the organisation (Helfrich et al., 2007). Nevertheless, what is also important to mention is that social culture is another factor that contributes to the organisation's culture and leadership (House et al., 2004). For instance House et al. (2004) project on Globe Leadership and Organisational Effectiveness (GLOBE) where "urban helpfulness" can be also associated with the dimension of clan culture. Project GLOBE claims that since Scandinavia is recognised to have an organised welfare state, it appears to be more humanely oriented compared to liberal models (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2011). This also can suggest that as a whole the state takes care of its society and recognises personal rights, which creates a national clan culture (House et al., 2004).

Lastly but not least, the purpose of using the competing value framework by Cameron and Quinn (2011) is first and foremost to grasp better the Scandinavia organisational culture, through examining the previous literature. Secondly, through that examination be able to

have a background knowledge of what types of values companies can have and how these can be maintained. Having explored a bit more about the societal and organisational culture of Scandinavia, what will be looked next are more elaborative models and theoretical framework of organisational culture that helped the process of investigating the second research question for this master thesis.

2.3.3 Schein's organisational cultural theory

Schein (2010) is one of the prominent scholars on organisational culture. He defines a group's culture as:

“a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (Schein, 2010, p. 18).

This definition is the starting point of structuring how organisational culture was investigated and understood when conducting the semi-structured interviews. It is further stated that organisational culture is a learned outcome of group experience, and it is considered by many researchers as an unconscious process (Schein, 2010). There are three levels to the theoretical framework of Schein's theory:

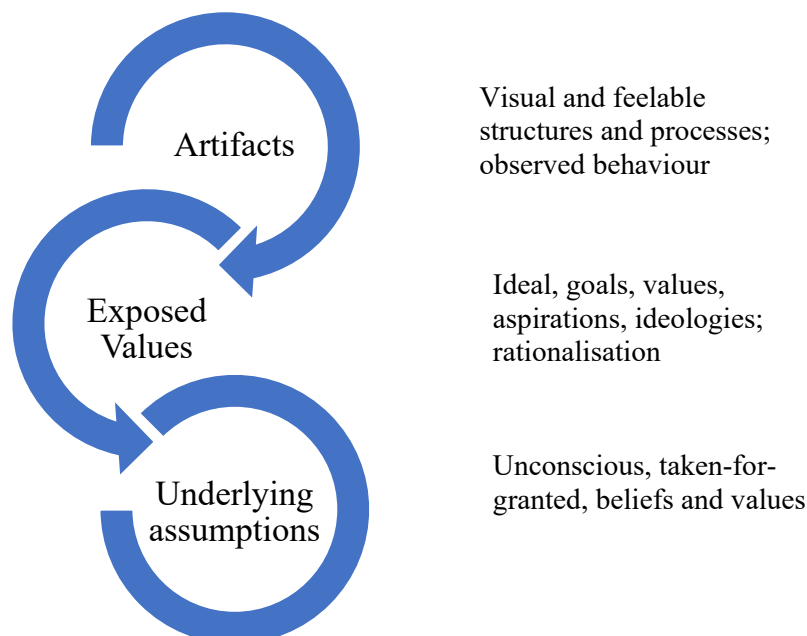


Figure 1. Schein's (2010) model of organisational culture (p. 24).

The first level is all the visual organisational processes and different artifacts such as dress code, architecture of the building, workplace tidiness, the technologies employed and so forth (Schein, 2010). However, this level is considered difficult to interpretation as it provides only the artificial and surface-based elements of an organisation. Cultural artifacts also include quality systems and information systems such as databases and statistics (Schein, 2010).

The second levels are adopted values, this are the organisation's objectives, goals, and missions. However, this level again tells us little about the everyday operations of an organisation, but it is a deeper understanding of what the company stands for and can make up the organisations philosophy which serves as a guide on how to behave in uncertain situations (Schein, 2010). This information from the two first levels can be usually gathered also from public documents and websites of the company. In this case research was made on the online websites of the two companies, in order to get more understanding of their organisational culture and general information, prior to the master thesis.

The third level which is the underlying assumptions, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings relates to the group's taken-for-granted solutions to problems (Schein, 2010). Seeing a culture as a set of basic assumptions refers to leaders paying attention to what really matters for the organisation, knowing how to sustain emotional reactions and lastly how to react in certain situations. Schein (2010) further argues that assumptions are related to the external adaptation and internal integrations of an organisation.

External adaptation is connected to the tasks and objectives and the organisation's responsibility to assess and implement them. Thus, an efficient solution needs to be found in order for the organisation to functions and thrives in its environment. For instance, when the pandemic began many of organisations had an external adaptation crisis, as their tasks and operations had to be moved from home and done through using digital platforms such as Zoom (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). With regards to internal integration, Schein (2010) argues that this is more related to maintaining the cultural values and operations capacity. For instance, creating a common language, level of authority relationships and group individualism. Therefore, the solution found needs to be a solution that helps everyone in the organisation to work harmoniously, collaborative and joined as a community (Schein, 2010). Additionally, this theory will help alongside the investigation to the pandemic as organisations would need to come up with solutions to maintaining the overall organisational

culture, even when the work environment is not at the office. More on how to maintain organisational culture will be introduced in section (2.3.6).

2.3.4 Denison and Mishra (1995) framework

Denison and Mishra’s theoretical framework was moderately used for this master study and for the creation of the interview guide with regards to questions 9 and 10 which can be found in Appendix 3. Denison and Mishra’s (1995) model is based on four cultural traits: mission, adaptability, consistency, and involvement (see Figure 2), these traits measure the effectiveness of an organisation. According to their research findings the traits of mission and consistency predicted organisations profitability and the traits of involvement and adaptability were predictors for innovation. Similar to, the previous framework of Schein (2010) at the core of the framework lies the beliefs and assumptions, which are the behaviours and actions of the employees, which are unique and difficult to measure. Nevertheless, enriches our understanding of organisational culture variables. This entails by knowing better which variables can be used with accordance to the research area to measure and investigated the uncertain times.

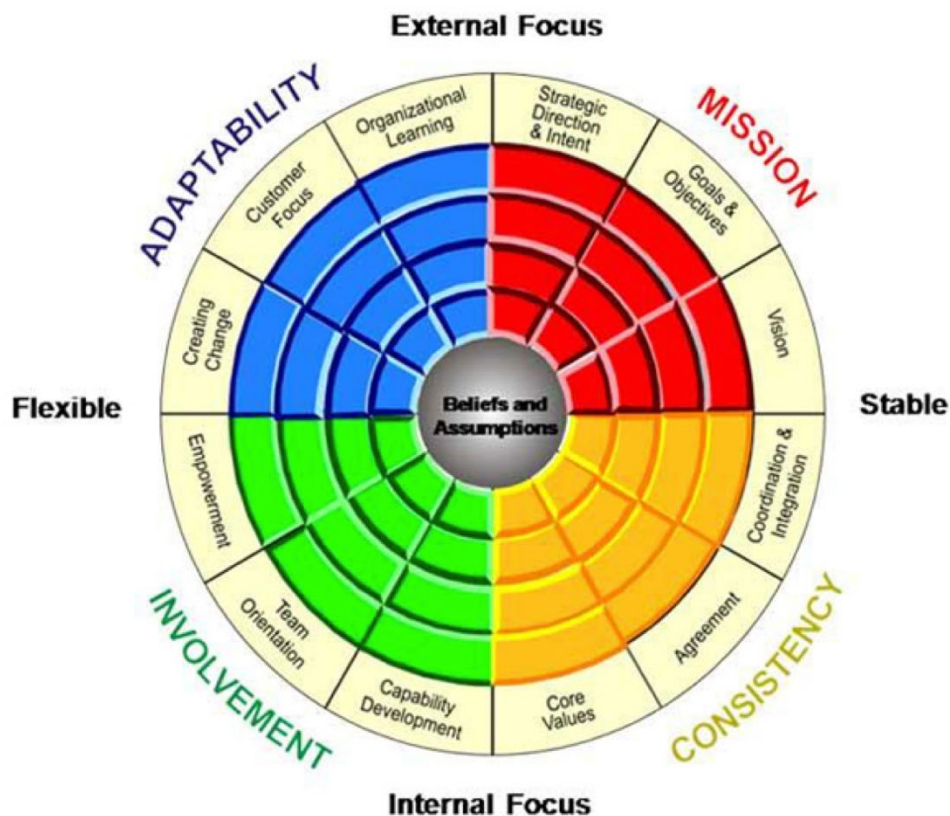


Figure 2. Denison et al. (2003)'s model of organisational culture (p. 101).

For the purpose of this master study, more attention was given to the traits of adaptability, involvement and consistency, as these traits appeared relevant to the context of the interest area, the pandemic (Denison et al., 2003). Adaptability is related to the internal and external adaptation, which is directly linked to the ability to adapt to change in the most effective way. However, within Denison's theory this change is referred to improving the organisations with the objective to satisfy customers, even though this is relevant for most of the time for organisations (Stalk, 1988). For this research adaptability will be related and looked at as improving the organisation's abilities to survive or get through challenging times.

Involvement is referred to the empowerment, team orientation and capability development of employees. Spreitzer (1995) suggests that developing these human capacities enhances the team's involvement with the leaders and managers, which creates sense on involvement with regards decision-making. The last trait, consistency, is when organisations have a strong culture with high consistent, well-organised and integrated frameworks (Davenport, 1993). The behaviour of the employees are signs of internalisation of the core values of the organisations and the leaders, try to be a role model to their employees. This shows stability and high degree of compliance (Senge, 1990).

2.3.5 Organisational Culture and Leadership

As the different concepts within this master thesis become more conceptualised and comprehensible, the literature has recognised that organisational culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin (Areqat et al., 2020). Looking at these two aspects as two interconnected elements is of importance as supporting literature suggests that culture can determine decision-making practices, communication, performance, working styles and so forth (Areqat et al., 2020). The opposite was also expressed within the literature where leadership plays a central role for the creation of organisational culture. Managers and the founders of the organisation are key actors in creating cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs (Gagliardi, 1986). In order to illustrate the influence on one another of these two concepts, Schein (2010) and Budin and Wafa (2015) research on organisational culture and leadership proposed that we look at the life cycle of a business. This simply means that at the beginning stage of an organisation the values and beliefs are shaped by the leader which creates the overall culture of that organisation. As time goes by the organisation experiences different challenges and progresses, this requires further actions, but these actions will be shaped by the experience of the leader and the organisation, which then results in an evolved

culture (Bass, 2000). Therefore, the leader is first the creator of the culture, but he/she is also being influenced by it when it comes to his/her leadership styles and techniques.

As, the pandemic allows room for new research and investigations, within the field of organisations with regards to their leadership and cultures, the current master thesis aims to provide more knowledge on how these two concepts are two sides of the same coin. To do that, what needs to be investigated further is how to maintain the organisational culture during the pandemic outbreak that resulted in lockdowns all around the globe. This will be discussed in the following section (2.5.3).

2.3.6 Maintaining organisational culture

Previous literature on maintaining or managing organisational culture has focused on how human resources strategies can be adapted to the implication of cultural management (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000). The literature also suggests that actions of maintaining or adapting to new cultural practices can be integrated within the different levels of organisational operations (Allen, 1985). For instance, leadership and modelling, the leaders and managers can assist in overturning or modelling through actions the existing values, beliefs, and assumptions. If we also take the strategy of interpersonal communication, how leaders can manage organisational culture would be having close relationships with their co-workers that encourages supporting and integrative behaviour into an existing culture (Kilmann et al., 1985). However, to my full knowledge there has been limited research exploring how organisations have maintained their organisational culture during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the aim of the second research question is to explore how organisational culture was maintained during the pandemic and ensure that it remained consistent while most employees worked from home. Nevertheless, what would be also of importance to maintaining organisational culture is the exploration on adaptability to a hybrid workplace after the pandemic, which will be explored in the following section.

