Digital Transformation and Virtual Team Transition due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

- An Empirical Study on Virtual Teams within Organizational Change Management

MASTER THESIS WITHIN: Business Administration

NUMBER OF CREDITS: 30 ECTS

PROGRAMME OF STUDY: Global Management and Digital Business

AUTHORS: Daniel Scherling & Iván Camarero Lind

JÖNKÖPING 5 / 2021
Abstract

Background: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic a series of regulations and recommendations were imposed. This resulted in firms transitioning their co-located teams into virtual teams in an effort to slow down and prevent the spread of COVID-19. This research focuses on the individual team member’s experience of the transition. The transition is a digital transformation and organizational change and its effects on the individual team member is being studied.

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to explore how individual team members experience the transition from a co-located team into a virtual team. Trust, communication and social interactions are previously known challenges for virtual teams. Therefore, we strive to explore how these aspects have been affected by the transition and how the individual team member has experienced it.

Method: This study follows a qualitative research design and the method of choice is semi-structured interviews that have been carried out in a virtual environment due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Eleven interviewees have contributed to the empirical study. The main findings are presented in chapter 4 and analyzed against existing literature in chapter 5, to finally be concluded in chapter 6.
**Conclusion:** Trust has previously been listed as a major challenge for virtual teams. However, our empirical findings have not identified trust as a major challenge and therefore contradict this. Communication has changed and the biggest two contributors to this is that the communication is digital and that body language becomes less effective in a virtual setting as compared to face-to-face communication. However, communication has not been a major issue during the transition but rather a complication. Social interactions were identified as the aspect affecting the team members the hardest since they had become non-existent except for in the virtual environment in many cases. A high level of digital maturity and the teams previously being co-located is seen to have made the transitions easier in terms of trust and communication. Furthermore, team members struggle to find their work life balance and often work more hours.
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone that has contributed towards our research. Our highly appreciated tutor Michal Zawadzki acted with courage, knowledge and passion which aided us in the process of shaping our research. The opponents in our seminar group gave helpful critics and engaged in fruitful discussions with us during the seminars which helped us improve our study. Our empirical study was made possible by the interviewees and enabled us to answer our research questions and carry out our research purpose. A great thank you everyone that contributed to our study!

Furthermore, we would like to show our gratitude to our course coordinator Karin Hellerstedt. Thank you for providing us with the course structure and instructions to complete our research. Last but not least, our deepest gratitude to Jönköping International Business School for giving us the opportunity to carry out academic research and providing an inspiring learning environment.

Daniel Scherling

Iván Camarero Lind

Jönköping International Business School

May 2021
Table of Contents:

1. Introduction 1
   1.1 Background 1
   1.2 Problem Discussion 3
   1.3 Purpose 4
   1.4 Research Questions 5

2. Frame of Reference 6
   2.1 Organizational Change Management 6
   2.2 Virtual Teams in connection to organizational change management 12
   2.3 Managing and leading virtual teams through the change process 21
   2.4 Summary 23

3. Methodology 25
   3.1 Research Philosophy 25
   3.2 Research Approach 26
   3.3 Research Purpose 27
   3.4 Research Strategy 27
   3.5 Sampling 28
   3.6 Data Collection 28
   3.7 Primary Data 29
   3.8 Secondary Data 30
   3.9 Respondents 31
   3.10 Data Quality 32
   3.10 Data Analysis 35
   3.11 Procedure 37
   3.12 Question Design and Formulation 37

4. Empirical Findings 39
   4.1 Trust not as problematic as theory suggests 39
   4.2 Communication challenges in the virtual environment 40
   4.3 Missing social interactions 42
   4.4 No major challenge to operational aspects in the virtual team transition 43
   4.5 Managing teams in the virtual era 45
   4.6 Finding the right work-life balance is a challenge 47
   4.7 Perspective on remote work 47
5. Analysis of Results
5.1 Introduction to analysis 49
5.2 Building Trust 49
5.3 Change in Communication 52
5.4 Social interactions 54
5.5 Digital Transformation 56
5.6 Effective Virtual Management 58
5.7 Theoretical Framework 59

6. Conclusions 60

7. Discussion 63
7.1 Theoretical Implications 63
7.2 Practical Implications 63
7.3 Limitations to Study 64
7.4 Critique of Method 65
7.5 Future Research 65

8. Reference List 67

Appendices 78
Appendix 1: Questionnaire 78
Appendix 2: Examples of coding process 80
Appendix 3: Data Analysis 83
1. Introduction

This chapter is designed to inform the reader regarding the background of the study, the problem discussion, the purpose and the research question. The background will introduce the transition into virtual teams from previously co-located teams due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic regulations and how team members experience this shift. The problem discussion will problematize this shift to virtual teams. The research purpose and research question will then define what we strive to achieve with this research.

1.1 Background

On the 1st of December 2019, the first COVID-19 case was identified in the Wuhan district of China (Ceylan et al., 2020). This later became a global pandemic and caused socio-economic panic worldwide in 2020. The initial effects of the pandemic has critically disturbed consumption, services, industries, finance and investments. Lockdowns have been enforced frequently on state or regional levels and a wide range of pandemic regulations changed the way businesses operate. The economic landscape has drastically changed due to the many restrictions imposed on economic activities, especially in Europe and the USA. Purchasing and consumption behaviors have changed and firms are in need to adapt in order to survive (Ceylan et al., 2020).

During the initial stages of the pandemic in 2020, businesses started adopting a new strategy in order to continue its operations. Firms that had previously hosted its employees in their office buildings now called for their employees to set up a home office and work from home. Wrycza & Maślankowski (2020) describes the transition from the traditional workplace to remote work as a radical breakthrough due to the digital transformation. Remote work is not a new concept but COVID-19 has certainly re-defined the role of remote work in a world and society that is rapidly becoming more digital. Furthermore, Wrycza & Maślankowski (2020) highlight the increasing support for remote work from the perspective of the employees. There is an expressed willingness and interest to continue working online from a remote location instead of simply going back to the traditional pre-COVID-19 office situation. A study conducted by Wrycza & Maślankowski (2020) showed that the amount of times remote work was mentioned in tweets was 15 times higher in March 2020 when the lockdown started as compared to March
2019, before the pandemic. Furthermore, the study found that more than 62% of the tweets addressed remote work in a positive way while less than 13% of the tweets were negative comments regarding remote work (Wryczka & Maślankowski, 2020).

The emergence of digital solutions have enabled organizations to transition into virtual work conditions in which tasks can be completed with a large degree of flexibility and responsiveness (Mehtab et al., 2017). Digital transformation and the role of virtual teams has become increasingly crucial in order to respond to the governmental regulations and restrictions issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To minimize the spread of the virus, the home office concept was developed and implemented on a greater scale than ever seen before from a global perspective. Furthermore, it’s expected that remote work and remote activities will continue in the near future while the pandemic is ongoing according to Madero Gómez et al. (2020). However, remote work and the implementation of virtual teams on a larger scale might prove itself to be a valid company strategy that is here to stay, even after the pandemic.

Madero Gómez et al. (2020) state factors such as stress, anger, annoyance, tolerance, fear and frustration as adherent to change in terms of remote work activities. These factors are harder to identify or position since remote work activities are carried out in a larger degree of isolation as compared to traditional in office work activities. It’s harder to display and comprehend emotions in this context. This creates an urgent need to identify and implement effective structures in order to overcome this challenge for virtual teams that carry out remote work.

Shingler-Nace (2020) describes the pandemic as a challenge, one in which social distancing is forced which naturally complicates certain work tasks and traditional communication in the workplace. This gave rise to a transition and an increase in virtual management structures and digital communication. COVID-19 is changing many aspects of the everyday life we got used to and we now live under a so-called new normal. The pandemic has also changed the way we need to operate in different positions. Remote work could affect factors such as trust and communication negatively.

There is no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic is acting as a catalyst for change in all aspects of society at large - economic, societal, personal and corporate. At this scale of change and at this speed, it’s clear that companies are facing a highly disruptive environment that is creating a generational shift. Even though there is high uncertainty concerning the pandemic, it’s clear that the shift will be digital and that remote work in the form of virtual teams will be used on a
larger scale as compared to the pre-pandemic state. Many companies are undergoing a digital transformation shift, towards a digital world and the pandemic has accelerated this process by imposing organizational change in the form of remote work and higher degrees of virtualness. This increases the usage of technology and changes the way teams operate. Furthermore, traditional ways of working and management behaviours are being challenged and the pandemic forces firms to transition their previously co-located teams into virtual teams. Virtual management has to be adopted and it might generate a virtual team with a new set of management structure, in which the team members lead each other towards the achievement of team goals. Virtual teams are a necessity in this pandemic situation and there is growing evidence that remote work and virtual teams are here to stay.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Much research has been done on the management attitude towards organizational change management (Carbery & Garavan, 2005; Jiang et al., 1997; Kotter, 1979) and on the effectiveness of the change from a corporate success criteria, such as profitability (Hayes, 2006). However, there is an urge in the literature to study the dynamics underlying organizational change and its implementation as a process experienced from the employees perspective (Nellisen & Van Selin, 2008). Scholars are calling for more research and more attention on the ways the employees perceive, communicate, manage and embrace organizational change in their work from a virtual team perspective. In our thesis, we will explore organizational change management during the pandemic period from the employees attitudes in the restructuring of the organization. We will explore their experience in the shift from a co-located to a virtual team creating a correspondence between organizational change management and the individual employees response.

