Thematic analysis investigating the impact of remote working during Covid-19 pandemic on communication and face-to-face interaction.

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Abstract

During the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, a sudden shift to remote working were enforced and adapted by many organizations worldwide. Research have shown that working environment has raised concerns regarding the ability of organizations to operate at the same level as before the pandemic. It was unclear how the introduction of these changes will impact employees engagement, motivation and productivity. This study will aim to identify and investigate the effect of the transition to remote working have on the effectiveness of communication and the importance of face-to-face interaction in developing trust and relationship within a team. This study also aims to understand the possible influence of these factors to the future structure of work settings.

Based on a review of the literature on remote working and theories on communication and face-to face interaction, a semi-structured interview was conducted to individuals who have adapted to remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic. Identifying the negative and positive impact based on the participants' experience and perspective.

A thematic analysis of the interviews demonstrated the impact on communication and an overall positive experience from working remotely. The research shows that many participants were satisfied with the ICT (Information and communication technologies) provided by their companies. However, the results also suggest that the effectiveness of communication still highly depends on the effort and engagement of the individuals involved. As identified in the analysis, hybrid work setting is preferred by all participants. Allowing employees to have flexibility and not feel forced to work back in the office can increase morale and motivation.

The results of this study can help improve the development and implementation of change management. Allowing people professionals, HR functions and management to drive effective change by facilitating the transition and adaptation stage with the overall aim of achieving a positive experience for the employees.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought upon many changes to people all around the world. Government restrictions and lockdowns were put in place to help reduce the spread of the virus and as a result many companies enforced working remotely. For many, this was an unfamiliar concept and with the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was unclear how these changes will impact the employees and how they work. The research aims to identify and investigate the impact of transitioning to remote working on two main factors, communication and face-to-face interaction. As well as how each factor can contribute to the future structuring of work settings. This chapter will provide an overall introduction to the study by discussing the background and context of remote working, followed by the research problem, research aims, objective and questions. This chapter will also include the significance and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background

Remote working is not at all a new concept, In the 1970s the term "telecommunicating" was often used to represent remote working. This was mainly focused on employees who conducted their work via phone and with the option of working from home. The rapid changes in technology and the impact of globalization has provided opportunities and flexibility for companies and their employees. The context of remote working prior to Covid-19 pandemic, was considered to be an occasional or infrequent practice and many employees had little experience of (Wang et al, 2021). Remote working was often offered as an option in a voluntary basis. Remote working was available mainly for occupations related to finance, business management, customer service, IT and sales related roles.

The main objective of remote working environments is to enable an increase in productivity and encourage virtual collaborations. It is believed that by creating a greater flexibility achieves better human performance and contribution. As illustrated by McLennan (2008), Remote working is a practice that allows individuals from a team to work from multiple geographic locations, working together in essence or by association through collaboration, providing individual expertise towards the production of a joint specific outcome. There are multiple definitions of virtual teams and or remote working. According to a study by Cohen and Gibson

(cited in Bizilj *et al.*, 2021), remote working can be defined through three characteristics. First, Teams working remotely are considered as a functional workgroup of interdependent individuals working towards achieving a common goal. Second, individuals working remotely are dispersed in some way. The third characteristic of a remote working is that members of the team mostly rely on the technology available to connect and communicate with each other, instead of a personal face-to face contact in a traditional work environment (Bizilj *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, Wang et al. (2021) suggests that the nature of the job is reflected in the characteristics of remote working during the period of working from home. They have identified four key characteristics that influences their work effectiveness:

Job autonomy – Allowing the employees freedom to decide ways to perform their tasks.

Monitoring – There are different forms of monitoring implemented in remote working setting. This can include clocking in and out, daily meetings, reporting and virtual supervision via on-cam call.

Social support – This can include wellness support, team interaction and other resources providing social support during working hours.

Work-load – This can differ based on the job requirement, however can be a characteristic that can influence the worker's work-home balance.

The characteristics outlined by Wang et al. (2021) may influence the effectiveness of the team depending on how they are provided and organised by the companies. Impact may either be positive or negative, therefore it is important for companies to be prepared and provide appropriate time for the pace of transformation to remote working to properly progress and attain benefits in the long-run.

As mentioned above, working remotely is a work structure where employees are interdependent and working towards achieving the same goal. Employees are usually dispersed to different location and mainly uses technology to communicate and connect with other individuals in the team. Structure and the team effectiveness can be influenced by how individuals decide to perform their task. Also, depending on the way management monitor and

provide support to the team. The effectiveness of teams working remotely can depend on the work-life balance, how individuals balance their personal and professional life. For example, individuals who are working remotely can easily get distracted depending on the environment and space they are working in. As remote working highly depends on technology, employees working online can find it difficult to completely disconnect from work.

1.2 Research problem

In a remote work environment, communication and interaction are the key factors for success. In order to create a successful environment for collaboration, team structure and communication patterns have to be effective and compatible with each other (Cagiltay *et al*., 2015). Numerous studies have investigated remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, these studies have focused on the overall experience at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic where impact relates mainly at the transition stage. Most studies focused on a quantitative and generalized representation of the data. Not many existing studies have investigated the impact on communication and interaction based on remote working experiences in the long-run.

1.3 Research aims

Given the lack of available research regarding the impact of remote work focusing on communication and face-to-face interaction in multinational companies. This study will aim to identify and investigate the effect of the transition to remote working have on the effectiveness of communication and the importance of face-to-face interaction in developing trust and relationship within a team. This study also aims to understand the long-term experiences of employees who worked remotely during the government restriction and after. As well as to create an understanding of how these experiences can shape the future of work setting.

1.4 Research objectives

Objective 1:
To identify the impact on communication and face-to-face interaction at the transition stage of remote working in comparison to the long-term experiences of remote working.

Objective 2:

To identify other factors that might influence communication and face-to-face interaction.

Objective 3:

To identify and investigate how remote working during the pandemic influenced the employee's mindset and preferred work setting.

1.5 Research Significance

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on change management focusing on factors such as, communication and face-to-face interaction by identifying the positive and negative experiences that can influence the employees motivation, engagement and productivity after the introduction of change. Allowing people professionals, HR functions and management to drive effective change by facilitating the transition and adaptation stage with the overall aim of achieving a positive experience for the employees.

1.6 Research Limitations

This study, however, is subject to several limitations. For the purpose of the study, the research was narrow down to two main factors, Communication and Face-to-Face interaction. Therefore, other factors of remote working will not be discussed. To narrow the scope, the researcher will focus on experiences of employees from multinational companies working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. The sampling size will be limited to 10 participants and sample profile will be limited due to the researcher's limited access to resources. The researcher has chosen a qualitative research method, therefore can be subjective and lack objectivity and generalizability. Due to Time constraint, The research is based on a topic the is subject to the impact of change. As the study is concentrated on the experiences during a certain phenomenon that in uncertain and unpredictable, a future longitudinal study might be required.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to identify and investigate the effect of the transition to remote working have on the effectiveness of communication and the importance of face-to-face interaction in developing trust and relationship within a team. In order to have a better understanding, this section will discuss the overall experience of remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic based on existing studies. Highlighting the advantages and disadvantage and common challenges that may occur. This section will also discuss the two main factors for this study, communication and face-to-face interaction. Explaining the relationship of the two factors and the importance of each in creating an effective team.