2.4 The Road to a New Normal

2.4.1 The Norwegian context

The COVID-19 pandemic was a great societal change for many people, where certain measures had to be taken such as social distancing. In a study by Hatchett et al. (2007), non-medical interventions such as distancing had shown great results in the past when the world had to deal with the Spanish flu. Norway, just like other countries implemented strict social

distancing from the beginning of the outbreak and that was including working remotely. However, not all jobs are structured to be done from home. The Norwegian government introduced other economic policies and incentives for the work sectors that had to be temporarily closed, due to the unavailability to work from home, such as the restaurants and cafe businesses (Holgersen et al., 2021).

Within the context of Norway, previous research on remote work and its achievability, can be supported by some of the national surveys that were conducted. For example, there has been a survey conducted by the Norwegian labour in 2017. The aim of the survey was to find out if employees were given the opportunity to work from home some days of the week, not entirely remotely but partially (Nergaard et al., 2018). The results showed that around 35% of the respondents can work from home, which is relatively lower. However, a more current study conducted by the Norwegian Institute of Transport Economics (TØI), was directly design for the COVID-19 pandemic with a purpose to see the effectiveness of remote work (Nordbakke, 2020). Around 48% of the respondents' responses was for the popularity of remote work. A setback that could be identified of this survey is the limited information of the different job occupations (Holgersen et al., 2021). Nonetheless, it is an insightful overview statistic of understanding better remote work and its implications.

2.4.2 Hybrid Organisations and Future Strategies

According to the literature a hybrid workplace is a blended system, which occurs in specific time, where two dissimilar systems are collided to normalise a new normal (Gratton, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic is the black swan event from this decade that forced organisations to become more innovative and changeable with regards to their workplace environments (Iqbal et al., 2021). Furthermore, a hybrid workplace or model can be looked along two axes: place and time. Place is the component that has been getting a lot of attention, as millions of workers around the globe have made a shift from working at the office to working from home or from anywhere, they can. Time, on the other hand, is related to the fact that employees have become more time-unconstrained, meaning working whenever they choose to for as long as they want nonetheless their work is delivered (Gratton, 2021). However, there is still a lot of planning to be done from organisations with regards to adapting to a hybrid workplace, if that is the best option for their organisations and how they are conducting their tasks in a post-pandemic era. Companies are starting to slowly implement flexible working options for their employees, which also boost productivity and employee satisfaction

(Gratton, 2021; Holgersen et al., 2021). However, making hybrid work implemented within organisation, will take time and leaders need to consider the varied challenges and opportunities that will come out of this scenario.

The purpose of including this element within the master thesis, is to get an overview of how and if the two Norwegian companies are considering of adapting to a more hybrid type of a workplace structure after the pandemic. Additionally, changing one’s workplace type has corresponding influence on the organisation’s culture and leadership approaches (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). These influences will vary from having to adapt to new values and cultural practices to employee training into a more digital work practice, which will mean that leaders will have to change or adapt the way they lead their team (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). This aspect was additionally integrated within the interview guide (questions 13 and 14 in Appendix 3).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

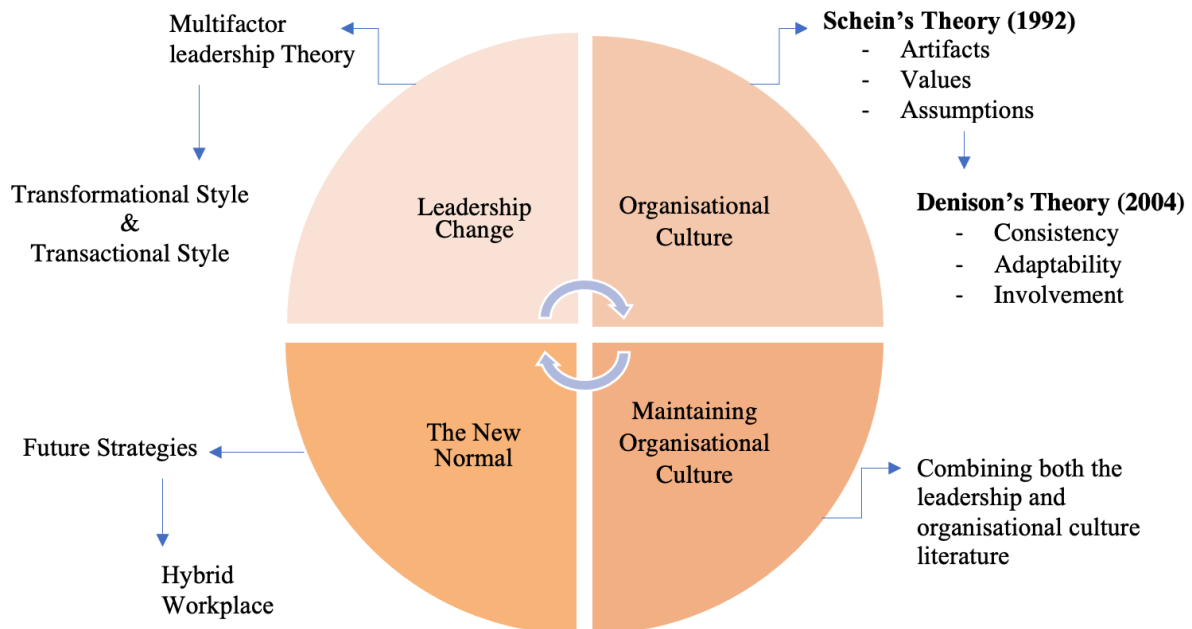


Figure 3. Framework of the theoretical background for leadership, organisational culture and hybrid workplace.

2.6 Summary

The present theoretical background on leadership intends to answer the first research questions which is related to: *How have team leaders in two Norwegian firms employed leadership approaches during the pandemic?* As for organisational culture and the ways of maintaining organisational culture intends to answer the second research question: *How have team leaders maintained organisational culture during the pandemic?* Thirdly, the third theoretical concept on hybridity intends to answer the question of: *Has there been any future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace?* Overall, by presenting the three concepts in one conceptual framework in figure 3, we can see that the concepts are related in some way or another. This adds a unique view on the current master thesis, as it brings a different viewpoint when investigating these concepts, especially with the factor of the world going through a global pandemic.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will present the methodological approach of this master thesis. The chapter begins by explaining the research design and research method. Then, the process of collecting data will be outlined, before the chapter concludes by discussing the validity and reliability of the thesis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

A research design is an overarching framework which describes how data will be collected and analysed during a research project (Bryman, 2016). There is a myriad of research designs that can be applied to a research project, and the choice of a particular design depends on factors such as the aim of the study, time and monetary limitations. In this study, I aim to investigate three research questions:

- *How have team leaders in two Norwegian firms employed leadership approaches, during the pandemic?*
- *How have the team leaders maintained organisational culture during the pandemic?*
- *Has there been any future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace?*

To gain knowledge about these three research questions I chose to use two methods of data collection: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The two methods both built on and complemented each other. The data obtained from the questionnaire was used to construct the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. In addition, the two methods allowed me to triangulate, meaning I could compare and corroborate the data obtained through the quantitative and qualitative method with each other to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic (McGrath et al., 1981; Vinger & Cilliers, 2006).

3.2 Sampling design

3.2.1 Population of study

Theoretically the population of a study is referred to as the people of interest that are intended to be researched or studied (Majid, 2018). In social research studies, it is often not possible to recruit an entire population of study. For the aim of this research using small and detailed samples of the population can be argued to be an efficient way of conducting both

quantitative and qualitative methods, as it will allow the study to become more concise and reliable to the purpose of the investigation (Bryman, 2016). In this study, the people of interest are team leaders within Norwegian companies. These actors are relevant to my research topic as they have direct experience with issues such as leadership techniques, organisational culture and the organisation's future perspectives on hybrid workplaces.

3.2.2 Sampling Procedure

Both qualitative and quantitative research projects can choose from a large variety of sampling strategies. In this study, I have used two sampling strategies to select a sample of the population of interest. The same sample was used in both data collection methods. I selected the sample through purposive and convenience sampling. As Palinkas et al. (2015) explains, sampling strategies may be combined on different levels. In this case, I used purposive sampling to select the geographical area, and convenience sampling to select the companies and participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability selection technique, where the researcher strategically chooses the sample in accordance with the research aims (Bryman, 2016; Coleman, 1958). Convenience sampling, on the other hand, is when the researcher selects the sample based on the availability of participants (Bryman, 2016).

By using purposive sampling, I decided to use participants within Norway. For choosing the companies for this master thesis convenience sampling, this meant that I used my personal contacts to obtain a sample. I wanted to include two different companies in my sample, which will be referred to as company A and company B. I contacted the mother of my best friend who works at Company A as a Quality manager and, additionally, the father of my best friend introduced me to the Head of People Performance at Company B about one year ago. Both gatekeepers have high positions within the companies, and they have been a part of those companies for more than 10 years. Therefore, it could be assumed that they have built up trust and rapport with their co-workers. Consequently, when given information about the study and specifically that the research will be studying team leaders, they were able to contact team leaders and ask if they wanted to take part in my master study.

The choice for selecting specifically team leaders for this master thesis derived from the fact that personally I wanted to research leaders that have direct contact with their employee rather than with sub-leaders. A second reason for using team leaders as my sample is due to the availability. This means that it is much easier to contact team leaders than top leaders for

participation within a master thesis. Furthermore, the team leaders are leaders from different departments, which can add to the representativeness of the study. My intention was to be able to get different opinions from different departments so that the data can be more enriched with different viewpoints from the team leaders. Lastly but not least, throughout the sampling procedure there were selected 8 team leaders, however only 6 of these participants had the availability to participate in my master thesis.

3.2.3 The Sample

The sample for this study is team leaders from different departments within two Norwegian companies.

Company A is a private joint stock company that has several operations such as to research food, develop the aquaculture industry and the fishing industry. The head quarter of the company is located in a medium- sized city in Norway, however they have offices in several Norwegian cities, with approximately 400 employees. The company has strong values for research creation of sustainable food that can be available for everybody. Following the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, Company A has had its obstacles, but they have strived to abide by their mission. The sample selected from Company A comprises of 3 women and one male, which makes it a total of 4 participants. For the research topic of this master thesis, it is more important to understand the differences between Company A and Company B, than the differences between the individual team leaders. Thus, I decided to refer to all participants from Company A as ‘Company A’ in the results and discussion chapters.

Company B on the other hand, is a public limited company within the industrial sector that produces aluminium and the company’s aim is contributing to create a sustainable future. Their head quarter is in Oslo, but the company has presence in about 40 countries around the globe, with a total number of 35 000 employees (Company B). Being a larger company than Company A, they have faced significant obstacles, but also gained some opportunities during the pandemic. From Company B the sample size was significantly low with a total of 2 participants comparing to company A. The participants were both females. Similar to, Company A in the results and discussion chapters, I will refer to all participants as “Company B”.

3.3 Data collection methods

The study used two types of data collection methods: an online survey and a semi-structured interview. The online survey used an adapted version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which is designed for the MLT. The questionnaire gives rich information on the behaviour of leaders (Den Hartog et al., 1997). The online survey was conducted prior to the semi-structured interview, in order to use the results to construct the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. In the following section, I am going to present and explain why these two tools have been used in this study.

3.3.1 The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Form 6-S (MLQ- Form 6S)

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was designed and introduced by Bass and Avolio (1992) it became one of the most commonly used instruments among researchers within the organisational sciences. It is a quantitative tool for measuring the three leadership styles described in the MLT. The questionnaire is useful for conducting research on leadership styles and behaviours, and in particular on leaders who have faced world-changing events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the study of Ibeawuchi et al. (2021) on the “Role of effective leadership in confronting educational challenges of coronavirus pandemic” introduces a detailed theoretical perspective on effective leadership using transformational and transactional styles. Vinger and Cilliers (2006) also used the questionnaire when they investigated transformational leadership behaviour for managing change. These types of studies are similar to my study, and thus the MLQ appeared as an appropriate tool to gain insight on getting to know what type of leadership style and behaviour the team leaders identify with when answering the different items on the MLQ-6S.