Taking into account the impact of digital transformation initiatives with the covid-19 pandemic and their rapid effects on the work design, there is a need for more knowledge and a need for relevant contemporary research. This is needed in order to understand organizational change management and the employees experiences to further understand work in virtual teams. Scholars such as Cortellazoo et al. (2019) argue that there are conditions that favour successful organizational change from a digital transformation perspective. One of them being the workforce of the company, that should be analyzed and better understood in order to shed some
light into the effects of digital transformation on employees, both from an organizational and individual level.

We identified a research gap in the literature in regards to the shift to virtual work, much has been written about co-located work teams and many aspects of it have been very well defined. In addition to this, literature has also covered virtual teams, such as the importance of trust (Brahm & Kunze, 2012), or how to increase efficiency within this type of teams (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). However, the aspect of rapid transition has been neglected, going from a co-located work team to a virtual setting induced by rapid changes, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic. Where overcoming the challenges and overcoming the rapid change is a must and not something you could have planned months ahead. Potentially, affecting both the virtual team member interaction and work relationship between team members.

Seidl & Washington (2020) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as an opportunity to study structural changes that have been caused by rapid changes when previously slow transitions have been the focus of structural changes. Thus, a potential rapid shift in virtual team member interaction and work relationship between team members can be argued to be of more interest since it’s an under researched topic. Furthermore, the forced rapid transition into a virtual team correlates more with the contemporary rapid shifts of today’s modern society and organization (Seidl & Washington, 2020). Although a shift in structural changes can happen slowly today it’s more likely that the change is more rapid than it was in the past due to the digital landscape.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the shift from co-located teams transitioning into virtual teams induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pursuing this purpose, the focus is on how individual team members experience this shift and effects on trust, communication and social interactions.

This virtual shift might have entailed a whole different way of interacting within the team. We will conclude our paper analysing the changes in relation to existing literature on virtual teams and organizational change management.
1.4 Research Questions

Based on the problem discussion and purpose of our paper we have formulated the following research question and sub-questions:

RQ1: How have individual team members experienced the organizational change of transitioning from a co-located team into a virtual team during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- How has trust been affected by the transition?
- How has communication been affected by the transition?
- How have social interactions been affected by the transition?

These three sub-questions have been identified as challenges to virtual teams in research on virtual teams and they connect well to exploring our main research question. It’s of interest to our research. The study explores the individual responses and experiences during the change process of the employees, hence formulating research questions that will address their main challenges and changes affected by the transition.
2. Frame of Reference

The organization of the literature review will be as follows. First we will describe organizational change management as the base of the study and as a catalyst for the restructuring of organizations into virtual environments due to the pandemic. Secondly we will introduce virtual teams, what characterizes them and what challenges they present for team members and the effectiveness of the team. The role of management and leadership in virtual teams will also be discussed, followed by the conceptual framework as a summary of the frame of reference.

2.1 Organizational Change Management

Organizational change management has been a key pillar for corporations to ensure long-term business success and maintain their strategic positions through the transformation of the organization's internal strengths. Organizational change refers in the literature to the process in which an organization transforms several factors that significantly will affect the whole organization such as its existing structure, strategies, culture or work (Herold et al., 2008). In this transformational process, business leaders have to take into account a large amount of factors that might support or hinder the desired change (Ashkenas et al., 1995). In the case of this pandemic and this study, converting the whole organization into a virtual environment and shifting from the offices into remote work environments was the main organizational change.

In understanding organizational change management, it’s important to understand the relationship between change and the organizational change process. This relationship takes into consideration the implemented change through the leadership of the organization sharing their knowledge, which in turn identifies the different stages of the change process and how they are implemented. Change within organizations is a complex process, where the old and the new intertwine, building an innovative dynamic (Castel & Friedberg, 2010). In implementing this change, many methods and models have been proposed in order to manage change, however many organizations report a high failure rate in their change initiatives (Balogun & Hailey, 2004). These failures indicate the need for finding the factors that increase successful changes
and imply a lack of a valid framework for organizational change (By, 2005). Managers are in need of methods that are “situational”, that adapt to the changing environment and depend on the organizational and external context (Nyström et al., 2013).

Change management methods oftentimes tackle change on a large scale and require intervention strategies. Moran & Brightman (2001) define change management as “the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure and capabilities to serve the ever changing needs of external and internal customers” (p.73). These methods help with aligning the change initiative with the overall mission and outcome of the proposed change through planning and creating a vision with the employees.

The world is fast changing so organizations must change quickly in order to not stunt organizational growth, maintain the status quo and survive (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). These models and change management theories are proposed for understanding changes in organizations, for managers to monitor and evaluate their plan changes and foresee the pattern of change of individuals, technology and structure (Van Ossten, 2006).

One broadly used method and an early fundamental change model that can help in understanding change management is Lewin's three step change process model (Hussain, et al., 2018). Here is presented a proposed model explaining the whole cycle or process of organizational change management by applying Kurt Lewin's three step model:

![Organizational change management model](image)

*Figure 1: Organizational change management model by Hussain, et al., 2018.*
This model shows the step by step phases of unfreezing, changing and refreezing, involving employees and instructed by leaders regarding the change management process. According to Lewin's change model (Hussain, et al., 2018), a successful organizational change requires the system to be unfreezed in the initial stage in order to implement change and once implemented, refreeze the organization with the change.

One important aspect to take into account of this model is the importance of employee involvement in the change process, as we focus on employees' experiences during this change into virtuality. Employee involvement seeks to involve employees in the decisions that affect organizational performance and their well-being. It is greatly used for overcoming resistance to change when implementing change. Research points out that employee involvement can contribute to create team member commitment, motivation and leading change through sharing information and ideas. By addressing change effectively to employees, leaders can educate, communicate, involve and provide emotional support and incentives to their team members. Researching how employees experienced the shift in their work location will be useful for drawing insights into how change was implemented during the pandemic (Pierce et al., 2002).

During the change process, leaders have to be transparent in order to reaffirm trust, allowing employees to be involved in the change and discuss in order to achieve a better sense of control and task commitment. This is followed by a more active role of employees and positive feelings, enhancing the acceptance of change (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003).

The other important aspect to take into account is knowledge sharing in task assignments, performance outcomes, decision making, information flows, new technological tools, work methods and ideas for organizational improvement (Cummings & Worley, 2007). Knowledge sharing is crucial for the organization and the individuals of the company. This sharing is done at the individual, group and organizational level, expanding itself throughout the whole organization (Wenger et al., 2002).

When it comes to the change process, it can be planned or unplanned, depending on the situation and the force that has triggered the change (Osman, 2006). On one hand, planned change happens when business operations are improved after an analysis of problems that require change, this helps organizations improve their performance (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992). On the other hand, unplanned change is imposed by external forces that might disrupt
the organizational environment and its operations. Oftentimes it requires the organization to react quickly and strategically in order to minimize negative effects, take potential benefits and transform the situation into an opportunity (Shaw, 2018). Due to the lack of time and preparation, there might be barriers to the changes that can be a threat to the organization and such changes could also adjust the whole operation system of the organization and particularly affect employees. (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Hence, how employees respond to those changes is essential for understanding how to manage organizational change.

During this pandemic period, organizations were facing periods of great uncertainty and a need for a rapid and effective organizational change management strategy in order to ensure the maintenance of their business. One of the main challenges that organizations were facing was the restructuring of the organization into a completely virtual and remote work environment. This implies that employees work as a virtual team, team leaders have to adapt to a new type of management in a virtual setting and new issues and experiences arise with these implications.

In order to push the organization towards a successful transformation, a deep understanding of these new challenges imposed by the pandemic and related organizational factors can help develop change management approaches that will optimize this process (Ashkenas et al., 1995). During this pandemic, companies had to adapt quickly and respond to the change rapidly, having all employees working as virtual teams and having little time to gain this deep understanding and having to implement changes along the way, with its positive and negative consequences for both the business and the employees well being. According to Spreitzer et al. (2017), “As employment relationships evolve we need more theorising on how these changes affect how work is done, how people feel about their work, what their orientation towards work is, and the role work in their lives” (p.475). Psychologists are still struggling with the boundaries and definitions of the physical and the social environment. There is a critical need for new ways of conceptualizing the dynamic nature of the real and the virtual world, need for more contemporary research on virtual teams, the digital workforce and the set of organisational circumstances which we find us in (Gifford, 2014; Medcof & Rumpel, 2007).
2.1.1 Organizational Change through Digital Transformation

For this paper, it is important to understand digital transformation as it is the enabling force that creates the capabilities of companies to adapt and become virtual. Digital transformation is a term used in many fields that is defined as “a change in how a firm employs digital technologies, to develop a new digital business model that helps to create and appropriate more value for the firm” (Verhoef et al., p.1, 2021). It usually needs two prerequisite stages in order to be achieved. First one is digitization, which is the process of changing from traditional to digital, meaning converting all analog information into digital information stored in computers and that can be transferred between them. Secondly, is incorporating digitalization into business practices in order to improve them or creating additional value to customers (Verhoef et al., 2021). These two combined are interconnected with the process of digital transformation of the organization, a company-wide change on a fundamental level affecting all parts of the organization. At the micro level, it has an impact on work design and employees dynamics, communication processes, routines, skills and perceptions (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016).