2.2 Remote Working during Covid-19 pandemic.

By early 2020, the global surge of Covid-19 pandemic have resulted to many companies around the world to enforced remote working. This was considered as a positive approach for some, however can also mean inequality among employees. While some employees were able continue their work at home to prevent the spread of the virus. Many other profession were not given this opportunity. Many companies who had the option to transition to remote working were given a limited time to transition. This can be very challenging as there are many existing work policies, expectations, routines that were created based on the traditional office work (McLennan, 2008). Existing habits and routines at work can create inflexible attitudes to change. Unfortunately, the required pace and willingness of changing attitudes can dictate the speed at which the transition process to remote working can progress and show benefits.

In Ireland, many multinational companies have considered remote working as a permanent option for their employees. As people switched to remote working, time management and task completion became more flexible. According to Bizilj, Boštjančič and Sočan (2021), virtual work have intensified since the 1990s, due to the increase in virtual communication developed through technology, providing options such as email, voice call, video conferencing and other forms of communication enabled by the internet. Working remotely have many advantages, this includes cross border collaboration without leaving the home, quicker and more efficient

way of sharing information. New level of human performance and capabilities are enabled by technology and innovation. Remote working allows flexibility beyond the predictable work schedules and allowing individuals to work during the time they believe to be more productive. Management are now more focused on efforts, team outputs and working independently.

2.3 Remote work challenges

While studies identified many advantages and benefits of working remotely. There are also challenges emerging from remote working experiences. For example, work-life balance and distraction .

Prior to what we consider as "new normal" of Covid-19 pandemic and remote working. Many employees found difficulties keeping a balance between work and personal life. This is because of the nature and high dependency of remote working to technology. Individuals have developed tendencies to be online 24/7 for work, for entertainment and even ways to stay in contact and interact with other people. The flexibility and ability to connect instantaneously creates pressure for employees to give immediate response to work request even outside working hours. The transition to remote working allowed working parents to spend more time with their family, however this in itself creates challenges as it can cause more interruption and can impact the work effectiveness and productivity in a negative manner.

2.4 Communication and Face-to face interaction

In a remote work environment, communication and interaction are the key factors for success. In order to create a successful environment for collaboration, team structure and communication patterns have to be effective and compatible with each other (Cagiltay *et al*., 2015). To have a better understanding of the impact of remote working to communication and face-to-face interaction it is important to understand these two main factors.

2.4.1 <u>Communication</u>

<u>Defining Communication</u>

Communication can be defined in multiple ways, According to Tiwari (2021), the term "communication" originated from the Latin word "communis" which means " to share commonly". Communication can be considered as a process of sharing information, ideas, knowledge, feelings or attitude with others through a common understandable way (Hamilton, 2010). Communication is a complex process due to the different possible interpretations, delivery methods or mediums and if receivers are willing to accept. As stated by Wilbur Schramm (cited in Tiwari, 2021) " communication is the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop". As explained in the model of Communication proposed by Schramm, communication is a two way path between a sender and a receiver, requiring both side to encode and decode the message shared. If the receiver of the information is unable to understand or decode the speaker's message, then the message will be considered no use. Schramm emphasized the importance of the individual's knowledge, cultural diversity, religion, and experience in communication and how individual's interpret the message shared.

Communication is not just about getting information across, it is also about creating relationship and an understanding between individuals and group of people. Effective communication can be differentiated to communication, Cambridge dictionary defined the word "Effective" as "successful or achieving the results that you want". In business perspective, communication is a powerful tool used in any transaction, creating bonds, community, encouraging culture and in creating authority power. Therefore, it is important to utilize communication effectively. Communication in a process dependent to the skills of an individual person. Communication style can be categorized into formal and informal communication. Formal communication refers to the style and format of communication used for official purposes and professional settings. Informal communication refers to a relaxed and friendly manner of speaking, writing or behaving. Degree of formality depends on the relationship between communicators.

<u>Importance of Communication</u>

Communication plays an important role in the success of a company, including the roles below:

- Effective communication helps develop better understanding between employees to enhance group effort.

- As mentioned in the definition above, communication can encourage and influence the attitude of employees' requires for motivation and cooperation.

- Encourages transparency, trust and improve work environment for subordinates and managers.

- Helps improve relationship and trust between employees by encouraging social relations through intercommunication and reduce conflict.

Types of Communication

Communication is classified into different types such as verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication - includes speaking or signing through the use of words depending on language and tone of voice. Verbal communication has its limitation due to the language used by both the speaker and the receiver and the individual's interpretation (Pardillo, 2019). Verbal communication can be easily influenced by the speaker's behaviour, body language and mannerisms. Effective verbal communication requires verbal skills referring to how an individual expresses themselves, enable a comprehensible advice and to convince and understand each together (Hamilton, 2010). There are two sub-categories considered under verbal communication. First is oral communication is the means of communicating through spoken words. This can include face-to- face communication, phone call, video conference and video presentation. Second, Written communication is a form communication through writing. This includes, emails, letters, messages, documents and social media post. This method is used more for formal communication as this provides a more precise communication. Written communication are considered more time-consuming because of the thorough preparation it requires. With recent global growth of companies around the world, written communication are the main method of communication as it ensures to reach higher volume of recipients and monitor the communication sent in the organisation (Pardillo, 2019).

Non-verbal communication – Non-verbal communication includes signal, signs, gestures and expressions, also known as body language. Non-verbal communication is the basic method of communicating and enables individuals to communicate with emotions and express their feelings. Body language can help individual communicate through actions, for example individuals have certain signs to show they are lying , angry, defensive, fearful, nervous or

happy. Including actions such as crossing arms, looking away, turning around, covering the mouth etc. Other than body language, humans uses facial expressions to express emotions such as embarrassment, disgust, amusement, contempt and compassion (Pardillo, 2019). One of the main factors that influences the interpretation of non-verbal messages depends on the culture in which they occur. For example Nodding in different countries can have different meanings, in America nodding is considered as an agreement and in Japan nodding means the message was received. Certain hand gestures or actions can also be interpreted as inappropriate depending on the culture of the individual (Hamilton, 2010). Culture difference is a limitation for both type of communication, it can highly influence the interpretation and delivery of the message and can lead to conflict if incorrectly understood. One of the most common example of non-verbal communication in the digital age is the use of emojis, memes and GIF. These were created as form of communication to express feelings and emotions through visual representation. However, due to different culture, market knowledge and perception of people around the world. These imagery may be interpreted in the wrong way, leading to conflicts especially in a professional work setting. For example a smiley face is a sign of happiness in most countries while in China, it implies disbelief, distrust and someone humouring you. This can be considered as inappropriate and rude response. The "OK" hand gesture emoji can be considered as an insult in Brazil and Turkey. Emojis, memes and GIF can be considered as a new language that was introduced through the use of social media.