The main objective of the questionnaire is to measure transformational and transactional leader behaviours, however it also measures Bass and Avolio (1992)’s third leadership style called *laissez-faire* (Tejeda et al., 2001). Over time, several versions, or forms of the MLQ have been created. For my data collection, I used an adapted version of the MLQ, which is referred to as the MLQ-Form 6S (Northouse, 2001). This is a commonly used and shortened version of the original MLQ, and it includes 21 statements or items (Vinger & Cilliers, 2006). The items relate to one of the three leadership styles. For example, item 1 states: “I make others feel good to be around me” (Vinger & Cilliers, 2006, p. 4). The respondents answer each item by selecting how well the statement describes their leadership style or behaviour.

The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale, going from 0 (“not at all”) to 5 (“frequently, if not always”). The items measure seven factors, which are shown in table 1.

Table 1. The seven factors, items calculation and leadership style in MLQ-Form 6S. Reference: (Moon et al., 2019, pp. 3, 6).

Factors	Name	Items from the questionnaire	Leadership Style
1	Idealised influence	1, 8 and 15	Transformational (F1+F2+F3+F4)
2	Inspirational motivation	2, 9 and 16	
3	Intellectual Stimulation	3, 10 and 17	
4	Individual consideration	4, 11 and 18	
5	Contingent reward	5, 12 and 19	Transactional (F5+F6)
6	Management-by-exception	6, 13 and 20	
7	Laissez-faire leadership	7, 14 and 21	Laissez-faire

As shown in Table 1, the questionnaire includes three items for each factor. For example, idealised influence is measured by the items 1, 8 and 15, while contingent reward is measured by the items 5, 12 and 19. The first four factors in Table 1 measure transformational leadership, while the fifth and sixth factor measure transactional leadership. The final factor measures *laissez-faire* leadership. The measurement for each type of leadership is conducted by summarising the scores of the three items for each factor, and then comparing it to a given scale. The scale goes from low (score 1-4), to moderate (score 5-8) to high (score 9-12) (Bass & Avolio, 1996).

I chose to use the MLQ-Form 6S as it was narrowed to the aspects mostly relevant for my study, and because it was publicly available. Additionally, there seems to be no significant difference between the different forms of the MLQ regarding the validity and reliability of the questionnaires. According to Elenkov et al. (2005) the MLQ-Form 6S has a high Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .70$, which means that the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire are reliable (Mansour, 2015). Since the questionnaire had the same measurement performance as the original MLQ and was publicly available, I chose to use this tool for the online survey. The questionnaire with the MLQ-Form 6S is presented in Appendix 1.

Several literature reviews on the MLQ have argued for and against the validity and reliability of the questionnaire such as Braathu et al. (2022) and Tejada et al. (2001). Factors such as rate consistency and peer ratings based on performance among small groups have shown a positive relationship between transformational and transactional leaderships and high MLQ ratings, which confirms the reliability of the instrument (Bass, 1998). In terms of the validity, Tejada et al. (2001) noted in their research that reducing the set items within the MLQ led to positive outcomes with regards to predictive and constructive validity. Additionally, the questionnaire uses a counterbalancing procedure on how the leadership styles are measured through the seven factors included in the questionnaire. Counterbalancing is referred to as the systematic variation of the sequence of conditions in a study, which helps to reduce bias in the survey (Corriero, 2017). For example, in the MLQ, “idealised influence” is measured by adding items 1, 8, and 15, whereas “contingent reward” is measure by adding items 5, 12, and 19 (for reference see table 1). This method of designing a questionnaire contributes to ensuring the internal validity of the survey (Corriero, 2017).

In addition to the items included in the MLQ-6S questionnaire, I included three descriptive demographical questions. These related to years of experience as a leader, the number of employees under the respondent’s leadership and the degree of work-from-home for employees prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. If any of the employees had worked remotely prior to the pandemic, the respondent was provided with a 4-option choice: now and then; low percentage (some employees worked remotely 1-4 days a month); medium percentage (over 50 % of the group worked remotely at least 2 days a month); and high percentage (most employees worked remotely at least once a week). These questions were included to learn more about the background and previous experience of the team leaders. The questions can be found in Appendix 2.

3.3.2 Procedure for online survey

In the beginning of the study, the gatekeepers of Company A and Company B forwarded me the participants’ e-mails. I contacted the participants directly and provided brief background information about the nature of the study and some general instructions about the procedure of the study. I also informed them of their rights as participants. These rights include for example the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were also given a Declaration of Informed Consent Form, which they signed and where they could find all

relevant information to the study and their rights. In addition, all participants were informed that the data would be anonymised by the 15th of March. I contacted a total of 8 team leaders from the two companies, of which 6 replied and confirmed that they were willing to participate in my study.

In the introductory e-mail, I attached a link to the online survey and asked the participants to answer it as soon as they had the time. Since the questionnaire was meant to inform my interview guide for the second data collection process, it was important to obtain the results from the online survey in time. The online survey containing the MLQ-6S and the demographic questions were distributed to respondents using an online distributing system called Nettskjema. Nettskjema provides a secure method of distributing online questionnaires to participants, and it complies with the VID guidelines of storing and protecting the participants' data (VID, 2022). To ensure that the questionnaire was easy to understand and visibly appealing for the participants, I tested the online survey on two people who have comparable experience and competence as the participants included in my study.

3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview

Conducting semi-structured interviews is a common method of obtaining data within social research. One reason why semi-structured interviews are popular among social researchers is that they allow room for flexibility and versatility (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006). Compared to the structured interview, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to deviate from the predefined questions in the interview guide. This facilitates for reciprocity between the interviewer and participant, by allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses (Galletta, 2013). The researcher can thus explore new topics arise during the interviews. Compared to the unstructured interviews, the semi-structured interview maintains consistency between different interviews by still having some pre-defined questions. This data collection method was therefore useful in this study as it allowed me to get insight on the relevant topics I was investigating. Furthermore, with a combination of doing background research on all the existing literature and the answers from the online survey I was able to be more engaged with the interview process. It should, however, be mentioned that there are some disadvantages of conducting semi-structured interviews. For example, these types of interviews often lead to a vast amount of data, and some of this data may not be relevant to the research questions. They also demand more of

the interviewer, in terms of designing the questions. Not only this but the interviewer needs to have good people's skills, where he/she needs to make the interviewee comfortable within the environment and produces good follow-up questions on the spot, which are skills that could be challenging for new researchers (Gibbs et al., 2007).

The interview guide was developed using the results from the online survey and through the theoretical background research. In the results from the MLQ-6S questionnaire, it became evident that there was a common trend amongst the participants to align with the transformational leadership style. Therefore, the interview guide included in-depth questions to further investigate this type of leadership. The extensive literature review on leadership, organisational culture and hybrid workplace informed my questions, and led to a focus on three areas: leadership, maintaining organisational culture and future strategies. One example of an inspiration for the questions was the Denison Organizational Culture Survey, which informed questions related to the consistency and adaptability of maintaining the organisational culture during the pandemic (Denison, 1996). The interview guide included direct and indirect questions, and in some cases I also posed unstructured follow-up questions. The interview guide had a total of 16 questions and is included in Appendix 3.

Developing the interview guide was a time-consuming process, which in addition to designing the questions included pilot testing of the interview guide. According to (Maxwell, 2012), pilot testing can help to test the study's feasibility, and can result in diverse perceptions on the design of the interview guide. The interview guide was put through critique and practiced on two persons with comparable competence and experience to my participants. This allowed me to get an impression of how the questions were interpreted by the respondents and which types of answers I would receive. I could then see if any revision of the questions were necessary in order to for example make the questions clearer or to remove any bias. The pilot testing also helped me to train and accustom myself to a digital interview situation which was new to me, and to improve my performance before I conducted the interviews with the participants. The pilot testing of the interview guide was therefore conducted to improve the quality of the overall research project.

3.3.4 Procedure

After the participants had completed the online survey, I scheduled the semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were audio recorded using an external recorder and conducted

digitally through the digital platform Teams using my VID university account. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, it was more suitable and safer to conduct the interviews digitally. Conducting digital interviews was also beneficial as my participants had busy schedules, and it was thus easier and quicker to arrange a digital meeting. Teams has also implemented several security measures, which ensures that the data would not be leaked or otherwise accessed by a third-party individual. The environment of the interviewing also becomes less formal, thus reducing interviewer physical presence and allowing for participants to be more open-with their answers (Tracy, 2019). However, there are also some additional challenges when conducting digital interviews. The internet quality may be poor, which can cause sound delays and make communication more difficult. The speaker or microphone may also be of poor quality, which again makes it difficult to communicate. Opendakker (2006) has also pointed out that digital interviews can lead to reduced attention and concentration of the participants and miscommunication or misinterpretation due to not seeing non-verbal reactions.

In the six interviews I conducted, I had the impression that the interviews went well. The participants seemed to understand the intention of my questions, and they mostly gave rich descriptions. One challenge that I experienced is maintaining my nervousness before each interview, as this process was a completely new method for me, therefore I wanted everything to go well. However, after the two of the participants, I noticed that the interviews were going very well, and I was gathering all the needed information. The interviews were conducted during one working week (21st to 25th of February). The total number of hours spent on all interviews was 3 hours, and each interview lasted averagely around 26 minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

Through the two data collection methods, I obtained both quantitative and qualitative data. I applied different approaches to analyse the data obtained. For the quantitative data obtained through the online survey, I used Microsoft Excel to analyse the data. I created descriptive tables and statistics to identify any patterns in the data. As recommended by Denscombe (2017) this included for example to calculate simple statistics such as the mean and standard deviation which demonstrated the distribution and frequency of different leadership styles among the participants.

As for the qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was used where I would alternate between the raw data and the preliminary themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These preliminary themes were *leadership, organisational culture, and hybrid workplace*. Thus, a theoretical thematic analysis was adapted for this part of the research. The preliminary themes were created by carefully researching the analytical interest area of leadership, organisational culture, and hybrid workplace. One weakness of this approach not having a rich descriptions of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2016). However, Braun & Clarke (2006) also argues that a thematic analysis allows the researcher to code very specific to the research questions, which was done for this study. The interviews were firstly transcribed by familiarising myself as researcher the “intelligent verbatim” transcription process (McMullin, 2021). This means excluding distracting noises and repetitive word. The aim was to make the transcripts more concise, readable, but staying to the participants main intend and meaning (McMullin, 2021). NVivo data analysis software themes and was used to organise, analyse, and find insights within the semi-structured interviews. As the analysing began there were identified *meaningful units*, which according to Braun and Clarke (2006) are characters of interest within the data, such as sentences, phrases, or parts of some of the paragraphs. They were highlighted using different colours in order to have a distinguishing system between each one of them. Consequently, these meaningful units were given a specific code and in total the data had 18 codes.

After the preliminary coding, I looked for any emerging themes in the coded data. During the first review of the codes, I identified some themes. However, the process of analysing the data was iterative, going back and forth between the raw data and the preliminary themes I had created (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some codes had to be corrected or adjusted, some had to be combined with other codes and I also had to code some new meaningful units. The iterative process allowed me to become deeply familiarised with the data set, and to gain a better understanding of the content. After finalising the data analysis, I ended up with four main themes and several sub-themes. These are presented in Table 4 in the next chapter, along with illustrative quotes. The quotes are included to enrich trustworthiness, by demonstrating how I have categorised the data into themes (Wihlman et al., 2014).

3.5 Reliability and Validity

There are several factors that may affect a study's reliability and validity. A researcher must for example pay attention to whether the data collection methods do in fact measure what they are supposed to measure, whether the results can be generalised to the population of the study and whether the conclusions that are drawn are based on the data obtained. In this section, I will demonstrate how I have paid attention to these issues, and how I have attempted to increase the study's reliability and validity.

The data collection methods are based on recognised tools and on an extensive literature review. The MLQ and the MLQ-Form 6S has been used in several studies on leadership styles and is considered to be an appropriate questionnaire to gain insight on the leadership styles that were relevant to my population of interest. The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was informed by a literature review and by the results from the online survey, which ensured that the questions were relevant to my topic. Both data collection methods thus appear to have 'measurement validity', that is, they measured what they were intended to measure (Bryman, 2016). The data collection process was further described in detail, to increase the reliability of the study.