With the pandemic, businesses had to change the way they work and innovate. This sudden need for work from home is driving change and the digital transformation of the workforce. Businesses at large have seen a huge increase in internet usage and have taken all communications and interactions to internet-based services in order to continue working. The lockdowns imposed by the pandemic have accelerated the implementation and usage of information and communication technology(ICT) systems in all aspects of society and with no sign to slow down and with continuation to grow in the foreseeable future. Companies have embraced organizational change management practices in order to transform and become virtual organizations, becoming critically dependent on ICTs, as the vast majority of business communications requires the use of these technologies and cannot function without them. There has been a vast increase in video and audio conferencing tools, making companies ramp up their technological infrastructure to meet the demands of the surge. Digital technologies such as cloud, internet of things(IoT), Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning are becoming central in all the corporation's restructuring efforts and of their digital transformation initiatives (Rahul et al., 2020).
A survey conducted by Jouany & Martic, (2020) found that only 3% of companies have actually finished any company-wide digital transformation initiative and more than 84% of them believe that digital transformation is crucial for their performance. With this technological shift and the new implemented organizational change come great challenges, organizations can use it as an opportunity to prepare their technological infrastructure for the future, a future that will be more autonomous with smarter processes. In addition, organizations also have to take into account their workforce and build an extensive and prepared digital workforce that will include leaders and team members that will effectively work in a virtual setting.

2.1.2 Employees coping with unplanned organizational change

In order to successfully implement changes, a deep understanding of employees’ attitudes and behaviours towards organizational change is critical, in order to minimize negative consequences of such change (Shin, Taylor & Seo, 2021). Especially when it comes to unplanned change such as the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This can cause issues such as uncertainty, which can negatively affect the relationship between the employee and the organization, resulting in unsuccessful implemented change. Negative reactions can include resistance to change, anxiety, urgency, disengagement, uncertainty and negative coping attitudes (Oreg, et al., 2018).

In the face of unplanned changes, it involves spontaneous changes and adjustments to the central spine of the organization, disruptively changing the way of working and having a cascade effect triggering new problems, situations and unpredicted new changes and the need to adapt. How employees make sense and respond to these changes is key for the success of unplanned change implementation (Shin et al., 2021).

Each individual has different ways of coping with change, different processes and strategies, which also might differ across situations. Research usually takes a bi-dimensional approach to coping strategies, namely, proactive coping or passive coping. The main difference between those two styles is that in proactive coping the individual seeks to fix the situation that creates stress, while passive coping individuals adopt an avoidance attitude towards the issue. Research by Holton et al. (2016) on coping with change describes that availability of organizational resources projects a tendency to shape the employees perceptions of certainty and control regarding stressful situations at work, hence helping in determining a proactive coping strategy. In organizational change, when employees cope actively, it is linked with positive emotions
towards the change and it creates favorable situations that might lead to successful changes. In this sense, the level of digital maturity and digital readiness of organizations is considered a resource that could entail a proactive coping style when it comes to shifting from a co-located work environment to completely virtual, due to the high need of these digital tools and resources.

A frequent feeling and experience of individuals during organizational change is uncertainty, which is “an individual's inability to predict something accurately” (Milliken, 1987, p. 136). In this case, the pandemic caused global uncertainty to degrees never seen before in history, the outcomes of the organization and of the employees themselves were highly uncertain. Such feelings can cause stress, negative attitudes and behaviours that negatively can impact the success of the change. Hence, understanding those perceptions and attitudes towards unplanned change from the individual's perspective is of importance for organizations (Cullen et al., 2014).

2.2 Virtual Teams in connection to organizational change management

Digitalization and communication technologies have had a great impact on the team structures implemented by companies. They have provided the opportunity to form global project teams with members localized all around the world and have removed the necessity to employ only local employees or to relocalize people to the company offices. At the same time, globalization has led to more complex and dynamic organizations, with the ability to easily be present not only in their local country but all around the world, leading to more dispersed headquarters geographically (Zigurs, 2003).

A 2012 survey with 379 respondents reported that 40% of the organizations used virtual teams. Similarly, a 2014 survey of 3000 respondents indicated that 40% of the organizations’ employees spent half their time working in a virtual team setting and most of those teams, 77% of them, were multicultural. At the same time, those same surveys indicated that the lack of interactions created significant challenges related to trust, decision-making, management of conflicts and communication issues (Society of Human Resource Management, SHRM, 2012; Briggs, 2014).
The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the pace of digitalization and organizational changes, greatly affecting working teams. Those changes have led and forced managers and employees to communicate through digital tools, instead of face-to-face meetings at the office, using communication technology and forming a new type of team, the so-called virtual team (Abbasnejad & Izadi Moud, 2012; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). This digital transformation process of switching from remote work to virtual work entails a deep, wide, and large form of technological change that is largely complicated and involves many factors for its success. The success of such an initiative has largely been dependent on the employees' efforts to engage in the change process and actively be part of it (Tosey & Robinson, 2002).

Most research on virtual teams has tried to put all teams under the same umbrella, creating a generic notion of virtual teams (Townsend, et al., 1998). As with any team, the internal dynamics can differ, the roles, the leadership style, the needs, their know-how, the team member relationships, etc. Hence, virtual teams are to be treated differently between them. The challenge we face is twofold: to create a body of knowledge that can inform research about the new virtual teams that have arisen due to the pandemic and to identify differences between the variety of teams; complete virtual teams that never have met before and co-located teams that became virtual under these circumstances. The external context of the pandemic from which we study virtual teams is considered important and there is rather less evidence within this new topic.

2.2.1 Team Structures

Virtual teams are characterized for high degrees of virtualness and spontaneity. Virtualness refers to the degree of technological means that are used for coordination and communication. Employees are used to communicating through ICTs in work settings, thanks to the prevalence of these technologies in today's work environment. These technologies are playing a leading role in supporting organizational change initiatives and organizational design. With the diffusion of total remote work during the pandemic, it has led to even higher degrees of virtualness. Virtuality is positioned as the moderating variable that influences processes in inputs and outputs. It directly influences the strength and direction of the relationships between team members. Spontaneity refers to the degree of proactiveness and self-managing approach
of employees to corporate tasks in virtual teams (Frese et al., 1996; Griffith et al., 2003). Depending on these two degrees we find four typical structures in work teams according to Griffith et al. (2003):

1. **Hierarchically imposed conventional teams** - Team members work in a department, led by a manager, usually co-located, communicating in traditional ways such as face-to-face meetings but additionally they use ICTs for communicating.

2. **Hierarchically imposed Virtual Teams** - Team members might be dispersed and managed by a team leader. Most communication happens through ICTs.

3. **Self-Organized conventional teams** - Members from the same department that are co-located. Members are responsible for task initiation and management of the tasks and communicate in traditional ways, using ICTs when needed.

4. **Spontaneous Virtual Teams** - Formed by dispersed members who initiate and manage the tasks with their own responsibilities and communicate through ICTs. These forms of organization emphasize cross-boundary and employee-driven collaboration.

Work teams can be categorized in these four groups, ranging from the traditional team, to the hybrid team with both traditional and virtual meetings and finally the pure virtual team where the team has all communications handled via digital tools (Griffith et al., 2003).
2.2.2 Virtual team dimensions and boundaryless organizations

Previous research conducted by Zigurs (2003) created a categorization of the different dimensions of virtual teams that characterize them based on four aspects that affect how work can be conducted through this type of work environment:

1. **Organizational dispersion** - Virtual teams allow organizations to exceed their traditional boundaries and have access to resources and employees that before could not be accessed due to inefficient digital tools. Organizations can access the best suited employees regardless of location. This also demands integration of methods, goals and culture.

2. **Geographic dispersion** - Characterized by the lack of physical closeness and co-location. It encloses the lack of proximity between team members, which in turn indicates that any team in this category is virtual, as the means of communication change from face-to-face to ICT based communications. Geographical dispersion has its biggest impact on less spontaneous interactions (O’Leary & Cummings, 2007).