Communication channels in remote working

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are the mainly used by employees to communicate on-line and virtually with other members of the team. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, ICT mediums almost become the only option for communication because of the restriction on face-to-face interaction, due to new government regulations. Similarly, Hollingshead (2004) (cited in Hambley, O'Neill and Kline, 2005). found that the lack of face-to-face interaction encouraged the use of communication technologies as vital tools for collaboration. As mentioned above, Communication can be categorized into two types, Formal and informal communication. The level of formality will influence the communication channel used by an individual, listed below shows the different communication channels used in remote work settings.

Examples of communication channel available in remote working:
- E-mail

- Video call/Conference

- Phone call

- Social Media

- Messaging flatforms/apps

- Fax

- VR (virtual reality) conferencing

- Letters

It is important to consider the purpose, audience, strength, limitations, and level of formality required when choosing the appropriate communication channel.

Communication challenges in Remote work.

According to a study conducted by Wang (2021), online communication through ICT is not enough to deliver an effective communication and not as efficient as face-to-face communication. The lack of personal contact, and the limitation on the level of communication due to the lack of prosodic features and paralinguistic factors creates difficulties for teams working remotely. There is importance in the effective communication for the collaborative development of shared meanings and understanding for the success of a virtual team. People working together either in the same location or remotely can expect challenges or conflicts due to differences in perception, values, opinions, interpersonal style and communication. The possibility of experiencing cultural clashes are very high when teams are made out of multiple cultures. Difference in culture may influence an individual's tolerance and may be perceived as conflict or a possible threat. According to Robinson (cited in Cagiltay *et al*., 2015), one of the greatest hurdles in the resolution of intercultural conflicts is that the parties involved, often misinterpret each other's intentions. Unintentional conflicts may occur due to contradictions or confrontations caused by different values, opinions, assumptions or beliefs. One of the major problems faced by multicultural virtual teams is that the individuals are not generally aware of their own cultural values (Cagiltay *et al*., 2015).

2.4.2   Face-to-face Social Interaction

Face-to-face interaction is one of the key factors to delivering an effective communication. As explained above on non-verbal communication, face-to-face interaction is an in-person communication without the need of mediation between two or more people (Codington-Lacerte, 2020). Information conveyed through tone of voice, facial expression and body language can influence the meaning of the work spoken. For example, a tone of voice can be used to express emotions such as anger, excitement, disappointment, or happiness. The ability to express emotions during an interaction with other colleagues can help express an individual's conformity, politeness and change in opinion during a discussion. These characteristics can provide context for better decision making or conflict management. Face-to face interaction is not only valuable to the effectiveness of communication but also to developing a stronger social relationship in the workplace. Face-to-face interaction allows individuals to express their feelings and develop a sense of social belongingness in comparison to computer-based interaction. According to social psychological theory based on Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (1943), face-to-face interaction helps develop the social needs based on human interaction and can influence an individual's self-esteem. Having connections with other individuals in either online and offline settings are an importance source of resilience and support (Marinucci, et al. 2022).

Face-to face interaction was difficult due to the government restriction during the Covid-19. Social distancing and remote working were encouraged and particularly in a business perspective, non-verbal aspects of communication and interaction in person were limited. There were challenges in encouraging a change in culture and collaborative infrastructure in remote working settings due to the lack of informal social communication (Beňo, Hvorecký and Cagáňová, 2021). Face-to face interaction is not only a key factor for an effective commination but also for satisfying social needs.

2.4.3 Challenges for Multi-cultural teams working remotely

Face to face interaction can help build and foster a positive team relationship and is an important factor in satisfying the overall team satisfaction and happiness. Satisfied individuals are believed to be more productive and effective. If an individual's satisfaction is met, it can encourage motivation at work. Motivation can be defined as the process that helps start, guide and maintain a goal-oriented behaviour (Cherry, 2022). Open communication and constant

exchange of information through connectivity can help increase social interaction, motivation and encourage knowledge sharing. (Stoica, Florea and Gonsalez, 2020). Motivation can also reduce the tendency to procrastinate while working remotely. Due to the flexibility and job anatomy of remote working, there are higher tendency for individuals to procrastinate. Employees can sometime struggle with self-regulation and working independently. A study by Wang et al. (2021), found that participants of their research delayed core tasks and had a higher tendency to spend more time on non-work-related activities during working hours, this includes using social media, watching movies or taking longer breaks. Lack of motivation can increase the feeling of isolation and loneliness. Face-to-face social interaction are important for providing individuals with the fundamental resources to cope with hardship and develop a psychological resiliency (Marinucci, et al. 2022). Positive interaction and relationship enable a more open communication between individuals in the team. Allowing a more creative and innovative way of thinking.

Face-to-face interaction and positive team relationship are important in developing trust, which is essential for creating an effective team. According to Codington-Lacerte (2020) face-to-face interaction is best utilized in developing trust to create a deeper network of business connections by building and maintaining relationships. A team that trusts each other provides a sense of safety that enables innovation, increase in productivity and team collaboration. Without trust, individuals will have the tendency to segregate themselves and focus only on their own interest. This type of behaviours can lead to conflicts and creating a toxic work environment. Codington-Lacerte (2020) research suggests that Face-to-face communication creates an environment open for informal dialogue and collaborative approach to completing complex tasks. Similar point was made by Nicole Stinton (2013) stating that communication and trust have strong influence on each other. It is difficult to develop trust without adequate human interaction. Therefore, employees who are working remotely have less opportunity to develop trust due to the lack of social interaction. For multi-cultural teams, it is important to understand the different cultures, language differences and the potential risks of miscommunication. Cultural background can influence an individual's personality, mannerism and most importantly their perception. Lack of non-verbal communication or face-to-face interaction in remote working setting can increase the risks of misconception and cause conflict between individuals in a multi-cultural team. Multi-cultural teams can have different communication styles and social interaction, for example there are difference in conventions on factors such as time, giving and receiving feedbacks and confrontations.

2.5 Conclusion

According to the existing studies on the overall experience based on transition stage to remote working. Remote working is considered as a positive solution during the surge of Covid-19 pandemic. There are many advantages to working remotely, such as flexibility, cross border collaboration and more efficient way of sharing information through the help of technology. However, there are challenges such as difficulty in creating a work-life balance and work distractions.

In remote work environment, communication and interaction are the two key factors for success (Cagiltay et al., 2015). In business perspective, communication is considered as a powerful tool. Effective communication helps develop an understanding and relationship between employees. It can influence the attitude required for motivation and cooperation. There are different styles of communication that can be categorized into formal and informal communication. According to existing studies, online communication through ICT is not enough to deliver an effective communication and not as efficient as face-to-face communication (Wang et al. 2021). Due to the lack of personal contact and non-verbal communication, conflicts and misinterpretation can occur.

Face-to-face interaction is another key factor to delivering an effective communication. Face-to-face interaction is considered as an in-person communication that enables non-verbal types of communication. Information can be conveyed through the tone of voice, facial expression and body language. Face-to face interaction is not only valuable to the effectiveness of communication but also to developing a stronger social relationship in the workplace. Due to the Covid-19 restriction and the enforcement of remote working, employees have lost the opportunity for face-to-face interaction, limiting the non-verbal aspects of communication. There were challenges in encouraging a change in culture and collaborative infrastructure in remote working settings due to the lack of informal social communication (Beňo, Hvorecký and Cagáňová, 2021). Due to this limitation, it has become a challenge to develop trust within the team. This can result in decreasing innovation, productivity, and team collaboration.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

1. **What effect does the transition to remote working have on the effectiveness of communication within a multinational company during the Covid-19 pandemic?**

   - How does remote working change our ways of communicating?