I have attempted to ensure that the study can be generalised to the population of the study. However, due to the sample size I cannot guarantee that the results can be generalised. As the population of study includes team leaders within Norwegian companies, the population is very large. Thus, my sample may not be large enough to represent the whole population. Due to time limitations and difficulties of recruiting participants, I ended up with a sample of six. Nevertheless, I attempted to increase the representability of the recruited participants by including participants from two different types of companies, and from different departments. (Silverman, 2020). Thus, I managed to have some variation in the type of participants included in my study.

I further attempted to minimise any bias and improve the trustworthiness of the study during all stages of the project. In the data collection process, I conducted pilot studies on the online survey and the interview guide and asked the two sample respondents to help me discover any underlying bias or leading questions. During the interviews, I attempted to avoid any leading follow-up questions, and to make the participants comfortable. By facilitating for a

more informal conversation, I attempted to reduce situations where the participants responded based on what they believed I wanted to hear rather than based on what they actually thought (Alvesson, 2003). I also used triangulation and obtained both quantitative and qualitative data. This way of obtaining data, can be beneficial as the quantitative and qualitative data can be cross-checked, which in return can add greater validity to the findings (Bryman, 2016, p. 633). In the data analysis, the iterative process allowed me to review the raw data and preliminary themes, which later I was able to ensure that the final themes presented in the results chapter had gone through rigorous analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

During the writing-up of the thesis, I have attempted to ensure that the data collection process is thoroughly described to increase the study's reliability (Bryman, 2016). Further, I have presented clear descriptions of the identified themes in the results chapter. Consequentially, I have included several quotes from the data so the reader can see how I arrived at certain conclusions based on the data set.

Lastly but not least, conducting interviews comes with its advantages and disadvantages, such as interview bias, distortion of memory information, and participants who just try to satisfy the interviewer with their answers (Alvesson, 2003). In order to, avoid as much as I can interviewer bias, the interviews were conducted digitally, which one argue it can be a way to makes the interviewees more relaxed and assertive with their responses (Brinkmann, 2015). However, it can also go the opposite way where the interviewees do not feel comfortable with sharing information through a digital interview (Brinkman, 2015). Therefore, I had full transparency of informing my participants about the procedure of the study and that they have the right to withdraw at any time.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

When collecting personal data, a researcher must ensure a secure handling of the data. The Norwegian Centre for Research (NSD) ensures data protection in research projects carried out in Norway. Thus, I sent an application to NSD well ahead of beginning my data collection process, to ensure that the data collection process would respect data protection regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The master proposal outlined my recruitment strategy, the questionnaire and interview guide, information and consent form and procedures for ensuring data security which included for example

anonymisation. In the first review of the master proposal, NSD asked me to make some adjustments to the interview guide. After I made these adjustments, the NSD approved my application.

The study has also followed the guidelines from The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2016). All participants were informed about the study and signed the informed consent form presented in Appendix 4. The participants were informed that I would register their names and e-mail during the data collection process, and that by the 15th of March all data would be anonymised. I chose to also anonymise the companies to secure the anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, the confidentiality of each participant was safeguarded during the whole process, as all the data was saved on an external encrypted USB-drive. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any time. I further reminded them of their rights one week prior to the interviews. Overall, the participant's integrity, freedom and self-determination were respectfully protected and will be protected when through the stages of reporting and publishing the results of the thesis (NESH, 2016).

Nevertheless, I had respect for all private interests of the two companies, by ensuring that the companies remain anonymous and ensuring the participants were treated with respect throughout the data collection process. I took great precaution, with making sure that my research questions do not conflict or harm the organisations in any way. As there is great interest from the public to know how organisations are operating, this aspect was greatly acknowledged, and I made sure that all guidelines were followed (NESH, 2016).

Other ethical considerations concerned my relationship and communication with the two gatekeepers, and their role in the sampling of participants. Even though I have a personal relationship with the gatekeepers I had put my mindset to see the situation as a researcher and make sure every guideline is followed to protect the participants' rights, data and confidentiality (Miller et al., 2012). Both gatekeepers were following their institutional ethical guidelines and had carefully considered my master study prior to accepting to be a part of the research project. I had provided them with my master proposal months prior to the data collection, and in the proposal, I was very systematic with explaining the project and the data collection procedures in order to maintain full transparency. This allowed the gatekeepers to contact participants that fit the sample criteria. However, I am also aware that

the gatekeepers have the power and authority to select participants that they see fit and thus introduce some bias in the sample (Edwards et al., 2002). Overall, ethical considerations can be considered one of the most important aspects when conducting any type of social research, as they are foundational guidelines to the researcher's behaviour and development his/her project.

4 RESULTS

The findings from this research were analysed with close relation to the research objectives and purpose, which are the three research questions: *how team leaders have dealt with leadership approaches, attempted to maintain their organisational culture and their thoughts on future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace within the two organisations.* Throughout the data presentation the use of tables, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and a thematical framework were used to help the reader understand better the relations and trends between the data.

4.1 Survey Data

In the online survey, the participants were asked three demographic questions related to their leadership. These questions were included to obtain an overview of the participants' leadership experience and background. The study had only six participants, of which five were women and one male. Table 2 presents the results of these demographic questions.

Table 2 Demographic responses of the participants.

Demographic Questions	Company A	Demographic Questions	Company B
N. of participants	4 (6)	N. of participants	2 (6)
How many years have they been a leader (Average Years)	15	How many years have they been a leader (Average Years)	2.5
Employees under their leadership (Average N. of employees)	16	Employees under their leadership (Average N. of employees)	8
Employees working from home prior to the pandemic		Employees working from home prior to the pandemic	
Now and then	1	Now and then	0
Over 50% more than 2 days a month	1	Over 50% more than 2 days a month	0
25% around 1-4 days a month	2	25% around 1-4 days a month	0
None	0	None	2

As explained in the methodology chapter, the quantitative data collection method was also employed to gain insight on what type of leadership behaviors the team leaders use. The

MLQ-6S Questionnaire was an appropriate tool to gather such information. Table 3 presents the mean score on the seven factors measured by MLQ-6S and the standard deviation. It further presents the mean and standard deviation for the three leadership styles described by MLT. The table indicates which factors measure each of the leadership styles, presented in brackets behind the name of the leadership style.

Table 3. Total mean and standard deviation scores for MLQ-6S and the leadership styles.

MLQ-6S Factor scores	MEAN	SD
1. Idealised Influence	7.7	1.4
2. Inspirational motivation	8.3	1.5
3. Intellectual stimulation	7.8	1.9
4. Individual consideration	7.8	2.2
5. Contingent reward	7.7	1.4
6. Management by exception	7.3	2.6
7. Laissez-faire leadership	3.8	1.0
Scores for different leadership styles	MEAN	SD
Transformational (F1, F2, F3 & F4)	7.9	0.2
Transactional (F5 & F6)	7.5	0.2
Laissez-faire leadership (F7)	3.8	1.0
Score range: High=9-12, Moderate= 5-8, Low=0-4		

In average, the participants scored moderately on the first 6 MLQ-factors and they scored low on the 7th factor, which relates to the *laissez-faire* leadership style. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics of the different leadership styles shows that the participants averagely aligned more with two of the leadership styles. The mean for transformational leadership was 7.9 and the standard deviation was 0.2. This leadership style obtained the highest mean score, which indicates that the participants averagely aligned with the characteristics described by transformational leadership more often. Nevertheless, the score for transactional leadership was almost as high, with a mean of 7.5 and a standard deviation of 0.2. The low standard deviation for both of these leadership styles suggest that the participants mostly obtained a similar score.

The third leadership style, *laissez-faire*, had a mean score of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 1.0. Although the standard deviation indicates more variation in the score for this leadership style, the mean was very low and thus suggests that few of the participants align with this

leadership style. The mean was also well below the mean for the two other leadership styles. The results from the online survey gave me preliminary insight into my research questions and were used as a foundation for further data collection and analysis.

4.2 Presentation of qualitative data

The findings indicate that the pandemic led to both obstacles and opportunities for the team leaders. In the following, I will present the results from the semi-structured interviews. This section is categorised into the four themes identified through data analysis: 1) *Leadership* (2) *Maintaining the department culture*, (3) *Pandemic* and (4) *Hybrid workplace*. The themes include between two and five sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes are not separate but are rather interconnected and may sometimes overlap with each other. One of the reasons for this overlap is because leadership and organisational culture are ‘two sides of the same coin’, as described in the theory chapter. Table 4 gives an overview of the themes and sub-themes and includes quotes to illustrate how the themes relate to the data.

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Illustrative quotes
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Communication • Decision-making • Leadership Approaches • Individualism 	<p>“It has been a lot of learning by doing and the pandemic has showed us that trust and communication is the most important principle for things to function.”</p> <p>“One obstacle of the pandemic was maintaining informal communication, such as small clearances, feelings, availability from me as a leader.”</p> <p>“In addition, as people are very different some are introverts’ other extroverts thus, people needed different kinds of follow up and making sure they are coping.”</p> <p>“We as a team are autonomous, but very hardworking.”</p>
Maintaining organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural practices • Values and norms • Cultural change • Role models • Performance 	<p>“The structure within the organisation is flat but there is high degree of well-being among employees and as leaders we try to model and reinforce values such as inclusiveness, diversity, and openness to our leadership approaches.”</p>
The pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Outcomes • Obstacles 	<p>“The positive part was that some meetings could be quite quick and it’s more to the point when you need that Teams or Zoom.”</p> <p>“(…) it was hard to get in contact with me because I was on call and Teams meetings all the time.”</p> <p>“I am very certain that the organisation will have a more hybrid approach for the future.”</p>
Hybrid workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptability • Future perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges ▪ Positive outcomes 	<p>“Some departments need to be more at the office rather than working from home. Needs to be a balance and flexibility for the employees.”</p>

Table 4. Overview of the themes and sub-themes

4.3 Leadership

During data analysis, the five sub-themes of trust, communication, decision-making, leadership approaches and individualism became apparent as important features of leadership. These four sub-themes will provide us with an insight to the leadership behaviours of the interviewed team leaders. This is of importance because we will be able to get a better understanding of how the team leaders acted within a time of uncertainty with regards to their leadership approaches. Furthermore, as mentioned in the theory chapter leadership change involves a variety of factors for the leader to lead and adapt to a given change whether it is intentional or not (Laub, 2018). These sub-themes appeared throughout the analysis as the factors the leaders dealt with regards to leadership.

4.3.1 Trust

In the semi-structured interviews, one of the questions was concerned with the team leaders' approach to maintaining trust among their colleagues during the pandemic. When answering this question, the participants described a couple of leadership strategies. Four participants shared similar strategies, such as having constant conversations, adapting an approach of listening and building rapport with their colleagues. As one participant described, "I had constant dialog and more closeness of talking with my employees as often as I can during that period" (Company A). It was evident that these participants wanted to be engaged with and follow up with their team as much as possible, as they knew that it was a difficult time for everyone. Another participant said: "I made it clear that I am sort of always available" (Company B).

However, one of the interviewees expressed an opposing view on maintaining trust among colleagues during the pandemic. The participant explained: "I don't think there was any issues with maintaining trust, as many employees have worked here for many years and trust was built over time" (Company A).

4.3.2 Communication

The next sub-theme relates to how the team leaders attempted to maintain communication with colleagues during the pandemic. The sub-theme slightly overlaps with the sub-theme of trust but is more directed towards how the team leaders facilitated for communication and which strategies they employed. In the interviews, the participants presented both similar and

opposing views on maintaining communication, and which effect different strategies had on communication. Almost all the participants mentioned that one method of maintaining communication with colleagues was to have regular follow-ups. They suggested, for example, to have “regular department meetings” (Company A) and “social calls on Fridays” (Company B). One team leader stated: “I set a goal that I will talk to everyone at least every week” (Company B). Similarly, another respondent said that an “important part was to basically keep as close contact as possible” (Company A).

Furthermore, a recurring answer about the challenges of communicating during the pandemic was that the team leaders and colleagues had lost much of the informal communication that usually occurs when physically being in the same office. As one participant described: “Small clarification, if someone is frustrated, I might miss that. Also, if my employees are experiencing challenges at work, it can be difficult to have contact them as everyone is on meetings and working from home” (Company A).