3. **Temporal dispersion** - Virtual team members can be located within different time frames as boundaries of space naturally also transcend boundaries of time. This presents certain difficulties such as it might hinder synchronicity communication and problem solving in real time, due to time disparities. At the same time, it might give time to team members to think thoroughly of what messages to convey, send or find solutions, as the time dispersion allows for longer time frames of response.

![Figure 2. Virtual Team Dimensions, Sigurds, (2003).](image)
4. *Cultural dispersion* - characterized by having members from different cultures. It affects the virtual team in having different languages, values and ways of working, which might also difficulty cooperation and effectiveness.

These dimensions highlight the overreliance in the technological infrastructure and the characteristics of virtual teams. Working in the same location, with the same schedules and know-how on cooperation with specific team members represent an advantage in regards to the formal and informal way of communicating when working together (Fisher & Fisher, 2011). Virtual team initiatives represent a ton of new opportunities for individuals and businesses, but also bring a host of questions and new challenges. The successful integration of virtual teams into the organizational structure will have to tackle change management issues and individual abilities to work efficiently within virtual teams in the new digital age. Researching work within virtual teams is a matter of interest due to organizations shifting towards a digitized age, allowing for people that are separated geographically and affected by these different dispersions to work across these factors cohesively thanks to technology, despite temporal and spatial barriers. These so considered “barriers” are being erased by virtual work and virtual organizations, becoming boundaryless organizations, from certain perspectives they can be seen as restrictions that hinder the free flow of information and knowledge and now organizational boundary activities reside under the responsibility of the working teams (Morgan, 1997). As these boundaries have been erased during this pandemic year, it is of high relevance for organizational change literature to understand how team members engage with each other, across departments and other teams and how they have embraced the change.

2.2.3 Challenges implementing virtual teams in the organization

The research on virtual teams has named several dominant challenges that might hinder effective work: communication, creating and maintaining relationships, trust and lack of social interactions (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Zigurs, 2003; Brahm & Kunze, 2012).

Previous research conducted by Griffith et al. (2003) depicts several perspectives for the appropriate management of work teams which can affect how well virtual teams are embraced and implemented within the company. Starting with the right organizational environment, from formalized processes and policies to the innovativeness ingrained in the organizational culture and employee autonomy. The great shift from traditional to virtual work environments accelerated by the pandemic was easier for some organizations than for others depending on
their digital maturity. Much of the literature has been concerned with developing frameworks for understanding change through IT-enabled strategies and the role of technology (Hsiao & Omerod, 1998). For example, how can technology substitute regular face-to-face interactions. The issue is that work processes within teams are dynamic and dependent on many individual factors that might hinder effective virtual teams. In order to better judge the shift towards remote work we need a better understanding of how work processes in virtual teams function, how they engage and create knowledge. There are several challenges to virtual teams that we will explore from the team member perspective.

2.2.4 Building Trust

Most research done on virtual teams highlights trust as the key of efficient teams, as it is the foundation of team cohesion, which in turn influences the success of the team. In addition to being the most important part, it has been researched that creating a work environment built on trust is also one of the most challenging functions of the virtual leader, especially in the upbringing of a virtual team (Abbasnejad & Izadi Moud, 2012).

Virtual teams are based on digital communication tools. Hence, in order to enhance collaboration and improve the resolution of ambiguities and uncertainties within the team members, communication and cooperation is key. These digital tools can make the process more complicated, as members cannot interact in the same physical space and there is a lack of verbal and informal communication, it decreases the chances of effective cooperation or trust building (Hunsaker & Hunsaker, 2008).

There is an ample body of work examining trust in virtual work environments, showing that trust is built on the perceptions of personal ability, benevolence and integrity, and perceptions of integrity have been found to have the strongest effects on developing interpersonal trust (Thomas & Bostrom, 2010). There is a high dependence on trust and the employees' reliability in virtual teams. Scherling & Antinoja (2019) found that social influences have a positive impact on trustworthiness. Managers often cannot supervise employees in the absence of face-to-face interactions and have to trust that they are doing their job in geographically distant locations. This points directly to the employees need to be reliable in fulfilling their job requirements, tasks, and work hours (Wise, 2016).

Trust is the key to cooperation, in virtual team settings, when ICTs and technology are the bases of the relationship between team members, technology adaptation is necessary and if
successful technology adaptation happens it can enable conflict resolutions in work tasks or between team members, hence increasing cooperation and trust. Even though this point is clear, there is little research on what features of ICTs might increase the development of trust through benevolence, ability or integrity (Thomas & Bostrom, 2010).

2.2.5 Communication Difficulties

Communication frequency is seen as a key factor in virtual team environments. Previous research conducted by Morgan et al. (2014) explored the relationship between communication and team effectiveness within virtual teams. They found that the limited range of different virtual communicating tools that a team has access to was not a major contributing factor to a team's effectiveness. Even though virtual teams provide flexibility and better resource allocation globally, these teams involve a higher complexity level compared to traditional teams. Communication and the tools being used are the focal point of this complexity, since it is needed in order to build trust, cohesion and team effectiveness (Hayes, 2002).

The psychological traits shared between team members are associated with higher performing teams, and most of them are built through face-to-face communication and non-verbal behaviours. In this sense, the virtual team is more limited than the traditional team as it involves interactions through technology. In addition to this, when messages are shared between members, instant feedback is an important part of the communication process as it allows for effective communication, a lack of face to face interactions can increase miscommunications and misinterpretations of the message can lead to job ineffectiveness and operational inefficiency. Also, details such as facial expressions and gestures might get lost. The loss of this valuable information in communication can have negative consequences for organizational change management and business performance (Oakley, 1999). Overall, communication is a contributor to team effectiveness in virtual teams, and the existing ICTs might allow for effective communication even though it is not as good as face-to-face (Morgan et al., 2014).

One of the consequences of becoming a virtual organization is that all of them present communication issues due to their reliability on ICTs. They present challenges in organizational change implementation, especially in communication effectiveness. Hence, successfully transforming a virtual organization requires much focus on these problems and
effectively addressing them as soon as possible. Companies have to drastically improve their communication efforts, but this can be complicated due to many companies having complex internal communication ecosystems with overwhelming information and not the right flow of information. For example, when implementing a planned organizational change, the communication of the change is a key process in the implementation (Jones et al., 2004).

Communication with employees during times of change is recognized as a fundamental determinant of how the change will be understood and managed by the employees, hence, strategic internal communication systems play an important role facilitating the employees ability to cope with the imposed change (Barret, 2020). Particularly in unplanned changes with high degrees of uncertainty. As employees go through a sensemaking process in order to understand the change and develop a strategy on how they should respond to the shift, quality communication during organizational change is crucial for helping employees to cope with the change. In order to overcome resistance to change, reduce uncertainty and embrace change, the need for change, the process of the change and the impacts of the change are to be communicated (Elving, 2005).

Research done by Graham, (2005) found that only 14% of all transformational failures came from the company's inability to cope with technology, most of them came from common management problems such as lack of effective communication (20 percent) or poor project management skills (32 percent). From this information we can draw that it is important to explore employees' experiences of digital transformation efforts and organizational change management as it seems that the biggest focus of improvement should be done in these areas. Even though virtual communication presents difficulties, a virtual organization presents less structure rigidity, a consequence of reduced collocation. The use of these communication technologies creates many opportunities for employees to cooperate, collaborate and to develop horizontal and diagonal communication lines that flatten the organization and weaken the structural rigidity.

2.2.6 Social Interactions

Related to the communication issues, in a virtual team, many times social interactions and spontaneous messaging is held to a minimum and most communication is concerning the project's topic (Saunder & Ahuja, 2006). This influences lower trust and closeness between
team members, which is seen as an important part of potential team effectiveness. Affection is key for enabling good member relationships. Spontaneous social interactions that happen lots of times in face-to-face interactions and indirect communication can make team members collaborate better. In virtual teams lacking this type of interactions, they should be managed carefully and properly in order to not negatively influence the team and the organization. Also when spontaneous interactions rarely happen in virtual teams result in lower degrees of knowledge sharing. ICTs used need to allow for easy communication and promote it in all the layers of the software (Morgan et al., 2014).

During organizational changes, spontaneous and frequent communication between team members aids in creating a mutual understanding of the change process and acting as support between employees in order to cope with negative consequences that could come with change. The social support from managers and colleagues encourages adoption of organizational change and is considered an important coping resource (Layrence & Callan, 2011).