   - What is the importance of effective communication in remote working?

2. **What is the importance of face-to-face interaction in developing relationship and trust within a team working remotely?**

   - How did face-to-face interaction change during the pandemic?

   - What is the importance of trust in developing a collaborative team?

3. **What effect does remote working have on the future of work setting.**

   - How did remote working during the pandemic influenced the employees' mindset?

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy can be defined as a way of gathering, analysing and using data based on a phenomenon. Research Philosophies can differ based on the components that help develop the research paradigm, underpinning the key ontological and epistemological assumptions. Research paradigm is determined by understanding the assumptions based on the interconnected components that are categorize as ontology and epistemology. For a better understanding each category are explained and defined as follows:

Ontology

Ontology refers to the nature of the reality and approached the phenomenon based on the nature of its existence. In terms of research, ontology is how a researcher seeks for answers and the reality of a research question by taking into consideration the existing knowledge. (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998).

Epistemology

Epistemology can be defined as the reality based on the researcher's perspective. Epistemology is concerned on the how a researcher approaches towards identifying reality and how to uncover the knowledge (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

For better understanding, the researcher will focus on the comparison between two major types of research philosophies, Positivism and Interpretivism.

Positivism

Positivism can be considered as the scientific approach based on observable reality that leads to generalization based on facts. Positivism strictly focuses on pure data that cannot be influenced by interpretation and the possibility of human biased (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). When researchers adopt a more extreme positivist position, the focus on identifying facts and regularities the are measurable and observable. This can lead to a more credible and meaningful data. However, the methods used by positivism can have its limitation in the social aspect of reality as it aims to reduce the complexity and simplify the data collected.

Adopting a positivist approach can have its challenges, for example:

1. Statistical test are susceptible to misinterpretation and misuse. Credibility of data will also depend largely on the sample size.

2. Positivism is mainly focused in generalization and simplifying the data, this can lead for the researcher to ignore intentions and actions. This can be limiting, if the purpose of the study is subjective to the participants perspective.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism takes into consideration that human beings are different in comparison to the physical phenomenon. Taking an in-depth approach in the meaning and factors related to context such as circumstances, cultures and different social realities (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Interpretivism differs from positivism due to the richness of the information gathered rather than providing generalised and simplify data. The ontological assumption on reality for interpretivist is that there is no single external reality and no direct access to the real world. Epistemological assumption is that the understanding of information is through perceived knowledge seek to understand a specific context.

According to Littlejohn and Foss (2009) (cited in Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020), There are three variations of interpretivism:

1. Phenomenology - This is a perspective of the world based directly on experiencing a phenomenon. Taking value from the experiences lived by human beings.

2. Hermeneutics - Understanding by philosophy interpretation, focusing on biblical sources and literatures.

3. Symbolic interactionism - This is a perspective that describes how society are constructed through repeated actions made by human beings. Understanding that social world through communication by means of languages and symbols.

For the purpose of the study, the researcher follows an Interpretivism philosophy to determine the effects of remote working on the effectiveness of communication and social interaction within a multicultural team during the pandemic. The research aims to identify the effects by investigating the phenomena through the participant's experiences. The research will follow an ontological assumption that there is no single external reality and an epistemological

assumption that, understanding the specific context of remote working is through a perceived knowledge of the participants experiences.

4.2 Research Type

Inductive and Deductive are the two major approaches to a research, these are the types mainly used in educational settings. Each types determines how researcher create assumptions about the nature of knowledge. The type of research thinking is determined by the research philosophy followed by the researcher, which therefore influence the overall structure of the study. This includes elements such as the research's intent, used of literature, focus of the research and how the researcher collects, analyse and validates the data.

Inductive approach

According to Trochnim (2006) (Cited in Soiferman, 2010) Inductive is "Bottoms up" approach, going from specific to general, creating arguments and assumptions based on observation and experiences of individuals. Reasoning for an inductive approach are considered to be subjective focusing on understanding dynamics, behaviours, robustness and with the aim of constructing alternative futures. Conclusion arising from inductive research are possibilities and not certain. Inductive method can never be proven and can be invalidated (Scribbr, 2022).

Deductive approach

Deductive is a "Top down" approach, beginning with an existing theory to proving a formulated specific hypothesis, providing additional information or contradiction to the existing theory. Deductive approach consist of the following four stages:

1. Begins with an existing theory.
2. Creating a hypothesis based on the existing theory.
3. Collecting data and testing the hypothesis.
4. Analysing the collected data.
5. Validating hypothesis based on data.

There are limitations that may arise from deductive approach where the conclusion can only be true of the existing theory and the premises of the initial inductive study are true (Soiferman, 2010).

Due to the interpretivism nature of the research, the research type will be based on an Inductive approach. Structuring the research from "bottom up". The study begins with a specific observation on remote working during the pandemic and its impact on communication and social interaction within a multicultural team. The researcher will collect data based on participant's experiences and develop a general conclusion based on recognised patterns. The aim for this study is to have a better understanding of the existing phenomenon developing a foundation to for a possibility of a deductive research on communication and social interaction in remote working.

4.3 Research Procedures

4.3.1 Sampling Strategy

Sampling strategy determines the selection of a particular group or the sample of individuals chosen to represent the population. There is two major categories of sampling, probability and non-probability.

Probability sampling

Probability sampling is where the representative sample of the population has equal opportunity to be chosen. This can be done by doing a random sampling of the population with the purpose of developing a conclusive data that is unbiased (Acharya, 2013). Hypotheses are tested using probability sampling and present data in statistical approach.

Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling is a method of sampling, where the selected individual from the population will not be known. This will be considered as a non-random sampling used for exploratory research (Acharya, 2013). This method can be subjected and used for generating hypothesis based on interpreted and analysed data.

The researcher has chosen a common type of non-probability sampling for the purpose of the study. Convenience or purposeful sampling is chosen, where the sample is selected based on the convenience of the researcher. The researcher has chosen the participants based on the availability and accessibility, while meeting relevant conditions for the study. The unit of

analysis will be focused on multinational companies in Ireland, who has enforced remote working during the the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic is introduced as a factor in this study to provide a time period with an existing common source of opportunity and challenges for the targeted participants of the study. Allowing the environment and factors that are relatable to the current and future studies.

4.3.2 Participants

Purposeful sampling has been used for the purpose of this study, only employees who are currently working remotely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 to present have been chosen to participate. All participants are employees of multinational companies operating worldwide. The researcher have invited each participants by email or chat to participate in a semi-structured interview. Respondents have participated without incentives. Ten participants were interviewed for the purpose of this study. All participants participated in interview conducted via video call. All interviews were given a 30 minutes duration and were recorded with the consent of the participants. For further information on the sample profile please see Appendix B.

4.3.3 Ethical Protocol

The study received full ethical approval from the national College of Ireland (NCI) ethics committee. The researcher have informed participants at the beginning of each interview that the data collection will be completely anonymous. Each participant will be simply label as "Participant A – Participant J". Participants consented to the recording of the interview for transcribing purposes. Participants were reminded at the start of the interview the purpose of the study is to simply understand their personal experience and any company name or confidential task will not be included and removed from transcripts. Interviews were stored on a password-protected computer, housing all data.