Interestingly, one of the participants went further and said that the lack of informal communication had an impact on team relationships, trust and even the employee culture. One leader commented that due to setbacks caused by the pandemic and its effect on his/her team’s communication, the team needed to “(...) start re-building again all those needs and factors, so they can improve communication” (Company B)

Overall, most participants mentioned that they had experienced struggles with communication, but they also explained that these struggles were manageable. The most common methods of managing communication were to have regular follow-ups and adapting to the individual employee’s needs during this period.

4.3.3 Decision-making

The third sub-theme which emerged from the data analysis of the interviews was decision-making. The findings suggest that there were no considerable challenges in terms of taking major decisions during the pandemic. The participants did not seem to have experienced any changes or struggles with decision-making related to their work tasks or day-to-day organisational processes. During the interviews, the team leaders portrayed their systems and departments as well-functioning. Additionally, some of the team leaders worked digitally prior to the pandemic. For example, one explained that “in my group of employees some

work and live in different places within Norway, we are used to taking decisions digitally via Teams” (Company A). Thus, conducting meetings digitally did not seem to be an issue for these team leaders.

4.3.4 Leadership approaches

When analysing the data for the fourth sub-theme, it became evident that the team leaders prioritised to spend time having direct meetings with their team group. They facilitated for social calls, such as coffee breaks or morning coffees on Zoom. Nevertheless, some participants acknowledged that some of their employees did not have the need for all these social meetings. Thus, not all employees attended the meetings. Another reason for not attending the meetings was, according to one of the team leaders, that the employees were very busy with work tasks and with meeting deadlines. The team leaders further stressed again that it was important to systematically follow-up all their employees. Some of the leaders explained that they made Excel sheets where they logged all the names and telephone numbers of whom they needed to call, to ensure that no one was left out. As one team leader explained, “leadership and management are all about personal communication and if you don’t meet, it is much more difficult” (Company A).

Furthermore, the team leaders mentioned that their approaches were more aligned with having a flat structure, where there is shorter power distance between the leader and the employees compared to a hierarchical structure. For instance, one of the leaders mentioned that as a team they try to “collaborate and coordinate with the other management teams and work together” (Company B). The team leaders also described that the use of digital tools and digital planning had increased during the pandemic. Some of them believed that the employees collaborated more and better during the time when most of the employees worked from home.

4.3.5 Individualism

As for individualism, participants from both companies emphasised that everyone within their departments are different. For instance, some are introverts while others are extroverts. The employees also have different life situations, such as that “some live alone” (Company B), while “others also have maybe three kids, that were sent home from school or kindergarten” (Company A). According to the team leaders, this individualism and the differences between the employees led to a need of adopting different leadership techniques

with regards to communication, support, adaptability, and lifestyles. One team leader shared his/her process of adjusting to individualism: “A few weeks into the pandemic, I learned whom you need to approach directly and who was more open to join the coffee breaks.” (Company A).

These five sub-themes are part of the theme ‘leadership’. In the following, I will present the second and third themes that emerged from the data analysis: *Maintaining organisational culture* and *The pandemic*. Interestingly, the sub-theme of individualism will become evident within these two themes as well, with regards to the departments culture and future strategies for adapting a hybrid workplace.

4.4 Maintaining organisational culture

The second theme that was found in the data analysis is maintaining the organisational culture. Under this theme, the following sub-themes were identified: cultural practices, cultural change, values and norms, performance and role models. These sub-themes contribute to understanding how the team leaders have maintained their organisational culture during the pandemic. In this section, I will also outline the differences and similarities between the two companies with regards to this theme of maintaining culture.

4.4.1 Cultural practices

Company A

During the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked to describe their organisation’s cultural practices. The majority of the team leaders within Company A described that the organisation’s system is not strict, clear and is based on a trust that people know what they are doing. Additionally, the culture of Company A was described as collaborative where employees can get help from each other or the team leader at any time. Furthermore, one team leader mentioned that there is less competition among the researchers within the company. It was also emphasised within participants answers that employees work independently. The team leaders stated that this independence was caused by Company A’s values of freedom of responsibility, delivering according to agreement and to a good standard. Furthermore, the team leaders described Company A’s culture as making sure that people are content and comfortable to come to work. One participant explained that “everybody speaks with everybody”, and that they have a “high degree of well-being at work

which is an important aspect” for Company A. However, one also stressed that there were some challenges relating employees struggling to adapt to some of the cultural practices. The team leader said, “we have some difficulties now and then with collaboration and with the mutual understanding and acceptance of other views. That kind of stuff, so it is not perfect”.

Company B

The participants working in Company B described the organisation’s culture as very outgoing and hardworking. As with Company A, the employees have worked independently both prior to and during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, from the responses from the team leaders, employees would work mostly from the office, but they can have the possibility to have some days at home if they needed it. Company B has open communicational cultural practices as well as a ‘no blame’ culture. One of the team leaders further noted that within her department there is also cultural practices of “diversity, inclusion and belonging”.

Evidently, the two companies have similar cultural practices, and in general the work environment was described as a place where the employees feel safe and happy to come to work every day, where they can perform high-quality work.

4.4.2 Cultural change

The second sub-theme relates to whether there has been any cultural change within the companies. Cultural change can be if the organisation’s values have changed in terms of for example internal collaboration, or if the employees feeling of inclusion has changed during the pandemic. The data shows that there was divisions within the two case organisations. In Company A, three participants did not experience any cultural change within their departments, while one participant experienced cultural change in terms of lack of communication and misinformation during the pandemic. In Company B, one participant did not experience any cultural change, while the other participant explained that there has been cultural change with regards to work overload and again poor communication between the team leader and the employees. The data from the semi-structured interviews regarding the sub-theme is visualised in Figure 4.

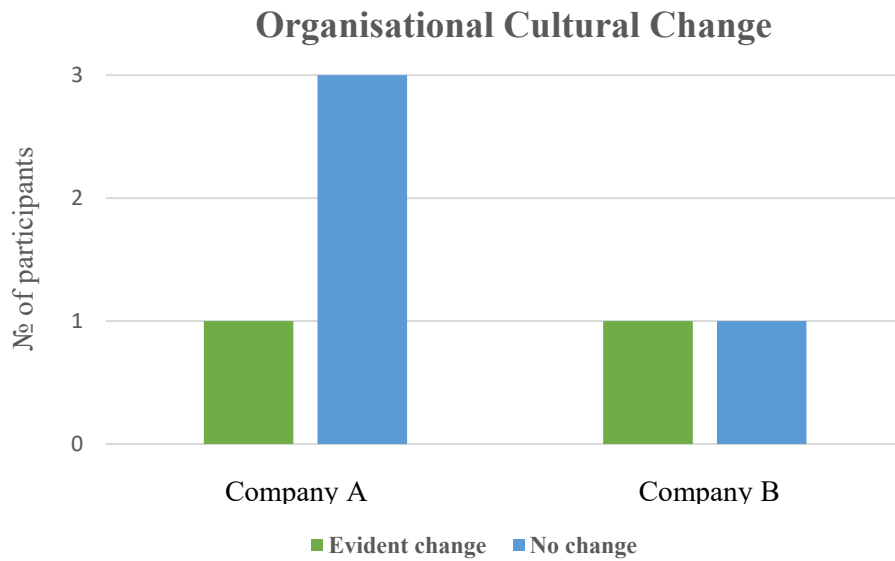


Figure 4. Organisational cultural change at Company A and B.

The participants that experienced cultural change were asked a follow-up question on how they dealt with the change within their departments. The two respondents had very similar responses on how they dealt with the issue. They highlighted that “having more one-to-one communication and follow-up” was important (Company A). Further, it was emphasised that the employees should disconnect from their work during their time off. One participant stated: “I tell my employees that they should not work in the evening, they should rest.” (Company B). The participant further emphasised that by letting her employees take the evenings off then the risk of blending work life and private life would be less.

4.4.3 Values and norms

Some of the questions in the interview guide was related to the companies’ values and norms. When I asked the participants about whether the values and norms had been maintained during the pandemic, three participants from company A answered that there has been no difference. They had not experienced a decrease in values and norms among their employees during the pandemic. As one said, “I don’t think that it has been influenced by the pandemic, at least that is my view of it.” (Company B).

However, another participant from company A and two participants from company B argued that the values and norms had decreased during the pandemic. This was mostly because of the lack of physical communication, misinformation and overall, that the values and norms had become different or less valued over time. One leader explained that to “maintain the

openness, ability to challenge and be able to ask for help among the team” was difficult during the pandemic, as some employees “were more careful and reserved” (Company B). Additionally, one of the team leaders also stated that the employees in the department did not follow the organisation’s values. The team leader explained that “I am not sure that the people in my department are fully adopting to these values” that they had defined for their department (Company A). Another explained the work they have to do in restoring the values and norms: “we have started up now to rebuild the values and practices and focus more on that, post-pandemic” (Company B).

4.4.4 Role models

The participants who had experienced a change in values and norms received one more follow-up question. They were asked whether they, as team leaders, were attempting to model and reinforce the values and practices among their employees. The follow-up question was posed to further explore how the values and norms were maintained during the pandemic. The participants from both companies said they were attempting to be role models, and that they tried to “reinforce these values as much as I can by doing ‘walk the talk’” (Company A). The team leaders gave some examples of how they attempted to reinforce the values and practices. This included to encourage and show the values and norms of the organisation, to have low threshold for the employees, so the employees were given the opportunity to “shine regarding with relation to the work they are doing”, to be more open and helpful with tasks and with how they are leading (Company B). One also said: “I try to model and share my knowledge to my employees” (Company A). This illustrates the different strategies they have used to maintain the organisations’ norms and values during the pandemic.

4.4.5 Performance

The final sub-theme of maintaining organisational culture related to the performance of the employees during the pandemic. During the interviews, it became apparent that even though there had been some struggles with maintaining the organisations’ culture and adapting to values and norms, the employees’ performance remained similar. In some cases, the performance and rate of delivering tasks had been better than in the pre-pandemic period. As one team leader explained, “(...) looking backwards is that when it comes to our work and our deliveries, we had really high work ethic during the pandemic” (Company A). The sub-

theme of performance also overlaps with the sub-theme of positive outcomes from the pandemic, which can be found in section 4.5.2.

4.5 Pandemic

The third theme represents how the team leaders experienced the pandemic and the lockdowns. The theme has two sub-themes, one which outlines the obstacles the team leaders experienced, and one which outlines the positive outcomes from the pandemic that the team leaders experienced.

4.5.1 Obstacles

Many of the team leaders explained that they felt the situation of the pandemic was difficult. They experienced an inner struggle with motivation towards their job, but they knew that they needed to keep going as they had to motivate their own staff. They further experienced that the energy of the employees declined, and it was difficult for some of the employees to work from home.

Some interesting findings were that the follow-up with employees, which is one of the strategies often mentioned to improve communication and trust, was difficult and challenging for several of the team leaders. One participant said that the “challenging thing was to talk to everyone and to follow up and be aware what was happening” (Company A). Another explained that it was a “very busy time within our department, after a while people started complaining that there were too many follow-up meetings as they did not have time for them” (Company B). The team leaders did not only struggle with finding the right balance for follow-ups, but also that their employees had a heavy workload. As one team leader explained, “it has been so much work, people sitting at home with their children and complains started coming in about the overload of work” (Company A).

Following this, it was also evident that another obstacle was that the private and work life had somewhat merged for the employees. This appeared to be an obstacle as employees did not have a structured workday, which made it difficult to know how long they must work and when can they have free time with their families. As one team leader stated, “my group struggled with the fact that work life and private life has blended into one” (Company B).

Other challenges identified in the findings were, again, the decrease of informal communication between the team leader and the employees and the uncertainty of not knowing what the employees were doing due to the isolation and working from home. One team leader also stressed that an obstacle was that they had to get to know new employees digitally by using Teams. More elaboration from one of the participants on this matter was that getting to know people digitally can cause lack of physical socialisation and interactions with those new employees.