2.2.7 Group Cohesion

An organization greatly benefits from having teams with high levels of group cohesion, meaning that the team has a high commitment to the group and wants to remain in it. The benefits of working in groups are clear, such as combining the different traits of group members to create a greater outcome than the individual by himself is capable of (Mullen & Copper, 1994). According to Chang & Bordia (2001) there is a positive relationship between group cohesion and group performance, when cohesion is increased, so does performance. A lack of group cohesion can lead to unnecessary stress and tension between team members, having a negative effect on work outcome. It also has positive effects on the group individuals, having shared goals and shared identity of the group creates a dynamic of connection, loyalty and job satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002). Through teamwork shared knowledge is maximized which solitary work can lack. In a virtual setting, building this sense of group cohesion and shared identity can be a great challenge that can affect team performance (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Closely related to group cohesion we find affinity, which is referred to as a close relationship between individuals, including friendship. This can also be applied to teams where team members are close to each other, having a personal relationship and are likely to be more cohesive. This is likely to appear in teams with democratic leadership style, cooperation and communication flows that bring contact between team members frequently (Garner, 2012). Spontaneous communications are crucial for building group cohesion according to Hinds &
Mortensen (2005). In contrast, feeling lonely can have a negative impact on motivation and trust and that it can be present when the level of social interactions is low (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

Work environments have shifted towards a geographical dispersion and hence transformed into virtual teams, with all the implications this has for the work teams, as we have seen in the previous chapters. In this coming chapter we will explore deeper into leadership and management during organizational change in virtual teams and how it might have shifted due to the changes that have happened during the pandemic.

2.3 Managing and leading virtual teams through the change process

Leadership has been deeply explored through the years from many different perspectives, being a concept susceptible to different interpretations, contexts, persons, relations and research schools. A traditional way of understanding leadership has been in establishing the relationship between the leaders as the order-makers and the rest, the followers, that follow orders and passively take part of decision-making. This is a very traditional notion of leadership, which has evolved with time and now we find that followers have been given a more important role and are considered as part of leadership itself. Leadership has evolved towards an understanding of leadership as a process built on social constructions, a co-production built in the relationship between leaders and followers. We no longer focus solely on the leader because this person has unique characteristics and people want to follow him or her. Followers are now active co-producers of leadership (Alvesson, et al., 2017).

In this context, it is important to distinguish and differentiate the concept of leadership and management, as they are often used in combination. Many times, management is closely related with the tasks related to directing, controlling, planning and problem-solving that come with a managerial position. Meanwhile leadership is oftentimes more associated with values, feelings, alignment, motivation and more as an inspirational figure. Many activities are embedded within both leadership and management, but the position in the hierarchy is not the only thing that determines these roles, as a manager can act as a leader, or the other way around, managers are not always leaders, it is important in a virtual team setting to take into consideration both (Alvesson, et al., 2017).
As seen previously, developing virtual teams is part of a deeper organizational change. It does not only add a technical layer of complexity through the addition of ICTs but it also involves a great social redesign, especially in the transition from co-located and face to face interactions to virtuality. These changes are important to be researched as they can be open to new issues and less efficient teams. In order to implement a change successfully at this scale, requires a good understanding of the change process and particularly its internal micro dynamics and how to manage them efficiently (Badhman, et al., 1997). Here is the importance of the manager of the team.

Leadership and management in a virtual context differs from the non-virtual environment. As aforementioned, leadership is co-produced through social interactions between employees, hence, not co-located teams that have changed the way they communicate will have an impact on how they are managed and leadership is practiced, this will cause some restrictions which can hinder effective leadership. Without face-to-face communications and social cues received from there, it creates an environment that tends to need more adaptation and where team members can crave more autonomy rather than control. Team development and growth originates from all team members and leadership is a joint endeavor which is co-produced (Zigurs, 2003; Alvesson, 2017).

The pandemic led to a need for more frequent communications between organizational management and the employees (Connley, Hess & Liu, 2020). In this aspect, leadership roles of managers are pivotal and key in order to help employees in their coping of the organizational change happening and help them in managing uncertainty and stress factors that arise with the unplanned change.
So far we have seen that developing virtual teams and team working is part of a wide organizational change, it requires a social redesign, not only a change in processes or structures. The radical change caused by the pandemic created a departure from the previous way of doing things, such radical change involves lots of uncertainty, how to do it, how to implement it, how to set objectives, etc. Managers have an important role in how to build commitment and communication throughout the team, encouraging flexibility and practicing approaches different from traditional management techniques (Badham et al., 1997). It highlights the need to address and create new knowledge around remote work, understanding employees perceptions of change and managerial practices applied during this change process.
2.3.1 Functions of virtual leader

The leader is the pivotal piece in the virtual team, as the leader's functions are necessary to improve the team performance and therefore, its success. In a virtual team, the leader has three main responsibilities, as proposed by Zaccaro & Bader (2003): team liaison, team direction setter and team operational coordinator. Which are responsibilities that are also present in traditional teams but there is a shift in how they are performed in virtual teams.

In line with Griffith, et al. (2003), the leaders have to search and observe the events that occur when the team performs their tasks, they have to be able to track back on the work and the source of the work in order to understand how the members of the team operate. It is essential to find what critical issues might affect the performance of the team. They also have to define clear goals for the team, coordinate, and follow up more often than in traditional settings and have to provide the right digital tools and resources in order for the team to perform specific tasks or if new tasks come (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). In practice, this means setting goals and visions, stipulating owners of tasks and task decomposition clearly, establishing routines and constant meetings and creating clear operational processes (Hunsaker & Hunsaker, 2008).

Previous research has shown that leaders that are able to communicate frequently and make members engage in conversation, will have more efficient virtual teams, as well as supplying relevant information and appropriate reward systems (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Leaders that encourage more informal communications also have shown to produce more efficient virtual teams, as it forms better and deeper connections between the team members and allows them to get to know each other better. Stronger personal relationships are seen as one way to make virtual teams more productive (Hart & McLeod, 2003).

2.4 Summary

By investigating the change in co-located teams to virtual teams during times of rapid changing conditions and unplanned change, a model is presented in order to give a structure to our case study and a path to follow in order to investigate the topic. In previous research around virtual teams it is seen that many challenges are present around this style of work environment. Virtual teams have been explored from several perspectives involving struggles such as trust building, communication issues, social interactions and its
different dispersions that might affect team effectiveness and how team members experience the shift.

Most companies are undergoing a digital transformation shift, towards a more digitized work environment and the pandemic has accelerated this process by imposing virtual work. This has increased the usage of ICTs and technology, changing the way of collaborating within teams and the organization as a whole. From these main topics the model that has been generated will serve as the base to explore and answer the research questions summarizing the main factors affecting virtual teams. These aspects are seen as highly relevant within the topic and will be used to generate questions, analyse data and draw conclusions:

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework by Daniel Scherling & Iván Camarero Lind (2021).
3. Methodology

This chapter will identify, define and motivate the methodological choices of this paper. First the research philosophy, approach, purpose and strategy will be covered. Second, sampling and data collection will be explained. Furthermore, the quality of data and it’s components will get a thorough and detailed description.

3.1 Research Philosophy

“Interpretivism argues that human beings and their social worlds cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena and that therefore social sciences research needs to be different from natural sciences research rather than trying to emulate the latter” (Saunders et al., 2016, p.140)

Research philosophy concerns the underlying assumptions and beliefs a researcher possesses regarding the advancement of knowledge and this study aspires to develop knowledge. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and when it comes to the ontology of interpretivism it encompasses a complex and rich, socially constructed reality that possesses multiple meanings and interpretations. The epistemology of interpretivism deem theories and concepts as too simplistic in terms of being a constituent of acceptable knowledge. Instead, interpretivism strives to achieve new understandings and worldviews from narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations. When it comes to the axiology of the chosen research philosophy the researcher is not expected to be disconnected from the research but rather being subjective and a part of the research since the interpretations of the researcher is essential to the contribution of the conducted research. In addition, this axiology allows for the researcher to be reflexive. Typical methods are smaller in-depth samples and investigation that typically follows an inductive research approach and qualitative method to analyse the collected data. (Saunders et al, 2016).

We explore the individual team members’ experience of transitioning into virtual teams and since their experience is a social construct the research philosophy of interpretivism is highly
applicable to our research. Furthermore, it’s based on the assumption that humans create meaning while a physical phenomena does not (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Therefore these two entities should not be studied using the same research philosophy. The perception of implementing effective virtual teams is a social construct and therefore, the researchers utilizes interpretivism as a research philosophy in this study. This paradigm is the most suited research philosophy to investigate and answer the research questions that are proposed in chapter 1.4 due to the emphasis on quality and depth of data collection (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

Exploring the individual team members experience requires in-depth understanding. Hence, the strength of using a qualitative method is understanding the case of social constructs such as a team member experience. An experience due to the organizational change of transitioning the team into a virtual setting. (Bluhm et al., 2010).

3.2 Research Approach

The three main research approaches are deduction, induction and abduction. While deduction moves from theory to data, induction moves from data to theory and abduction being a mix moving back and forth between theory and data (Saunders et al., 2016). This study will utilize induction as a research approach since the researchers strive to explore phenomena and build and generate theory on virtual teams combining secondary and primary data in order to develop a conceptual framework. One of the main goals being theory generation using induction. The researchers aim to explore and identify themes and locate them in a conceptual framework created by the research.