4.3.4 Time Horizon

There are two different types of research design which determines the collection of data at a specific duration in time.

Longitudinal study

Longitudinal research design requires repeated observation, collecting data generated from the same group and follow the changes experienced by the participant over time (Scribbr, 2022). This approach requires data to be collected in multiple times and over a period of time.

Cross-sectional study

Cross-sectional research design requires observation in a single point of time (Scribbr, 2022). Collecting data from different groups as representative of the population, allowing the researcher to create a representation of society at a given point.

For the purpose of the study, the researcher conducted a cross-sectional study, focusing on creating a representation of the society during the covid-19 pandemic. Due to the time limitation of the research, data will be collected at a single point of time, observing the experience of the participants while working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.3.5 Data Collection Method

Quantitative and Qualitative research are the two main types of analysis that are typically used in educational settings. These methods can be used on their own or together to address the same question.

Quantitative research method

Quantitative research is the method used for statistical analysis, understanding the connection between variables by using either inferential or descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics are generated from the descriptive statistics and generalized assumptions based on the population sample. Descriptive statistic helps shape the parameters of the population to develop inferences (Soiferman, 2010). Data collected through quantitative analysis are often represented through visual representation such as graphs, tables, and charts. Quantitative research method often drawn its conclusion from arguments, logic and evidence collected from the sample.

Qualitative research method

Qualitative analysis focuses on the natural setting, this method can be subjective as the researcher becomes the main instrument for the reasoning of the data collection. Through this method, researcher gathers the data and analyse by identifying themes and focusing on the participant's interpretation and perspective of their experience (Ejimabo, 2015). Data collected are mainly represented through words and or text from participants. Based on broad and general

questions, participant's answers are analysed through thematic analysis. This method can be time consuming and often used for social science research that are not supported by firm guidelines and procedures. Conclusion are often biased and can continuously change with more data collected. Qualitative research follows an inductive approach going from specific to general, creating arguments and assumptions based on observation and experiences of individuals.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has conducted a form of qualitative research through semi-structured interviews. Designed to ask general and broad questions with the aim of understanding the participant's experience of remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the qualitative data collection is to identify themes based on the participants experience and have a better understanding of the impact of remote working in relation to communication and social interaction for multicultural teams. The researcher has chosen this method to enable participants to share their experiences in depth and have the freedom to express and share their thoughts and opinions without limitation of structured questions (for example through surveys).

4.3.6 Interview Process

The interviews were conducted via video call through zoom. The interview were semi-structured, with the aim to provide a loose structure to explore the chosen topic. Examples of questions are listed below, Full list of interview question is shown in Appendix B.

"What are your thoughts on the overall experience of remote working?"
"What does effective communication mean to you?"
"What are your thoughts on face-to-face interaction in the workplace?"

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings

5.1 Data Analysis Strategy

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will be followed during the review of the collected data. According to Boyatzis (1998) as cited in Braun & Clarke (2006) Thematic analysis is defined as,

"*a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (Themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data in (rich) details. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic*".

There is 6 phases in thematic analysis that will be followed by the researcher, this should not be considered as a linear model but rather a recursive process.

1. **Familiarisation with the data**

   The researcher will need to be completely immerse and familiarise with their collected data. Reading multiple times and noting initial analytic observations.

2. **Coding**

   Coding is an analytic process, capturing both the sematic and conceptual reading of the data. Involving creating pithy labels for important features of the data collected that are relevant to the research question guiding the analysis. The researcher must use this phase to collate all the codes applied and extract relevant data.

3. **Searching for Themes**

   As themes do not passively emerge from the data, the researcher will need to actively generate and construct the themes. Themes are coherent and meaningful patterns observed in the collected data.

4. **Reviewing Themes**

   The researcher should review whether the themes are telling a compelling and convincing story about the collected data. This phase allows the researcher to define the nature and relationship

of the individual themes. It is a possibility that some themes might need to be split or combined or even discarded during this phase.

5. **Defining and naming themes.**

The researcher is required to write a detailed analysis based on each theme, identifying the essence, while constructing a concise and informative name for each theme.

6. **Writing up**

The researcher will then write up an analytic narrative to provide the reader with coherent and persuasive story about the data and relating the context produced with the existing literature.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006).

5.2 Findings / Results

Based on the thematic analysis, there are two main themes produced.

1. Adaptation
   Sub-themes:
      i. Impact on communication.
      ii. Impact on face-to-face interaction.

2. Hybrid work setting.
   Sub-themes:
      i. Impact of long-term remote working.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Adaptation

Early Stage - Transition

Almost all participants have experienced challenges at the initial stages of the transition to remote working. With the additional uncertainty caused by the pandemic, many have faced

difficulty in maintaining a balance between their personal and professional life. The main contributing factors were the urgency of the transition and the lack of preparation. Almost all participants were unable to create a separated space for work. Illustrated examples appears below.

Participant H:

"At the start of the pandemic, it was hard for me , it took a lot of getting use to. There was a lot of trial and error basically. For the first year and even the first few months it was more stressful ."

Participant F:

"I think it was hard in the beginning and especially this was something I've never considered. So it was kinda hard for me at the beginning".

"I wasn't sure like, I didn't have a proper setup for work so it was really hard to find like a proper place to work from at home and to focus so that was challenging."

There were other common issues that many of the participants have encountered while working remotely, such as technical issues and the difficulty to disconnect. Almost all participants have stated the challenges of "bad internet connection" disrupting their focus and work flow. This leads to slower productivity and delay in task completion. Some participants have also stated the difficulty in disconnecting from work after working hours. Some participants who shared their home with family or other people were often distracted and unable to switch their focus back to work.

Participant A:

"Well not really much but other than that it could be just you know technical things for example and due to issues like the Internet connections and stuff like, it's not stable most of the time so not only for me but my colleague. So it's kind of hard working with that."

Participant G:

"In the office you had more access to office equipment and stronger internet. At home there are more chances of internet problem…"

"So it was harder to disconnect . other challenges is that I found it hard to disconnect and was always tempted to use my laptop. It seems like I always remember something I forgot to do . But for some reason its always after work."

Participant B:

"It's easy to switch but at the same time you cannot just shut yourself from something. so I'll give you an example I sometimes work late hours in the night just to finish few tasks (um) I have. OK other than having flexibility to do it at different times but I also don't know (sort of) not feeling guilty, but I feel like "I really need to finish this" or to do this just to have it ready. If you know what I mean, I suppose that's a negative aspects to it was if we were working from the office like full time once you find it you should finish it you just go home and I'd say it's the end it's great."

Participant C:

"work life and personal got mixed together, it's like you kind of you're working but you don't work at the same level or the same consistency in your from home. Because you're working and then you go down for breakfast and you see your siblings out there and then you're talking to them. So you don't have the same flow as compared to the office because when you are in office environment, it's just mostly constantly work. You don't get things done well at home. It's just you might go to the shop, ,your nephews and nieces might come down. and then it's kind of gets hard it's very hard to switch on and switch off from work you know."