4.5.2 Positive outcomes

On the other hand, the pandemic also led to some positive outcomes for the companies. The team leaders explained that their employees gave more feedback, that there have been less registered overtime hours, and that the meetings became much quicker and more efficient. By using digital tools such as Teams, the participants stated that it was much easier to gather and connect with a lot of people both from Norway and from other countries.

As mentioned in section 4.4.5 on the employees' performance, the team leaders highlighted that the work performance and frequency of delivering on tasks had increased during the pandemic. One team leader explained that "more publications and proposals have been written. We have never published so many publications as we did in 2021. Scientists are usually on the introvert side of the scale, so it is a bit easier to cope with the pandemic." (Company A). We see that the team leader believes that the personality of the employees also affect how well they adjusted to the pandemic.

Lastly, the participants emphasised that the flexibility was another positive outcome of the pandemic. The pandemic and the new work situation created a more flexible approach towards work time, which was especially important for employees with children.

4.6 Hybrid Workplace

The last theme that emerged during the data analysis is hybrid workplace. The theme has two sub-themes, one on adaptability and one on future perspectives. The theme will allow us to gain a better understanding of the overall leadership concept though the explanations given by the leaders. Additionally, we will also explore what the companies are thinking about moving towards a different workplace after the pandemic.

4.6.1 Adaptability

The participants shared their view on how the companies can adapt to a more hybrid workplace after the pandemic. From the results it can be evident that not all of the participants wanted to adapt to a hybrid workplace after the pandemic. Two team leaders did not want to adapt, while four wanted to continue with a more hybrid workplace in the future. Figure 5 visualises the distribution of views on adaptability in the two companies.

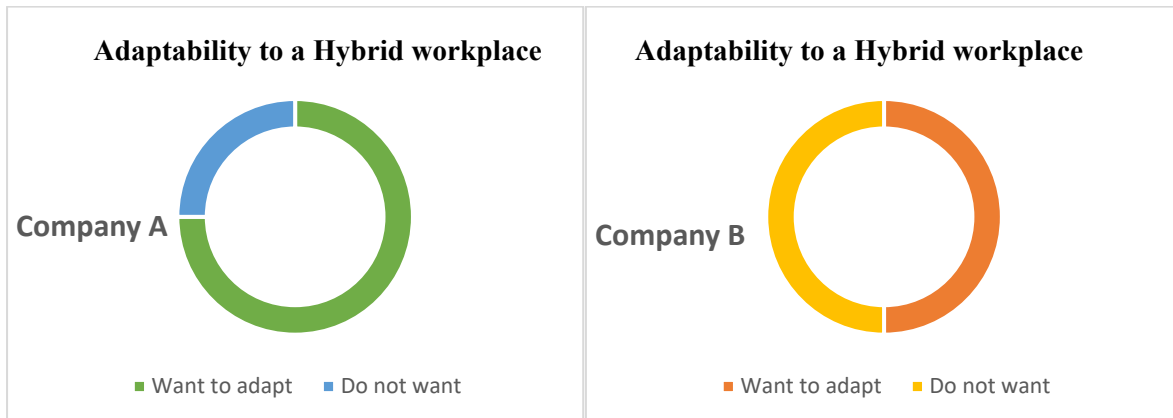


Figure 5. Adaptability to a hybrid workplace for Company A and B.

From the four participants that wanted to adapt to a hybrid workplace, it was evident that they wanted to offer the option of choosing the workplace to their employees. The employees can then choose to be some days at the office and some days at home. The team leaders seemed to believe that the employees would like to have the option of working from home. One stated, “I am sure that more people will work from home part of the time, because it's a, it's feasible now” (Company A). The digital tools also seemed to have improved during the pandemic, making it easier to collaborate from home. For example, one team leader explained that “we learned that Teams for instance, have more tools and options that all make things flow better than what it did before we had to be forced into this.” (Company B) Nevertheless, the participants also highlighted that the employees should have at least some workdays at the office, in order to maintain the physical contact. One explained that “(...) some people coming into the office for meetings, attend specific meetings, and be flexible for the rest of the time” (Company B).

The participants were asked a follow-up question regarding whether the values and norms would change if the companies introduced a more hybrid workplace in the future. The majority answered that there will be no change, but one team leader mentioned that they may

change to a certain extent and therefore new leadership techniques might be used. The participant said that “having a hybrid work culture can mean that inclusion and belonging needs to be altered both for the office and at home, people need to feel included, and we need to cater for those values and needs” (Company B).

Regarding change in values and norms, one participant added that the work environment also needs to be altered to adapt to people’s individual needs and wants. They would need to ensure that the workplace is pleasant and enjoyable, that they have more collaboration or fun spaces within the office and that they facilitate for more discussions with other colleagues. The team leader suggested for example:

“(...) when people are working from home, they have their working space, but the organisation and leaders need to make sure that they want to be in the office as much as at home, make work at the office more appealing, so cater for those needs.” (Company B).

The team leaders that do not want to adapt to a hybrid workplace argued that work-from-home is not the optimal option for their department, as they need to have physical meetings and to have employees that are available throughout the workday. However, they also emphasised that both Company A and Company B have had digitalised work settings even before the pandemic. One team leader said: “(...) we have used video meetings and calls with the different offices in the different town such as (...), the organisation as a whole, but not internally within the departments” (Company A). The other participant who did not want to adapt to a hybrid workplace emphasised that he/she was not convinced that work-from-home would be optimal for the organisational culture: “I think the culture, the team spirit and loyalty deteriorate if people are just working from home” (Company B).

4.6.2 Future perspectives

The sub-theme of future perspectives illustrates the future challenges and positive outcomes of having a hybrid workplace after the pandemic. The participants explained that both organisations have internal programs to investigate their adaptability and future strategies in terms of having a hybrid workplace. These internal programs will produce reports on common rules and guidelines for future approaches to a hybrid workplace. The team leaders gave some insightful answers about their view on the matter.

The team leaders identified several challenges with having a hybrid workplace. Some challenges have already been mentioned above, such as the difficulty of following up the employees. They elaborated on these difficulties, explaining that the question on *how* to follow up the employees still remained, especially as the team leaders and the organisations will need to cater to different people's needs. This can also result in some difficulties of planning the follow-ups, they explained. Another challenge they brought up was the lack of international networking, such as meeting researchers working within the same field abroad. When meetings can be conducted digitally, the leaders and employees do not need to travel, however the getting-to-know someone may be more challenging digitally than physically. They further emphasised that the training programs and internships should be conducted physically. The team leaders explained that teaching digitally can be challenging, especially for topics that are very practical. One participant further noted that "(...) onboarding and students as trainees, they need to have physical interactions with their colleagues, it is not pleasant to have your teaching from home" (Company B).

The team leaders also stressed that there are positive aspects of having a hybrid workplace. As also shown above, the participants explained that they, and the employees, will benefit from the flexible working. In contrast to the challenge mentioned above with international networking, one participant saw the decrease of travelling as a positive effect. The participant explained that by reducing the amount of travelling, hybrid workplaces would have led to a reduced impact on the environment. Another positive outcome was that the digital tools are going to be further optimised if we keep using them, which will make it easier for employees to connect with each other as much as possible. Lastly, the participants emphasised that hybrid workplaces allow the organisations to attract diverse and 'top talents', as people that have relevant competence for their job openings can be found and recruited from outside the office city or even Norway.

4.7 Summary

One of the most evident results from the semi-structured interviews is that team leaders focused heavily on systematic follow-ups of their employees during the time they were working from home. The follow-ups made it easier to know how everyone was doing and what issues they were struggling with. However, it also became evident that, to a certain extent, the team leaders experienced a higher degree of misinformation and a decrease of

informal communication compared to before the pandemic. Nevertheless, aspects such as trust and decision-making were not significantly affected by the pandemic.

As for maintaining the organisations' culture, the team leaders expressed that there has not been much change with regards to maintaining the organisations' values and norms. The results also showed that the pandemic did not cause an organisational cultural change, as the team leaders have been and are still acting as role models to their employees with regards to maintaining the culture.

The team leaders also had different opinions on adapting to a hybrid workplace and future strategies. Some team leaders stated that a hybrid workplace affects the employees' trust and culture to some extent, while other team leaders suggested that hybrid workplaces are now a feasible future strategy for their organisation. Thus, some of the team leaders suggested that there should be a balance between working from home and at the office, and that they should have clear guidelines on how a hybrid workplace can be introduced to the employees after the pandemic ends.

5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this master thesis is to gain a better understanding on how team leaders have dealt with a very challenging and demanding period such as the start of a global pandemic, COVID-19. This chapter will firstly discuss the quantitative results from the demographical questions and MLQ. Following this the chapter will be then structured around the three main research questions which are: RQ1: *How have team leaders in two Norwegian firms employed leadership approaches, during the pandemic?* RQ2: *How have the team leaders maintained organisational culture during the pandemic?* and RQ3: *Has there been any future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace?* The research questions will be evaluated using the results presented in chapter four and discussed with regards to the relationship of the existing literature and theoretical background for this topic mentioned in chapter three. This will provide the readers with more insight into what extent the findings may confirm or contradict the presented literature. Furthermore, this chapter will also discuss the practical implications of the study. Final, statements will be made on limitations and providing suggestions for future research.

5.1 Quantitative results

5.1.1 Demographical Questions

There were three demographical questions for this research these were: *years of leadership experience, number of employees under the leader's leadership and employees working from home pre-pandemic time.* Results showed that the average number of years of experiences for Company A was 15 and for Company B only 2.5. However, since I had an uneven number of participants between the firms, the low number for Company B can be justifiable. For the second demographical questions the results were similar, Company A had an average of 16 employees under their leadership and Company B an average of 8 employees. Lastly, the third question, had an interesting output as the leaders from Company A responded that everyone had employees working in some way from home pre-pandemic time. As for company B the leaders had none of their employees working from home. However, this could be due to the type of work the employees are involved in, where it is required to be working only from the office. For example, lab researcher are most of the time required to be working at a lab which they need for the purpose of performing their tasks, this can be also assumed

for the responses of Company B, that the work of the employees is not flexible enough to be done from home (Cheng & Song, 2020).

5.1.2 The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The quantitative results suggested that these team leaders have moderately high level of transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. According to Vinger and Cilliers (2006) this proposes that on average leaders with transformational and transactional leadership styles, use these behaviours frequently if not always within the leaders' day-to-day tasks. This statement is a supporting view of Tejada et al. (2001, p. 35) research on MLQ that transformational leadership supplements transactional leadership behaviours, meaning they are considered to be seen on one continuum rather than separately. A detailed explanation within the literature implies that when talking about transactional leadership behaviour and styles it can be suggests that the leaders lead by means of completing their given goal and providing rewards to their employees (Bass, 1997). Furthermore, Hay (2006) states that even though leaders with transactional leadership behaviours have difficulty of achieving complete trust and subordination with their employees, when being paired with individualistic traits of the leader it can be a starting platform for transformational leadership behaviours. This further helps the leader to positively achieve increased motivation and performance among his/her employees (Moey, 2016). The low score on the laissez-faire leadership is an indication that the leaders do not align or exhibit any of the characteristics and behaviours for this type of leadership. This can be interpreted positively as the leaders having the ability to manage change successfully (Vinger and Cilliers, 2006).

5.2 Qualitative results

5.2.1 How have team leaders in two Norwegian firms employed leadership approaches during the pandemic?

The first research question tackled issues such as trust, communication, decision-making, leadership approaches and individualism with regards to the leaders' methods of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The results presented on this matter provides supporting evidence that leading a group of people during a medical crisis could be a stressful process but also requires the leaders to have a decisive role in times of change (Talu & Nazarov, 2020, p. 519). Additionally, the leadership approaches of the leaders appeared to be aligning with

Warner-Søderholm (2012)'s follow up research on the GLOBE by House et al. (2004) study regarding Norwegian cultural identity. The study provides evidence of Scandinavia scoring low on the power distance dimension, meaning organisational practices are considered to have little use of formal titles, dress code and attitude to the day-to-day task employees are doing (Warner-Søderholm, 2012, p. 5). Looking back at the responses of the team leaders, they stated that their leadership approaches aligned with a flat structure, where there is short power distance between the leader and employer. This is an important point that should be taken into consideration, throughout the discussion of the three research questions, as the study was conducted in Norway using Norwegian team leaders for the interviews.