Following an interpretivist research philosophy, induction is a good fit since the typical method of interpretivism often is inductive, using smaller samples and qualitative methods of analysis while still allowing to interpret a range of data (Saunders et al., 2016).
3.3 Research Purpose

The main purpose of an exploratory study is to gain new insights into a defined topic of interest. The research purpose of this study is to explore the phenomena of transition from a previously co-located team into a virtual team due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how the individual team members experienced it. This research purpose enables the researcher to ask open questions in order to explore the phenomenon or issue and these questions would most likely start with “What” and “How” in order to clarify and understand the topic at hand better (Saunders et al., 2016).

An exploratory study can for example conduct in-depth individual interviews and apply a search of literature to conduct the exploratory research purpose. One of the main motivations as to why adopting an explorative research purpose is due to its advantage in flexibility and adaptability in light of change. As new data appear it would only be natural for an exploratory study to change its direction and narrow down its focus as the research progresses. Making empirical discoveries and exploring new perceptions are useful for the explorative research purpose (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.4 Research Strategy

This study will conduct a case study as its research strategy with the aim of generating new insight into the phenomena of the transition from co-located teams into virtual teams due to the covid-19 pandemic. It’s of importance that the context and the case are clearly defined in order for the interaction between the two to be clearly understood. A case study could refer to many different case subjects. For example a phenomenon, person, manager, event or change process could be identified as a case study (Saunders., et al, 2016). The boundary that has been identified in this research is that only virtual teams that were previously co-located teams before the pandemic are being studied. In addition to this boundary, team and management structures are defined as the context in order to explore the change process in team and management dynamics. This study strives to develop theory from rich empirical data gained from in-depth research into this phenomenon and its context (Saunders et al., 2016).
3.5 Sampling

Snowball sampling is proposed to be used to find suitable interviewees who have experienced transitioning from co-located teams into virtual teams. To qualify as an interviewee we have two criteria that have to be upheld. First of all the interviewee has to be working in a virtual team and second of all the interviewee in questions has been part of this team in a co-located setting previously to the transition into a virtual team. In other words, interviewees have not changed their teams, just moved online and away from the office due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total 11 interviewees have participated in this study and they all meet the criteria mentioned above. Team members from 8 different virtual teams have been interviewed on their experience transitioning from a co-located team to a virtual team. The first respondent was found through our own social network, a respondent that we knew fulfilled the above mentioned criteria. The organizations were not chosen based on industry but was rather the organization that a referred team member worked for. Selected respondents and organizations were a result of the snowball sampling process.

The process of snowball sampling can be explained as identifying an interviewee that meets the criteria of the study for interviewees and then asking them to refer the researcher to people they know that also meet the criteria (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Members of a network can enable this approach to be especially useful when the members of a population in the sample can be difficult to identify. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) snowball sampling is a form of sampling in which the design follows a non-probability sampling method. Included entities all meet the criteria and refer to other entities that also meet the criteria.

3.6 Data Collection

This paper has used primary and secondary data in order to answer the research question. We have conducted 11 semi-structured interviews digitally, using tools such as Microsoft Teams due to the current pandemic, using our provided questionnaire. The collected primary data has been analysed with complementary secondary data in the literature review in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic phenomenon at hand. The main questions in the semi-structured interview used follow up questions in order to gain deeper insight into the answers of the respondents and get more insightful information on the topic.
3.7 Primary Data

A series of semi-structured virtual interviews were carried out in order to conduct the empirical study. We strive to understand and explore the experience of the virtual team members that have experienced transitioning from a co-located team into a virtual team due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We explored this via the virtual team members feelings, thoughts and actions. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method to use according to Collis and Hussey (2014). Semi-structured interviews are non-standardized and therefore they are suitable for qualitative research purposes such as this one (King, 2004).

The collection of the primary data took place digitally since it’s more responsible and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Microsoft Teams interviews were recorded and we had the camera on to make the interviewee feel more comfortable. It was also recorded via a phone audio recording in case the large video meeting recording failed. All interviews had semi-structured questions and follow up questions which meant that none of the interviews were identical even if they followed a shared topic thread. The interviews were structured in advance when it comes to the main themes but all the questions were not always asked directly in the interview nor did they always follow the same order. Questions could also bring additional follow up questions that differed from interview to interview. When it comes to insight into the themes the answer from the interviewees guided the direction of the interview. In order to keep a strong focus on the themes that answer the research question, these semi-structured interviews were beneficial due to the natural development and discourse of the interview pattern (Saunders et al., 2016). Unnecessary information that strived too far from the research purpose and question could also be avoided via this method.

The main drawback with non-face-to-face interviews are that social cues and the standardisation of the interview situation could be negatively impacted (Opdenakker, 2006). However, other ways of interviewing for qualitative research purposes can be used and should not be disregarded as an alternative to face-to-face interviews when it comes to data collection. All interviews conducted in this study were carried out in Microsoft Teams. Further limitations for digital interviews could be technical issues but we prepared well to avoid it to our best ability.
3.8 Secondary Data

The literature review is a representation of existing research on virtual teams and organizational change management theory. All secondary data collected in this study can be found in the literature review. According to Saunders et al. (2016) the literature review can aid the researchers in their strive to identify and map out research gaps in the current literature. This study has identified research gaps in the literature of organizational change management when it comes to how team members experience the organizational change of moving online into virtual teams when previously being co-located due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So that one may identify and map out research gaps in the literature, search engines have been used in combination with keywords for searches. As a systematic procedure and in order to conduct the literature review Google Scholar and Jönköping University Library’s search engine Primo has been used. The following keywords have been used: “organizational change management”, “virtual teams”, “Covid-19”, “virtual management”, “virtual leadership” and combinations of them together to narrow down the search. We strive to represent an accurate and credible understanding of the research field of organizational change management and virtual teams. To do so we have only included peer-reviewed articles within the time span of 1979-2021. In order to increase credibility data triangulation has been used.
### 3.9 Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Interview Tool</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 1</td>
<td>IT Company</td>
<td>2021-03-29</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>50 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 2</td>
<td>IT Company</td>
<td>2021-03-30</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 3</td>
<td>IT Company</td>
<td>2021-03-31</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>44 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 4</td>
<td>IT Company</td>
<td>2021-04-01</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>65 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 5</td>
<td>International Ecommerce</td>
<td>2021-04-06</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>59 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 6</td>
<td>Biotechnology</td>
<td>2021-04-08</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 7</td>
<td>International Retailer</td>
<td>2021-04-08</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 8</td>
<td>International Retailer</td>
<td>2021-04-16</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 9</td>
<td>International Ecommerce</td>
<td>2021-04-16</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 10</td>
<td>International Ecommerce</td>
<td>2021-04-21</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member 11</td>
<td>International Retailer</td>
<td>2021-04-22</td>
<td>Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4: Researchers respondents list (2021).*
3.10 Data Quality

Bias, reliability, validity, generalizability and cultural differences are associated with potential data quality issues when it comes to semi-structured interviews. The preparations made by the researchers combined with the procedure for the semi-structured interviews could potentially affect the data quality (Saunders et al., 2016). Ethical issues and the sensitivity to initiation of intrusive themes during the semi-structured interviews when it comes to data quality will also be discussed in the following sub-chapters.

3.9.1 Bias

There are three possible biases that can be caused by semi-structured interviews in the interview process according to (Saunders et al., 2016). The first one is the interviewer bias, this one can affect the answers of the interviewee and cause bias in the answers due to the body language, comments and tone of voice of the interviewer. Furthermore, when analysing the answer the interviewer may impose bias as well. The validity and reliability could be affected negatively if the interviewee doesn’t feel trust towards the interviewer or the interviewer is deemed as lacking credibility by the interviewee (Saunders et al., 2016). In addition to the interviewer bias, there is the response bias and this can be caused by the intrusive and explorative nature of semi-structured interviews. In turn, this could make the interviewee choose to keep certain information to themselves even if they have participated in the interview by their own free will. The response bias is caused by the perception of the interviewer. The third and final bias is the participation bias and is directly related to the sampling. Since potential interviewees might cancel or reject the interview, the sample that primary data is taken from is therefore affected and causes a participation bias (Saunders et al., 2016). In order to lower the risk bias we prepared well, informed and made the interviewee feel comfortable to our best ability.

3.9.2 Reliability and Dependability

One of the core strengths in semi-structured interviews is that it’s not standardized and therefore is suitable to research complex and dynamic issues and in turn provide deep insight. However, this lack of standardization also impacts the consistency of the research negatively which in turn affects the reliability negatively. According to Saunders et al. (2016) “the lack of standardization in semi-structured and in-depth interviews can lead to concerns about
In order to increase the reliability of this research transcripts have been made on the interviews and used accordingly. Furthermore, the purpose of the semi-structured interviews is to explore the complexity of the researched phenomena at the moment it’s being researched and the empirical findings are focusing on representing reality at the time the findings are derived. Therefore, it’s not of significance to the reliability of our research that our empirical findings on the virtual team members are repeatable.