Adapting to change

According to participants, the overall experience of remote working was positive. As time passes, they were able to create a better routine, better time management for both work and personal life and have a more comfortable experience. Many participants expressed a more relaxed and flexible work flow at home. Three participants have also expressed being able to feel safe while working remotely during the pandemic. One of the most common benefit that participants found during their experience while working remotely was being able to save money and time from not requiring to commute to work.

Participant G:

"I was living with people who are high risk and it was definitely a positive point to have the opportunity to WFH during the pandemic as I was able to continue to work and at the same time keep the people around me safe."

Participant A:

"OK yeah so since the COVID-19 started it gave all of us a chance to experience working from home, Honestly for me, I do prefer working remotely because it gave me much more positive impact due to myself having more control with my own time or schedule .I was also safer in my own home rather than traveling in the bus or Luas and going into a workplace where you're more exposed and likely to get COVID. "

Participant B:

"So I think in my personal opinion it has impacted me in a positive way. I got to stay with my family longer. I got to workout at flexible hours. I got used to the new situation etc. I'm also not having to commute,"

Participant E:

"It's perfect because I was able to combine many things, I can do many things while I work. Especially with kids, I don't have issue with my performance at work, I can mind the kids and im saving lot's of funds on not commuting. Yeah, for me its great."

Sub theme 1: Impact on Communication

According to the thematic analysis, participants found positive and negative impact in communication during remote working.

Communication software were provided for the company that provided chats, group communication, email, voice calls and video calls. For some participants, similar systems were provided from well-known providers such as zoom, Microsoft Teams and company email. This had made communication instantaneous and efficient for business purposes.

According to participants, each communication channel available are more useful for a specific purpose. For example, emails for instruction and formal business communication, chats were used for more informal conversation with colleagues and Video calls for important meetings or urgent calls.

For example:

Participant A:
"So my experience of communication during remote working was good because we have our own software that we use in a company that provides services for needs and also allows us to communicate effectively to our respective things. So overall we use emails and we do have individual chats and group chats."

Participant C:
"The messaging platform between me and our team and also a video conferencing software like zoom obviously. You video conferencing is not really or zoom is not really used unless I have an important message to mention or addressed. But usually the usual kind of way of communication is through messages from the most efficient and fastest way to communicate but obviously what messages is very precise and very kind of specific compared to zoom."

Participants believed that effective communication is the ability to clearly convey the intention of the message to reduce the possibility of miscommunication and misinterpretation. Participants believes thar effective communication can also help increase productivity. As illustrated below.

Participant G:
"For me it means that the message is successfully delivered and the person to receive that messages understand the intention clearly."

Participant I:

"An effective communication would be listening, being aware of each other's cultures and building trust through verbal communication. It is also important to keep it clear and short to avoid any misunderstanding."

Participant C:

'What I found working remotely is that people who kind of have effective communication or efficient communication get things done much faster."

As mentioned above, there were also negative experiences in communication while working remotely. These include:

1. Most participants found challenges and felt frustration from the delays in response caused by technical issues and sometimes, simply from other colleagues choosing to ignore messages or call.

> Participant E:
> *"Sometimes you cannot reach people immediately, you know people are not checking their messages straight away. So in communication, there was a few challenges while working."*

2. Information and messages can be duplicated and misinterpreted due to the multiple communication group that are not maintained and monitored.

> Participant I:
> *"A messaging program is a great tool to collaborate, create project groups and organise your workspace. However, it is independent of what users' do which often leads to duplicates of the information. This information can be mis-interpreted and shared via multiple groups created"*

3. During meetings conducted over a video/conference call, attendees usually have the camera off. These reduces the engagement and can sometimes feel like they are only talking to themselves.

> Participant G:
>
> *"It was a bit difficult because most of the sessions were delivered through zoom or video call. Even though I go on camera, most of the time the people I am delivering the session to have their camera off. So most of the time it felt like I was just talking to myself, for example when I ask questions usually it is just silence. This actually impact my motivation in a negative manner. I was demotivated and at some point I felt like I just didn't care. I would just deliver the session and finish the call as soon as possible."*

> Participant C:
>
> *"During the regular day people can hide behind their screens and they can have all sorts of excuses. But obviously when you're working in person there's those excuses are not there you know because the same side you can ask a question they can answer straight away, like there's no hiding behind the screen or anything you know. and that's one of the challenges I guess with work remotely that people can hide behind screens and have excuses and things just get delayed and longer to answer".*

Culture Diversity as a factor in effective communication.

According to participants, culture diversity is a benefit, especially for multinational companies, Respective market knowledge and backgrounds are considered assets for many international companies. All participants believe that culture diversity is part of the norm and with mutual respect and being aware of each other's culture helps reduce conflict and the possibility of miscommunication and misinterpretation.

Participant I:

"Diversity does not change my way of collaborating. I will support, share my knowledges, regardless of origins, gender, sexual orientation. It is however sometimes needed to understand someone's culture to communicate and avoid mis-interpretations."

Participant A:

"There were, Culture (diversity) helps in especially in an international company that I worked for where different opinions are taken into consideration due to their respective market knowledge and backgrounds."

Sub theme 2: Impact on Face-to-face Interaction

According to the participants' response, Face-to-face interaction is important in terms of non-verbal communication such body language and facial expression. This can also be considered as one of the important human needs in a social aspect. However, participants have also expressed that after the introduction of remote working, almost all participants believe that face to face interaction is not a daily necessity.

Participant F:

"yeah I prefer it, I prefer talking to people face to face. I prefer having this connection as a human beings after all and this is important for our existence"

Participant E:

"We are still human. We still need to see other people communicate and interact face to face but for me it's not something that I would like on a daily basis."

The thematic analysis conducted found different point of views on interaction during remote working, some say it became purely professional and only business related. While some say it was more than just about work and it was used to create a deeper level of relationship. Participants expressed that face-to face interaction helps build a good relationship and encourage growth for the team. Face to face interaction is an important factor of social interaction in creating trust encouraging collaboration in the company. As illustrated below.

Participant I:

"In general, my thoughts on face-to-face interactions would be purely professional and stressful. However, the pandemic made me eager to meet and get to know my colleagues without the barrier of digital appearance."

Participant C:

"I think that we develop a connection with people once you both venture frustration to each other regarding the work or the team. Whatever could be on, that develops a lot trust between colleagues. Sometimes you need it, sometimes you just need someone to listen to and when you have that person, then definitely can develop a different level of camaraderie."

The level of interaction still depended on the individuals, this can be influenced by their personality or by their job role. According to the participants, collaboration also depends on the people's effort. The level of collaboration in a team can also rely on the communication. Face to face interaction encourages trust and collaboration that can lead to an environment open for creativity and shared opinions.

Participant E:

"The thing is, I had to interact with less people and so for me that was positive. (Again) because before I don't want to interact with too many people and seen with myself, I was much less stressed."

Participant A:

"So face to face interaction is important even just going twice a week so we would be able to communicate much better. I feel people tend to give more opinions and generate ideas when meeting in person. It paints us a greater picture of the people that we are working with so we get to know them better."

5.2.2 Theme 2: Hybrid Model – the future for multinational companies.

At the end of each interview, each participants were asked the same final question as shown below.