The results from the first sub-theme which was trust, highlighted that the leaders kept close relationship with all their employees and made sure that as one participant mentioned "(...) to be always available". These leadership approaches helped the team leaders to sustain their trust with their employees though out the pandemic. Supporting literature on this statement, suggest that Scandinavian companies generally are perceived as building strong values of loyalty and trust (Mielniczuk, 2020, p. 10). Since the study used two Norwegian firms it can be suggested that they also have strong approaches of building loyalty and trust among their employees and across the whole organisation.

Furthermore, these results represent the first direct demonstration of leaders having effective communication skills. Previous research suggests that these two concepts can be viewed co-dependent of each other when it comes to maintaining trustworthiness among a group of employees (Guzzo et al., 2021). For instance, a study done by Mazzei (2015) found that internal communication strategies can significantly affect the way employees perceive organisational trust. This idea is further supported by the findings from this thesis where one leader claimed that "trust is also built over time", as employees have been working at the company for many years. Therefore, this can imply that having communicational strategies that reinforce trust among the organisation consequently can result in building positive relationships and contribute to the success of the organisation (Guzzo et al., 2021)

Additionally, with relation to communication what became evident was that leaders were employing to have very planned and systematic routines of contacting their employees. This meant, having "regular department meetings", "phone calls" and generally the leaders were trying to have as close contact as possible with their employees during that difficult time.

These results are consistent with the claim that transformational leaders have a characteristic behaviour of individual considerations (Bass & Avolio, 1992). Where an emphasis on a two-way communication is strongly practiced and valued by the leaders. Not only that but also their ability to listen effectively and pay attention to their employee's ideas and opinions (Ronald & Marc, 2021, p. 3).. Whereas Ronald and Marc (2021) study have also shown that communication via emails and online meeting give room for misinterpretations which might not have occurred otherwise if everyone was working at the office. The present study has also shown supplementary data that leaders also experienced some challenges of keeping up with informal communication. One of these challenges was miscommunication and knowing when people are feeling down or just dealing with problems related to the work.

The sub-theme of decision-making within this current study did not appear to be of an issue or challenge for the leaders' approaches. Every leader mentioned that there was no change with regards to decision-making. One reason given by one of the leaders was that the organisation had very well-functioning departments, which made decision-making efficient.

As for individualism, this sub-theme appeared to be evident within all three research questions. For the first research question, individualism was tackled by the leaders with regards to adapting different leadership approaches during the pandemic. This was done by using different leadership practises, such as being more understanding and specialised decisions when approaching their employee's needs. One participant mentioned "(...) after the first week, I learned who I had to approach directly and who needed their space". This pattern of results is consistent with the Multifactor Leadership Theory of Bass and Avolio (1992), specifically to the four behaviours identified for transformational leadership. The behaviour that corresponds with these results is again individual considerations, but being applied to leaders build individualised relationships with their employees, to cater to their different abilities and needs (Yaslioglu & SelenayErden, 2018, p. 44).

The results from the data related to the first research question, align with previous studies, where factors such as trust, communication, and leadership approaches contribute to understanding how leaders can deal with unexpected life changing events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as mentioned earlier leadership and organisational culture go hand-in- hand, therefore we can now move on to explore the second research question, which will provide a further analytical discussion of the investigated topic.

5.2.2 How have they maintained organisational culture during the pandemic?

The second research question investigated, the cultural practices of the two firms, their values and norms, the leaders as role-models and cultural changes if there were any. Overall, the cultural practices of the two companies appeared to share common values and practices such as being outgoing, hardworking, open-door policy, delivering task to a good standard, employee's working independently and the organisation prioritising their employee's well-being. The finding of having glass doors and walks within Khalid et al.'s (2020) study can be related to the value of open-door policy in our case, as an important factor for maintaining organisational culture. As it's a way of showing transparency between the leaders and the employees. This results in shorter hierarchical distance and improved internal communication within the organisation. This was also observed within the results of this study, where leaders always made sure that they are available to their team members. Another association with this evidence was made for the previous research question, as being a good leadership approach to further maintain trust and loyalty among employees (Mielniczuk, 2020).

Furthermore, by doing background research on the companies prior to the interviews it became evident that the two companies have a strong organisational cultural practice. These, factors mentioned in the previous sentence confirm this claim to the best of our knowledge. Supporting evidence from previous literature on strong organisational culture suggest that the organisation will have more focus on its employees behaviour, can increase performance among employees it has been even suggested of enhancing employee confidence and reduction of work stress (Ahmad, 2012; Odor, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2012). Furthermore, as previously outlined in the theory chapter Scandinavian culture has been suggested to aligns within Cameron and Quinn's (2006) competing value framework of having a clan and adhocracy with implication to organisational culture. Which could be another reason to why the two organisations did not experience much of cultural change during the pandemic.

Another finding that can be highlighted is the responses on maintaining the values and norms of the organisations during the pandemic. The results for this interview questions were split in half; one part of the leaders did not have any problems with maintaining their organisation's values and norm. This contributes to the theory mentioned earlier with regards to Schein's (2010) theory, specifically to internal integration. The leaders were prepared, as this was not something new for them, as one stated: " we have used video meetings and calls

with different office in the past (...)". Additionally, from the demographical data we can see that Company A had employees who were working already from home for some part of the time prior to the pandemic. Thus, the leaders were able to set a collaborative environment where it would help transition everyone from their department to working from home (Schein, 2010). Being more digitally prepared and in general using the necessary tools will help everyone to be better integrated to a home office and be more effective with collaborating meetings between the team members for their day-to-day-task (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). This was also evident within the interview's data and leaders did try to adapt these approaches.

The other half of the leaders experienced some struggles with maintaining certain values and norms such as openness, positive competitiveness among employees and being able to sometimes accommodate to different employee's needs. A reason, given by the participants for these challenges was lack of physical communication. As it can be evident, communication is also a part of the organisation's culture and a part of the leader's leadership style, which was discussed for the first research question. Thus, when looking at the recent literature by Ingelsrud et al. (2022) who also found in their case the sample was managers who struggled with communicating and following up with their employees, while they were working from home during the pandemic. However, the research also stated that even though they did not have direct control their relationship with the employees was driven on a trust-based management (Ingelsrud et al., 2022). The present study has also shown relations to having trust-based leadership and as explored for research question one the leaders had several leadership approaches of maintaining their trust within employees.

Furthermore, leaders claimed that even though it has been challenging to maintain the organisations values and norms, it was outlined that there was some increase in employee's performance during the pandemic. The data showed that performance was kept at either the same level for some employees, which was still regarded as good, but also for other it had increased. One leader from Company A stated that they had published more papers and articles compared to previous years. As for Company B they stated that they did not have any overtime hours, which can be interpreted that employee were efficient at their work and finished their tasks on time. The present results appear to be consistent with results from a recent study conducted Ingelsrud et al. (2022) on investigating "home office and other remote work: mapping scope, development features and consequences". Who also found that

performance among employees during the pandemic had increased. However, they also found employees lost some of their spark/motivation to work when working from home. This statement was also evident within this research as one participant claimed: “(...) the team spirit and loyalty deteriorated if people are just working from home”. Even though employees had an increased performance, they were at the same time dealing with inner motivation to do their task and keep up the good work. Another challenge that some of the leaders and their employees stated as challenging is having their children home, due to the kindergartens being closed. Recent research has also found that employees with children considered to be working less efficiently comparing to their employees without children (Ipsen et al., 2021, p. 12; Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021).

Additionally, a struggle that was identified by the leaders which can also explain work overload that was mentioned by the leaders was the merge of private life and work life. Sandoval-Reyes et al. (2021, p. 2), claims that behaviours of overworking can be explained and related to the fact that employees have long working day and poor work-life balance. Thus, this leads to more difficulties for the leader to maintain the organisational culture. As it was outlined by one leader, “challenging thing was to (...) know what was going on, (...) people worked a lot (...)”. Therefore, it can be suggested that the leaders could adapt other leadership approaches that could help their employees to balance their work life, which will have an immediate effect on their private lives.

The sub-theme of role model was closely related to the idea of the leader’s commitment of showing their employees the required cultural practices that the organisation holds. However, another link that could be made for this sub-theme is to the type of leadership approaches the leader has. Previous literature suggests that transformational leadership can be a persuasive approach for employees to follow organisational culture (Khalid et al., 2020). Evidence from the results showed that every leader has strong beliefs for as one participant puts it “walking the talk”. Furthermore, this pattern of results is consistent with the literature that leaders are active mentors for their employees that has an outcome of gaining trust and loyalty from their employees (Akhtar, 2018). Schein (2010) suggest that once the cultural practices are recognised and accepted, it is up to the leadership approaches that are going to communicate these organisational belief and values. This then makes the leader of being more prone to predicting unexpected outcomes and consequences and thus responding with appropriate leadership decisions (Schein, 2010). Nevertheless, another demonstration is to Denison et al

(2003) model of organisational culture, where the leaders is being consistent with the core values of the organisation and subsequently models these values. This shows stability and high degree of compliance (Senge, 1990).

The results from the data related to the second research question, align with previous studies, to a certain extend when discussing elements of maintaining values and norms, leaders as role models and the performance. Therefore, it could be suggested that these findings can be contributory to a growing body of research for the future on examining further on maintaining organisational culture. Lastly, what should be taken into discussion is the future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace.

5.2.3 Has there been any future strategies and adaptability approaches related to a hybrid workplace?

Lastly the third question tackled the leader's thoughts about future perspectives for adaptability to a hybrid workplace in a post-pandemic era. The results from the interviews related to this question suggest that there needs to be a balance to the way employees do their work. This means having flexibility with regards to working some days at the office and some days from home, which they were going to offer to their employees, as stated by one of the leaders from Company A. Recent research has started to investigate similar viewpoints on work options and there have been suggestions that some Norwegian companies are already starting to adapt a more hybrid workplace. Two example are Telenor a phone company, where 43% of their staff is working flexible (50:50) and Storebrand with 49% of employees working at least one day from home per week (Smite et al., 2022, p. 5). The study by Smite et al. (2022), has also received supporting evidence the companies used for their study are trying to adapt to a more hybrid workplace, but they are they are also struggling to accommodate everyone's need. This could be explained as to the varied employees' opinions of what they require for their workplace (Smite et al., 2022).

When asked about if a hybrid workplace would have any effect on the organisations culture, the majority stated that they did not think that there will be any cultural changes. One exception from a responded was however, that he/she will change their leadership approaches with regards to inclusion and belonging both at the office and at home. This was an interesting statement because current research by Mandy et al. (2020) claims that leaders

should start re-building a common social identity and belonging with their employees which are related to the values, norms and habits of the company. This can be further interpreted as creating two appealing workplaces, where employees feel equally motivated and enthusiastic to do their day-to-day tasks. This was seen in the response from one of the leader, where a more collaborative and fun spaces are made within the office so that the place is “pleasant and enjoyable”. Nanayakkara and Wilkinson (2021) applications of organisational culture to the workplace suggest similar evident to looking at a workplace by proposing three factors: office layouts, interior designs and work practices. All these three factors are closely related to the organisation’s productivity and efficiency of day-to-day work and, eventually, the turnout of the entire organisation.

When asked about discussing the challenges and positive outcomes of having a hybrid workplace in the future the leaders mainly focused on “how” follow up can be done more effectively and the issue of onboarding of new employees. Onboarding of new employees is important as employees need the proper training for their work position, thus leaders inclined that digital teaching could be inefficient comparing to a physical one. This concern was also brought in another recent study by Yang et al. (2021), where employees had no physical presence at the office, it would have major effects on the organisation’s innovation, company culture, sense of belonging and knowledge sharing. However, Smite et al. (2022) argues that this can be very individualistic and dependent of the already existing culture within the organisation, Furthermore, research has shown that technological components have played an important role for digitalising organisation’s process. Therefore, it has been argued to have brought an environment where employees have a collaborative work interactions. (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). This leads us to the positive outcomes outlined by the team leaders.