Dependability on the other hand is in regards to the repeatability of the research, in which we would have found the same results carrying out the research again. Collis & Hussey (2014) suggest to keep a detailed description on methods and research processes used in the research in order to improve the dependability of the study. By doing so, it would then be possible for further research to be carried out by other researchers to find confirming data on the study having had the possibility to adopt the same procedure.

To improve the dependability of our research we will describe the general procedure. First the semi-structured interviews were carried out using a questionnaire for guidance during the interview. This was to stay focused on the research purpose. The interviews were recorded via Microsoft Teams and via an audio recording on the phone as a backup, in case the video file got corrupted. Then we proceed to transcribe the interviews ourselves. We did not discuss the research with the interviewees beforehand, only a short introduction was given to the interview and the background of the study.

3.9.3 Validity and Credibility

This study aims to achieve a high degree of validity and credibility. Validity can be defined as to what extent the experiences and perceptions of the interviewee, the researcher has gained insight into (Saunders et al., 2016). By using various sources of information the validity can be increased and semi-structured interviews are suitable to achieve a high degree of validity and credibility when being conducted in an appropriate manner. We have opted to use primary and secondary data in this study in order to strengthen the validity.

Credibility can be achieved by representing the collected primary data in an accurate and truthful manner. The main criteria behind a high degree of credibility is a high correlation between the representation of answers by the researcher and the intended meaning behind the
answers from the interviewee. By clarifying perceptions and doing so from multiple perspectives the credibility can be further strengthened, this is possible due to the informed decision to conduct a qualitative study. In order to further improve credibility it’s also of importance to reflect and account for negative cases. The empirical findings have been analyzed by more than one researcher in order to further secure a high degree of credibility in the research (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.9.4 Generalizability and Transferability

Due to the often smaller samples used in qualitative studies as compared to quantitative studies, generalizability can become an issue. However, it’s not impossible to achieve generalizability in a qualitative study. Although, statistical generalizability is hard to achieve due to non-probability samples not not being eligible for statistical generalizability (Saunders et al., 2016).

This study conducted 11 interviews which would categorize as a smaller sample, especially compared to the sample sizes of quantitative studies. However, this is still within a commonly used and appropriate range of sample size based on semi-structured in depth interviews. The need to conduct more interviews was not present due to the themes replicating already before the 11 interviews had been carried out. Therefore, the number of interviews needed were reassessed and deemed sufficient. Interviewees from the virtual teams represented both genders and several different occupations, industries and nationalities.

To allow for homogenous research to be carried out under different research settings and by other researchers, transferability was of importance to this study. The research purpose is explorative, trying to explore the experience of individual team members transitioning into a virtual team from a previously co-located team due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, contributing to a research gap and suggesting future research areas within the field we strive to achieve a high degree of transferability. Saunders et al. (2016) define transferability as “the need to provide a full description of the research questions, design, context, findings and resulting interpretations in the project report” (p.400). This is to aid new theory development within the field under other research settings and by other researchers.
3.9.5 Cultural Differences

Saunders et al. (2016) argue that multicultural settings may pose a risk of increased bias and become a threat to reliability. In order to prepare and reflect on this issue, cultural reflexivity was utilized to aid in the endeavour. A natural part of research is the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, cultural customs that are similar or different can come to affect these interactions (Court & Abbas, 2013).

3.9.6 Ethical Issues

Information on the research purpose and background information to the study was given beforehand to all the interviewees, this was to conduct the research in an ethical manner (Adams et al., 2007). No other information than needed in accordance with an ethical research process was shared with the interviewees. It was strictly concerning the topic of research and the procedure concerning their involvement. All interviewees have signed General Data Regulation Protection (GDPR) consent forms on the handling of their data. It further requires the interviewees to accept that we record and store their data. In addition, they are also informed of their rights concerning their participation in the study. In order to conduct our research in an ethical manner we need not only to treat the interviewees in an ethically correct way but also treat the empirical findings and the presentation of it in an ethical manner (Castree et al., 2013). This study strives to uphold ethical procedures to its best ability.

3.10 Data Analysis

In a wide array of different analytical approaches of data analysis we have used the thematic approach. Nowell et al. (2017) deem this as a highly flexible approach that provides a complex understanding of data while the lack of coherence and inconsistency can be drawbacks of a thematic analysis if not done correctly in comparison to other forms of analysis such as ethnography or grounded theory. As suggested by Nowell et al. (2017) there are sex key processes to the thematic analysis and we have adopted them in order to secure a systematic and coherent analysis of our collected primary data. The first step of the thematic analysis is for the researchers to familiarize with their collected data (Nowell et al., 2017). This can include but it is not limited to documenting ideas and comments regarding the familiarized content. So
in order to analyze our data we firstly transcribed the recorded data and then started familiarizing with it, taking notes on the content of the data.

The second step of the thematic analysis is coding of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). In order to identify emerging themes and patterns we coded the qualitative data first. Coding of data enables a better structure of data that in turn can provide the opportunity for an increased in-depth knowledge and understanding of collected data (Saunders et al., 2016). The initial coding was the process of scanning all the data for initial codes, we structured them in Microsoft Excel in order to establish an overview of the codes and make it more practical visually. Qualitative coding is the process of understanding what the data is concerning and linking it to categories or themes. Furthermore, Braun & Clarke (2006) states that in the process of coding, accounts departing from the main story should not be ignored. We labeled data as we understood what it was about and indexed the message to categories. It was a process of coding, decoding and recoding. Revisiting the data over and over. By using a thematic network we established emerging themes and the specific patterns connecting categories. This helped us get a deeper understanding and insight into what our data really said and how it was connected.

After the coding process we moved over to step three, searching for possible themes as suggested by Nowell et al. (2017). This was possible due to the created categories from the coding process. By utilizing a thematic analysis we have been able to identify emerging themes from the collected primary data and structure the categories under themes. We utilized Excel to give even more structure to the identified themes, going over and analyzing it again. In order to arrive at a more structured point and understand the data better, the procedure of assembling similar codes under categories had to be made prior to this. Bryman and Bell (2011), stated that value to research should be given by analyzing the empirical data collected in such a way that it can be understood. By giving a thematic structure to our empirical data we were able to understand our large volume of data better. In order to avoid possible data issues we systematically continued to analyze the empirical findings in step four that entailed reviewing the identified themes and discovering if they align with the dataset. The fifth step as suggested by Nowell et al. (2017) is to refine the themes.

Identified emerging themes and patterns allowed for an in-depth exploration of our research purpose due to the interpretivism paradigm adopted in this thesis. In order to increase the validity of the study we utilized pattern matching which allowed for comparison in analysis
between our empirical findings and existing current literature within the field. Furthermore, this enabled the possibility to compare similarities and contradictions between the two aforementioned entities (Saunders et al., 2016). Pattern matching as a data analysis method combined with a case study as a research strategy used in this study, makes for an appropriate combination (Yin, 2014). The identified themes, patterns and relationships that frequently occurred throughout the data analysis were used as a foundational basis for the chapters of empirical findings, analysis, discussion and conclusion and is also the sixth step of producing the report using the analyzed data.

3.11 Procedure

Before we carried out the real semi-structured interviews we carried out test interviews to test the quality of the questions. These interviewees did not participate in the official collection of primary data, the empirical study. Before each interview the interviewee was informed of the topic, background of the study and how we would record the interview and use the data. In order to avoid bias to the fullest extent the interviewees only got the essential information needed or required to participate in the empirical study. Due to the current circumstances and the pandemic we took the active decision to follow all health regulation and safety measures and only conduct the interviews digitally. We had our cameras on and tried our best to make it comfortable for the interviewees. We started off the interview with some background questions to see that the interviewee in question met the required criteria to partake in the empirical study. The interviews lasted between 37-65 minutes, the majority of interviews being between 40-50 minutes. No interview was identical to the other and a greater focus was established as the interview phase continued since irrelevant information to the research purpose was easier to identify at an earlier stage. After an interview, transcription proceeded. Followed by data analysis as described in chapter 3.10 above.

3.12 Question Design and Formulation

Saunders et al., (2016), list open, probing and closed questions as examples of different question categories that can be utilized in an interview. In our semi-structured interviews open ended questions were in focus and only follow up questions or the first background questions were not always open ended questions. Since our research purpose is to explore how individual
team members have experienced the transition from colocated teams into virtual teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic we opted for open ended questions. This would also be beneficial since we strive to understand complex and dynamic experiences that the interviewees have experienced during this transition. Closed questions were only used as background questions to assess different required criterias of the interviewee. Probing questions were mostly used as follow up questions to understand the answer better or get more in depth-understanding of the answer. The questionnaire used can be found in appendix 1.
4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter we will present our empirical findings from the interviews conducted. We will present the empirical data categorized by themes that have been identified from our data analysis and codes taken from the field will be presented in order to show the findings.

4.1 Trust not as problematic as theory suggests

Trust has been identified as one of the main themes in literature on virtual teams and therefore we wanted to see how it was affected in a team that is making the transition from being co-located to becoming a virtual team. When team member 1 and 3 were asked on “How has trust changed transitioning into a virtual team”, they said:

- “It has not changed so much. Because the people I was placed with physically, I knew them a lot since before. No, it’s quite the same.”
- “No, I think that the only thing that has changed is that we don’t have that much contact. The trust is the same.”