"If you were given a choice, would you continue to work from home or back in the office or the possibility of both?"

All participants have mentioned the word "Hybrid", each participant had expressed the hope for a hybrid format going forward. The possibility of having the option to work remotely and WFO (Work from the Office). According to all participants, once the government restrictions were lifted, they were given the option to work from the office few days out of the week. Participants expressed that having this option is important to facilitate and encourage employees to build trust and relationship with other colleagues.

For example:

Participant A:
"I personally prefer having the flexibility to work both, as we still need to have (you know) the social aspect of working in a company. You got a better sense of belonging in that way and you're less likely to feel excluded in the team. As for working from home it helps a lot with work life balance because I've had more time to spend to myself. so I like balancing both working from home and in the office"

Participant G:
"I would prefer a hybrid model, balancing office and home. I prefer having the flexibility but also the chance to interact with the team at a social level. I think it is important to still have the chance to have interaction with other people you work with as it can help create a stronger team. But also have the flexibility to work from home. Cause it has its benefits as mentioned before, like its less stressful, I can concentrate more especially once you have established a work-life balance."

One of the first benefits that all participants have mentioned relating to a hybrid work format was "flexibility". The main source of positive experience during remote working was the ability to manage their own time and to be able to do tasks related to their personal life without interfering with their work. This was one of the important aspect of remote working they wish to continue going forward, but also have the chance to interact and create a stronger relationship with their team. One participant stated that having an option and allowing employees to make a choice is more motivating, as this makes the change feel like a choice and not forced upon.

Participant H:

"For me right now, we have the option to work from the office or home and we have the option to do both. I haven't really gone to the office cause maybe I gotten so used to the routine I have at home. But for the future I think both, I think it might work in the long run because you can have the flexibility .It going to be up to you and doesn't feel like you are forced. Like you know its not like they are going to force you to go to the office or lose your job. There is that flexibility now and it can be more motivating because you feel like you have a choice, I would go with the hybrid environment."

Impact of long-term remote working.

Most participants have shared their experiences based on the passed 2 years of remote working during the pandemic. They emphasized on the importance of social face to face interaction and the necessity of creating a balance between working remotely and working from the office. Some participants were experiencing social anxiety, mental breakdown and even loss of confidence. Participants who are not English native speakers, began to experience a decrease in their language proficiency due to the lack of interaction. Many of the participants stated that there were tendency for employees working from home to slack and be lazy due to restriction and lack of available activity that led to demotivation and depression. Illustrated below are few examples of long-term impacts of remote working.

Participant H:

"My work got slower, the standard of work was the same but it just got slower. Especially due to the internet connection .The big change for me personally, was that I developed a social anxiety. After working remotely for over 2 years now, when I am in a crowded place I would get anxiety. There were bits of pieces, here and there when it comes change. Then there is communication, I feel like my communication skill has worsened. Not worsen but it was definitely affected . I don't interact with people as much as I did in the office format. Now because its mainly behind the screen I don't get a chance to talk to people much and that was one of the biggest change for me."

Participant J:

"I had a mental breakdown during that period, not because of the pandemic because of work and then I started seeing a psychologist and was talking about the pandemic and the fact of working from home. She was saying that a lot of people feeling they became lazy."

Chapter 6: Discussion

This research aims to understand the impact of remote working on the effectiveness of communication and the importance of face-to-face interaction in developing relationship and trust within a team. Taking into consideration the experiences of employees from multinational companies, who are working remotely during the pandemic. The research aims to understand how employees are influenced by their experience and how this can change the workplace setting in the future.

Based on the thematic analysis conducted, the result suggest that all participants have undergone through an adaptation stage to what we can now consider as "the new norm". Due to the uncertainty of the pandemic, many have faced difficulty at the early stages of the transition. As time passes, all participants have expressed changes from a challenging experience to an overall positive experience.

6.1 Impact of remote working to the effectiveness of team communication.

Communication can be considered as a process of sharing information, ideas, knowledge, feelings or attitude with others through a common understandable way (Hamilton, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on what is considered as an effective communication. According to the results of the thematic analysis, participants believe that effective communication is the ability to clearly convey the intention of a message to reduce the possibility of miscommunication and misinterpretation. The research shows that many participants were satisfied with the ICT (Information and communication technologies) provided by their companies. The results suggest that participants were provided with communication channels that worked effectively for a specific purpose. For example, emails were used for formal communication, chats were used for casual and more instant communication and voice and video call were mainly used for important meetings and urgent matters.

However, the results also suggest that the effectiveness of communication still highly depends on the effort and engagement of the individuals involved. Even with the innovative and

improved technologies available, human behaviour still plays a key role in the effectiveness of communication. The result suggest that human behaviours were the key factor to the negative experience relating to communication while working remotely. For example, participants felt frustration from delays in response and attendees of video/conference call would have their cameras off. These types of behaviour often lead to demotivation, lack of team engagement, lack of trust and reduced productivity.

As illustrated in the literature review section, many studies were conducted during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In comparison, this qualitative research was conducted 2 years after the initial government restriction and remote working was enforced. According to Robinson (cited in Cagiltay *et al.*, 2015), one of the greatest hurdles in the resolution of intercultural conflicts is that the parties involved, often misinterpret each other's intentions. Unintentional conflicts may occur due to contradictions or confrontations caused by different values, opinions, assumptions or beliefs. A surprising outcome did arise from the thematic analysis conducted. As suggested by the results, culture diversity is an asset and considered as part of the norm. Participants did not find culture diversity as a key factor to communication challenges. Participants have shared the same opinion that awareness and mutual respect is important to ensure that no conflict and misinterpretation arises. However, this outcome does not represent a general representation as many participants works in similar business field.

6.2 The importance of face-to-face interaction.

Face-to face interaction is not only valuable factor to the effectiveness of communication but also to developing a stronger social relationship in the workplace. Face-to-face interaction allows individuals to express their feelings and develop a sense of social belongingness in comparison to computer-based interaction. According to social psychological theory based on Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (1943), Face-to face interaction helps develop the social needs based on human interaction and can influence an individual's self-esteem. Having connections with other individuals in either online and offline settings are an importance source of resilience and support (Marinucci, et al. 2022). As suggested by the thematic analysis, many participants agreed with the statement above. However, participants have also expressed that after the introduction of remote working, almost all participants believe that face to face interaction is

not a daily necessity. As suggested by the results, the level of interaction are still highly influenced by the individual's personality and level of effort.

6.3 Introduction of Hybrid Model

The experiences shared by each participants were based on a 2 years period of remote working, going through a difficult transition due to the urgency caused by the government restriction as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As indicated in the results, no one was prepared and many found it difficult to create a work-life balance. Many were unable to create a space for work and a space to detached from work. The most common issues were technical problems such as the internet connection and difficulty in disconnecting. The result suggests many employees worked outside their working hours due to the temptation of completing pending tasks as their working space is within reach. The research shows that most experiences shared based on the first few months of working remotely were negative and challenging.

According to the results, almost all participants found the 2 years' experience to be overall positive. With time, employees were able to create a better routine and manage their time more efficiently. They develop ways to be more productive and less susceptible to distractions at home. Many participants expressed a more relaxed and flexible work flow at home. However, there were evidence of negative impact arising from long-term remote working. The result suggest employees who lack interaction from other people developed social anxiety, mental breakdown and lack of confidence. This mainly impacts individuals who are single or live away from family.