Adapting to a hybrid workplace could mean for the team leaders to be able to attract diverse and top talent people, who have competence for the job but without the necessity to be living in Norway. Another positive outcome for them was with regards to travelling and how that has a positive effect on the environment. Coming back to the statement of attracting top talent employers and to the research done by Ingelsrud et al. (2022), who also had similar responses from their interviews. It became apparent that, if high flexibility is offered to employees, it will also mean that they will be able to compete for the top talent future employers. This means expanding their recruitment category more broadly, where the employees would be able to do their work from home, but living in a different part of the country or outside of the

country (Ingelsrud et al., 2022). However, as mentioned earlier a demanding tactic of balancing remote work and office work is required, in order for this strategy of recruiting top talent to work, because companies do not want their work environment to deteriorate too much (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Ingelsrud et al., 2022).

The results from these three research questions provide supporting evidence that leaders had struggles and positive outcomes with regards to their leadership approaches and maintaining organisational culture during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results also provide us with more insight on what future strategies these two companies could be adapting to and further what struggles and outcomes those decisions will bring. Therefore, it can be suggested that there are three major findings: first one being that transformational and elements of transactional behaviours can be suitable leadership styles when facing world crisis such as a pandemic. Second, that organisational culture is a far more complex concept than anyone can predict, from the current results it can be seen that with persistence, empathy and care for employees, leaders can maintain core values and norms. The third finding is that deciding what the future workplace will be requires a lot of planning and considering the employee's different needs in order to create balance among the organisations.

5.3 Practical implications

In my view, I see the constructed thematical framework as an interesting and varied way of characterising the four themes and (*leadership, organisational culture, pandemic and hybridity*) with its corresponding measurement sub-themes. This lays the foundation on what leaders should focus when adapting to new leadership techniques and where they should take action when facing uncertainty. Furthermore, it can be a useful thematical framework to understand better what factors could be considered important when maintaining organisational culture. As every country and organisation has its own way of managing and maintaining culture especially when dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, it could be an applicable idea to get to know different approaches across other countries outside of Scandinavia. This is outside the scope of this paper, to comparing with other European countries. However, in my opinion being able to evaluate and discuss the thematical framework by using other countries as cross references, can have implications on the discussion of how international companies have dealt with leadership approaches, maintained organisational culture and perspective on future hybridity.

Secondly, findings from this study also showed that performance among the employees had increased while working from home during the pandemic. This can be an interesting implication when companies start to plan their transition in a post-pandemic era of the workplace model. They can use the factors related to hybridity to understand what possible challenges and outcomes organisations can face if a hybrid workplace was implemented. One, main challenge outlined was deterioration of informal communication while working remotely. However, a positive outcome for the team leaders was operationalising digital tools, as they were used more often, then people became more digitally integrated. Therefore, the factors outlined under the *hybrid workplace* theme, can map out a balancing discussion and help organisation's planning processes of moving forward from the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to research leadership approaches, organisational culture during the pandemic, and future strategies towards hybridity within a Norwegian context. Perhaps a more suitable research approach would have been a comparative case study between the two organisations. Furthermore, the two organisations were quite different with regards to what they do, and the number of participants was not equal. Therefore, this study could be a subject of criticism of generalisability associated to the mixed method studies. Therefore, future researchers should consider comparing more between gender or role positions when investigating for instance the aspect of adapting to a hybrid workplace. This also brings another viewpoint that could be researched, whether hybrid approach is an appropriate model, or could there be another model that is more appropriate for organisations?

The data collection was also challenging, as the time chosen to conduct the interviews coincided with the removal of national restrictions of the pandemic and everyone had gone back to work in the office. Thus, it took several weeks to plan and correspond with my two gatekeepers, who helped me gather the participants for this study as the team leaders were very busy, which could raise concerns about data collection bias. What I suggest is that future studies also review data from when the lockdowns were implemented and data after the lockdowns were removed. This will allow the researcher to compare and understand better

what the leader's approaches were before and after and how organisational culture was maintained.

Some of the measures used for this master study were newly created, such as creating an interview guide for investigating the three concepts (leadership approaches, organisational culture, and hybridity) within the research question. This required additional time of reading the theory behind my research so that the development of the end transcript for the semi-structured interview could be a reliable tool. It could be suggested that the data collection tools specifically the interview guide was improved, maybe add more measurements (e.g., well-being, stress, work-balance, and work satisfaction) on employee's experiences working from home and from the office and how the leaders dealt with these outcomes. This will shed more light on what leadership approaches the leaders had before and after the pandemic and contribute further to organisation's handling crisis and change.

6 CONCLUSION

The thesis has shown that the pandemic has had unchangeable consequences on the corporate world. Having investigated three big areas within the organisational literature, by using two Norwegian organisations give us an idea of just how complex the future of organisations will be. As leaders need to consider a variety of factors for the success and well-being of their organisations. Pandemics are not new occurrences; they can occur frequently and with different repercussion. Therefore, effective leadership behaviours and styles are needed in order to start developing new future strategies with respect to maintaining or re-inventing organisational cultures and give rise to new workplace models (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). This thesis has shown that, the team leaders have adapted leadership approaches that reflect flexibility, decisiveness, and great care for their employee's well-being at work during this critical time. The leaders made sure that there was a systematic follow-up with each and every one of their employees and tried to accommodate to people's needs to the extent that they were able to. It also became apparent that maintaining organisational culture was relatively manageable, as the organisations have been identified prior of having a strong organisational culture. Lastly, the two organisations, appear to be somewhat open of adapting to a hybrid workplace, as long as there is balance between the number of days people work from home and from the office.

Leadership, organisational culture, and adaptability to a hybrid workplace are a triad that can be looked at simultaneously, as each area is in some way related to one another. The future of organisations and the workplace holds exciting opportunities and cultivates a workforce that is collaborative and motivational. Change is here to stay, and organisation's need to break with the past and integrate to the new normal. This is only possible if everyone within the organisation is heard and knows what this positive change reflects individuals, values, norm, and needs.

7 References

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Appendix 1: MLQ-Form 6S

The questionnaire includes the MLQ-Form 6S.

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S

INSTRUCTIONS: This questionnaire provides a description of your leadership style. Twenty-one descriptive statements are listed below. Judge how frequently each statement fits you. The word others may mean your followers, clients, or group members.

KEY

0 - Not at all 1 - Once in a while 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly often 4 = Frequently, if not always

- 1. I make others feel good to be around me..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 2. I express with a few simple words what we could and should do..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 3. I enable others to think about old problems in new ways..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 4. I help others develop themselves..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 5. I tell others what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 6. I am satisfied when others meet agreed-upon standards..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 7. I am content to let others continue working in the same ways always..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 8. Others have complete faith in me..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 9. I provide appealing images about what we can do..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 10. I provide others with new ways of looking at puzzling things..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 11. I let others know how I think they are doing..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 12. I provide recognition/rewards when others reach their goals..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 13. As long as things are working, I do not try to change anything..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 14. Whatever others want to do is OK with me..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 15. Others are proud to be associated with me..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 16. I help others find meaning in their work..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 17. I get others to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 18. I give personal attention to others who seem rejected..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 19. I call attention to what others can get for what they accomplish..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 20. I tell others the standards they have to know to carry out their work..... 0 1 2 3 4
- 21. I ask no more of others than what is absolutely essential..... 0 1 2 3 4

SCORING

The MLQ-6S measures your leadership on seven factors related to transformational leadership. Your score for each factor is determined by summing three specified items on the questionnaire. For example, to determine your score for factor 1, Idealized influence, sum your responses for items 1, 8, and 15. Complete this procedure for all seven factors.

	TOTAL
Idealized influence (items 1, 8, and 15)	_____ Factor 1
Inspirational motivation (items 2, 9, and 16)	_____ Factor 2
Intellectual stimulation (items 3, 10, and 17)	_____ Factor 3
Individual consideration (items 4, 11, and 18)	_____ Factor 4
Contingent reward (items 5, 12, and 19)	_____ Factor 5
Management-by-exception (items 6, 13, and 20)	_____ Factor 6
Laissez-faire leadership (items 7, 14, and 21)	_____ Factor 7

Score range: HIGH = 9-12, MODERATE = 5-8, LOW = 0-4

Appendix 2: Demographical Questions

Exact look of the demographical questions, this is a screenshot from Nettskjema, the university's platform for distributing online surveys.

What is your e-mail address? *

How many years have you been a team leader? *

How many employees are under your leadership? *

Before corona, has some or several of your group / employees worked from home or otherwise remotely?

If "YES" please answer the question below.

Yes

No

If Yes: To what degree /extent?

Now and then (A few of the employees worked remotely now and then)

Low percentage (Some employees worked remotely 1-4 days a month)

Medium percentage (Over 50% of my group worked remotely more the 2 days a month)

High percentage (Most employees worked remotely more the one day a week)

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Introduction

A brief introduction about myself and of the interviewee.

I am currently undertaking a master program within ViD Specialised university, and I am conducting research on how team leaders have dealt with leadership and maintaining organisational cultural during the pandemic. Furthermore, implementation will be researched if this has had any effect on adapting a more hybrid workplace.

This interview will focus on three points the first one being on **leadership, culture and third future strategies**.

LEADERSHIP

1. Would you mind telling me briefly about yourself?
2. How did you make sure there is trust between you and your employees during the pandemic?
3. During the pandemic was there any challenges with maintaining communication with your employees?
4. What leadership techniques did you adapt to when your team members had to work from home?
5. Has there been any challenges in terms of decision-making during this difficult time? For example, deciding to cancel important meetings, or if some of your employees had to stay home but others just could not be due to their type of work? Can you give an example?
6. Would you tell me what was the most challenging or positive thing during the pandemic?
7. This challenge or positive outcome has it had any effect on how you would lead your team?

CULTURE

8. How would you define or describe your organisation's cultural practices?
9. Within your team, do you feel that the values and practices of your organisation have been consistent/maintained during the pandemic? – Follow- up question: Do you as a leader model and reinforce these values and practices?

10. During the pandemic, did you experience any cultural change among your team employees? For example: difficulty for employees to feel inclusion, associate with the organisation's values such as internal collaboration or else.
11. This leads me to my other question, how did you respond to employees feeling like..., did you use different leadership techniques in order to maintain the work culture even, if your employees had to work remotely most of the time during the pandemic?
12. What other approaches do you have as a team leader to maintain the organisational work culture during the pandemic?

FUTURE STRATEGIES

13. In terms of future strategies- this life changing work experience during the pandemic do you feel it will lead for you as a team leader and the company to adapt to a more hybrid workplace, such as a 50/50 approach?
14. if yes,- they think the organization will be more hybrid in the future:

Follow up question: If many of the employees take advantage of the opportunities in the future to work remotely, and Hydro / gets a hybrid work culture, do you think that will alter your values as a leader and the way you perform your leadership? For example, more individual follow up, recruitment of other kinds of employees?
15. When this new situation becomes more permanent, what do you as a leader think will be most challenging and positive, and do you think some leadership tools will become more important in the future situation.
16. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on the topic we have discussed today?

Appendix 4: Informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a two-part data collection process for a master thesis. This questionnaire is the first tool used to collect some demographic information and a questionnaire about leadership, where more information can be found in the pre-sent email by Kristina Georgieva. It will take no longer than 10 minutes. The second data collection tool is going to be a semi-structured interview, which will be scheduled separately. The interview will take approximately, 30-50 minutes.

Data will be presented in the form of a master thesis which you can access in May 2022, via oria.no should you wish to know more. Additionally, it should be highlighted that this study is entirely voluntary. As a participant you are free to withdraw without giving a reason.

If you wish to withdraw, please take contact with Kristina Georgieva via email: krisi_tg@hotmail.com or her supervisor Emeka Echebiri chukwuemeka.echebiri@vid.no before the data are anonymised which will be approximately the 15th of March.

Please tick all the boxes with **"Yes"** if you would like to participate in the questionnaire and later on the semi-structure interview.

I confirm that I have read and understood the consent form above for current questionnaire and interview and have the opportunity to ask questions. *

✓ Select ...
Yes
No

I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential. *

Select ...

I agree to take part in the online questionnaire and semi-structured interview. *

Select ...