As emphasized above, In a virtual work environment, communication and interaction are the key factors for success. In order to create a successful environment for collaboration, team structure and communication patterns have to be effective and compatible with each other (Cagiltay et al., 2015). Remote working brings many benefits, this includes flexibility to manage your own time, saving money, and more time with the family. However, as illustrated above, it comes with negative impacts that can lead to depression, demotivation and reduced productivity.

As illustrated in the results, all participants had expressed the hope for a hybrid work setting going forward. A Hybrid model is the option of splitting the days in the week to working remotely and working from the office. This encourages employees to develop trust and good rapport with other colleagues. Creating an environment open for creativity, stronger teamwork and collaboration. Having this option can also increase morale and motivation as this can allow employees to have flexibility and not feel forced.

6.4 Limitations

This research, however, is subject to several limitations. As detailed below.

1. **Narrow Scope**

This research only included 10 individuals to participate in a semi-structured interview. The research is focused on the experiences of employees who worked for multinational companies who transitioned to remote working during the pandemic. For the purpose of the study, the research was narrow down to 2 main factors, Communication and Face-to-Face interaction.

The sample profile for this research can also be considered as a limitation, below states the 10 participants sample profile.

Participant	Gender	Industry	Duration of Remote Work
Participant A	Female	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant B	Female	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant C	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant D	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 1 years
Participant E	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant F	Female	Information Technology company	> 2 years

Participant G	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	< 6 months
Participant H	Female	Accounting and Finance/information Technology	> 2 years
Participant I	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant J	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years

"Multinational company employees" is one of the condition set by the researcher in order to create a more focused research scope, however due to the researcher's limited access to resources. The sample mainly consist of individuals from the tech industry, which can influence the data due to the similarity of work.

2. Methodology

The researcher has chosen a qualitative research method. Through this method, researcher gathers the data and analyse by identifying themes and focusing on the participant's interpretation and perspective of their experience (Ejimabo, 2015). Qualitative analysis can be subjective as the researcher becomes the main instrument for the interpretation and reasoning of the data. Personal biased can be difficult to manage when interpreting the data collected. The researcher's presence during the data collection (Interview) may also influence the participant's responses.

3. Resources

Another limitation to the research is the time constraint, The research is based on a topic the is subject to the impact of change. As the study is concentrated on the experiences during a certain phenomenon that in uncertain and unpredictable, a future longitudinal study might be required. To further explain, the literature review section were mostly from the period of the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and the interview were conducted during the time government restriction were lifted. With time, new conditions relating to this topic may come to light and experiences may change.

4. Generalizability

Qualitative studies are great methods to provide and understand in-depth information on human experience. Despite the positive aspect of qualitative analysis, there is still a lack of

objectivity and generalizability. The findings of these type of studies cannot be generalized from the research sample to the entire population.

6.5 Recommendation

To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address the impact of remote working post-pandemic or the possible impact of the hybrid model. A longitudinal research is a more appropriate approach for future studies. Longitudinal research design is a repeated observation, collecting data generated from the same group and follow the changes experienced by the participants over time (Scribbr, 2022).

The result of this study and possible future studies can help improve the development and implementation of change management. Change takes place at a faster pace and understanding the necessary factors to help employees adapt to change through a positive experience is important. As shown in the result above, an initial negative experience can develop into an opportunity to explore new possibilities and create an overall positive experience. Failure to implement an effective change can have high impact. This can lead to the loss of key employees, reduction in productivity, engagement, and motivation. People professionals, HR functions and management have the responsibility to drive effective change and can have better understanding of employee experience through this research and future adaptation of this topic.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This section will conclude the study by summarising the key research findings in relation to the research questions, as well as outlining the values and contribution based on the results.it will also review the limitations of the research and propose possible opportunities for future studies.

This research aimed to investigate and understand the impact of remote working on the effectiveness of communication within a multinational company during the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as to understand the importance of face-to-face interaction in developing relationship and trust within a team. The researcher aimed to provide an insight on how the experiences of communication and face-to-face interaction can influence the future structure of work settings. The results indicate that as human beings, people learn to adapt to change and human behaviour and level of engagement are key factors to creating positive and negative experiences. Even with the innovative and improved technologies available, challenges and miscommunication can still occur. It is important for companies to understand the driving factors for individuals to increase motivation, engagement, and productivity during an introduction of change. As the study shows, this may include creating a balance between flexibility and social interaction in the case of remote working. As suggested by the findings, face-to-face interaction is no longer a daily necessity. However, this is still an important factor to meet social needs to create a better relationship and encourage growth for the team. As lockdowns and government restrictions have been lifted and many companies have slowly returned to the office. The results indicate that the introduction of "Hybrid" model is the preferred setting for many. A Hybrid model is the option of splitting the days in the week to working remotely and working from the office. This encourages employees to develop trust and good rapport with other colleagues. Creating an environment open for creativity, stronger teamwork, and collaboration. Nonetheless, these results must be interpreted with caution and several limitations should be borne in mind. These includes the narrow scope, methodology, resources and generalizability.

The results of this study can help improve the development and implementation of change management. Allowing people professionals, HR functions and management to drive effective change by facilitating the transition and adaptation stage with the overall aim of achieving a

positive experience for the employees. With the aim to create an environment that encourages, collaboration, knowledge sharing and creativity by understanding the needs of each individuals. To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address the impact of remote working post-pandemic or the possible impact of the hybrid model. A longitudinal research is recommended, to allow repeated observation and collecting data from the same sample, following the changes experienced by participants over time.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Focus Area	Questions/Probes
Remote Working	What are your thoughts on the overall experience of remote working? How was your experience in transitioning from traditional office work to WFH/remote working? What were the main changes for you? What in your opinion are the benefits and challenges of working remotely?
Work-life balance	How is your work- life balance while working remotely?
Covid-19 Challenges	How did the pandemic impact your experience of working remotely? What if any, were the challenges and benefit of working remotely during the pandemic?
Effective communication	What does effective communication mean to you? How was your experience with communication during remote working? What communication channels available to you and your team? PQ: What in your opinion are the benefits and challenges of these communication channels? Do you work with people with different culture? - Does working remotely impact communication between a team with culture diversity.
Face-to-Face interaction	What are your thoughts on face-to-face interaction in the workplace? What are the importance for you and your team? How was the interaction with your colleagues before and during the pandemic?
Trust	How is trust created in your team while working from home?
Collaboration	What is your experience in collaboration with other while working from home during the pandemic? PQ: Does the diversity in culture impact the way you collaborate with others?
Preferred work format	If you were given a choice, would you continue to work from home or back in the office or the possibility of both?

Appendix B:

Participant	Gender	Industry	Duration of Remote Work
Participant A	Female	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant B	Female	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant C	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant D	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 1 years
Participant E	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant F	Female	Information Technology company	> 2 years
Participant G	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	< 6 months
Participant H	Female	Accounting and Finance/information Technology	> 2 years
Participant I	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years
Participant J	Male	Tech industry/ Social media company	> 2 years