Team member 5 considered that trust was not an issue since the team had already been working together at the office and that they already had the know-how on how everyone works and their responsibilities. Interestingly enough, the company culture was considered an important catalyst of trust, having built a culture during the years where employees delivered their work on time and a certain way of work had been developed:

- “The company had a very strong culture of delivery of work. It has been built over the years, the way to work, measuring what people are doing, and not when the employee is doing it... Fortunately for me, it was never a question of trusting people, I already had this mindset, but it was in the mindset of the company. So it was easy”.

Both managers and employees came down to trusting each other even though they were working virtually since they knew their teams personally before and most respondents said
that having to hire someone new, completely virtually would be a challenge as they would not know the person, they would have to teach them everything online and it would be a complicated process. Respondents had no issue with trust even though they could not track what other team members are doing like at the office. One important aspect related to social interactions is that respondents agreed on that interacting at the office, chatting, seeing each other helped in creating and building relationships between them on a personal level, enhancing trust and knowing the person better, quoted from team member 6:

- “Onboarding a person right now I think would be very hard, especially for the new employee to understand how everything works and the people at the company. Also for us, being in contact in person helps in generating a relation and a perception of this person. I would trust the person more if I have met them and have an idea on how they are...”.

4.2 Communication challenges in the virtual environment

Communication is one of the major changes transitioning a co-located team online into a virtual team. It has also been identified as a main theme in our interviews. Virtual meetings in for example Microsoft Teams have replaced the physical office meetings now that everyone works from remote. Instead of participating in person the team members participate from their home office. Attempts to make it as similar as possible to the office morning meetings have been attempted but many interviewees still feel that the change is big when you can’t see everyone or only a few people speak during the online meetings. However, these morning meetings are still appreciated due to the fact that you get to communicate with people in the team that you might not always work on the same tasks with. In regards to the daily meetings, team member 5 pointed out that the daily meetings were key for creating group alignment, team member cohesion and prioritization. As a manager it was very important for understanding the team needs and if any support was needed. Also in order to provide a time for sharing thoughts and conversing a bit:

- “So the first thing that I thought when I was at home is how I'm going to do this, how I'm going to understand what is what everyone in my team has to do if they are willing to work or not, how we are going to create this belonging to the to the team
and to keep it together, specify the main priorities and making sure everybody is aligned, and that communication was going smoothly. So what I did is to create a daily meeting”.

This goes in line with what other virtual teams were doing, daily meetings that kept the team together and created alignment. Interviewees also point out that communication has improved in some areas and worsened in others. One area in which it did improve is that now that they work from home they can be more flexible with times and meetings and can schedule their workday easier around those important meetings. While before they had to be at the office a certain time and then as a result left the office a certain time. One way in which communication has worsened is the loss of body language in communication. For example team member 1 stated:

- “Yes, maybe I communicate in a different way since I have to do it in Teams (Microsoft Teams). I don’t use the camera so I can’t see how the receiver reacts but I can hear the voice. Maybe I have to be more clear now. It’s training also, you get better if you do it every day.”

It’s safe to say that it’s harder to understand each other in a virtual team even if it works fine most of the time. Furthermore, there is an increased risk of miscommunication since body language can’t aid the communication as well or at all in certain virtual situations. This complicates communication and reduces the information quality given and received in the virtual work environments at times, according to team member 11:

- “… the body language is a little more difficult to get it, so I had to create an extra effort to try to understand. You lose that part of the conversation even if you have the screen and the media tools”.
4.3 Missing social interactions

The change in social interaction is one of the main themes that have been identified from analysing the interviews. The majority of the interviewees have experienced a lack of social interaction. For example they have felt lonely or expressed that they miss the random chats that can occur around the office. For example team member 1 said:

- “I live outside the city so it’s quite lonely to sit at home all day.”

The use of online meetings and calls is not enough to satisfy the social need and often they are perceived as scheduled or forced as compared to the random chats that occur around the office. Before the interviewees had lunch together, brought their lunch boxes or went out together to eat. That is something that acts as a bonding experience between team members and it’s also a moment that enables the colleagues to take a break and discuss private life and get to know each other better on that field. It also seems like a bigger problem for people commuting to work since the people who live closer to the office still can meet up for lunch or social activities easier. When team member 3 and 8 were asked how she had experienced the transition from being co-located with the team to going virtual she said:

- “The biggest thing was to sit at home and it felt very lonely at the beginning.”
- “I see and feel that people are starting to get a little tired, that they miss personal contact and another way to communicate. I see it in people in my team and in other colleagues”.

This quote was repeated during our interviews with several members of the study denoting the tiredness of working virtually and that employees not only seek to work but also to socialize. One main issue and interesting data found in the study is the aspect of conversation as mentioned above. Interviewees agreed that interactions between them working virtually transcended the social part of it and only interacted for work related conversations or requests, hence, making their interactions mostly only about work and nothing else, leaving little room for socializing and getting to know each other more.

According to the respondents, there have been attempts made by the organizations to promote social interactions and getting to know each other better and knowing the people outside of
each respective team. For example, Christmas parties conducted through Zoom in huge group calls, planning social games through virtual tools and setting up meetings between employees so they get to know each other, called Virtual Coffee breaks, etc. Even in some cases, meetings with the leaders and the general board of the organizations in order to ask questions and get to know the leadership. Respondents were happy with the efforts made by human resources teams that have created these initiatives as the lack of social interactions were becoming a problem in the organization and employee well being. In most cases, especially the virtual parties and games were a failure as people had a hard time to converse in such big chat rooms. The general view on virtual coffee breaks and leadership meetings were positive but that most often employees did not attend or did not make time for those meetings. Quoted from team member 10:

- “We had a virtual Christmas party and it was a disaster. They tried to do it and put a lot of effort in it. But it was very hard to attend an event of 500 people for hours... it was very tiring, boring and I could barely talk and enjoy it.”

4.4 No major challenge to operational aspects in the virtual team transition

Moving offices from the official company one to your own home office and working remotely towards the team has been one of the biggest changes for the virtual teams. The technical aspect to working and collaborating was identified as one of the main themes. Where many interviewees struggled initially it seemed as something that the teams overcame rather quickly. Especially the interviewees that deemed their company to possess a high degree of digital readiness. Most of the employees interviewed already worked in one way or the other virtually. Most of them already knew and were constantly using Microsoft Teams working at the office and were using other softwares for collaborating, so the digital maturity of the company was an important aspect that helped in the transition and experience of the employees. Also, collaboration and support was deemed by most employees as enhanced, since working with ICTs allowed them to have easy access to everyone in the company in a chat, get fast answers, get support, get and do requests, etc, quoted from team member 7:
“The collaboration has not suffered, it is very easy to access anyone, everybody answers fast as it is in the culture of the employees and company to be this way, and any requests are provided and everyone is supportive.”

Respondents deemed Microsoft Teams to be the key tool that enabled them to work efficiently and communicate with their peers. They have different chat groups with the different teams that they are part of, create new ones to resolve conflicts, work across different teams in order to be on the same page. This tool allows them to communicate to different channels and enhance collaboration. Also the usage of cloud services in order to store data and information was considered key for working efficiently and to not miss out on information, having easy access to documents, powerpoints, excel sheets, dashboards, etc. One aspect that had changed, for some worsened or was considered a challenge by many, was when it came to the way to work in creative meetings and brainstorming, according to team member 6, 8 & 9:

- “There has been a challenge anyway, the way to work. We were very used to working physically, writing on boards, generating ideas and discussing... Now we cannot do it anymore.”
- “Now it works that by showing videos, images or examples we show what we mean, since explaining virtually is hard and a lot of times we can be misunderstood, or don’t know how to explain it, so we rather do it this way. It is true that the way of working has changed.”
- “Generating ideas or the meetings where we could dialogue and draw has suffered a bit. It is a bit more complex now, but we make it work. For example, I will start doing something, once I have something generated I share it with my team and ask for feedback and opinion, because starting from zero all together is very hard.”

Another aspect related to virtual work was the issue of multitasking during meetings. It was clear from the data that most respondents had issues with doing other things, working in parallel to a meeting or when attending training sessions. It is easy to get distracted and it’s tempting to keep working on other things while listening to the speaker and an extra effort was needed to fully concentrate on what is being communicated. Quoted from team member 7:
“it's easy to get distracted, for example I am attending a training session and at the same time I am going to quickly answer a mail and do other quick things and at the end you end up losing a lot of important information”.

A worse internet connection could hamper work tasks but other than that the interviewees seemed to get on with their workday fine after the initial period of the transition which meant adjusting and taking home equipment from the office.

4.5 Managing teams in the virtual era

The managers have experienced difficulties in the transition due to not being close to the people they manage. Team members that were not managers also expressed their concern over the difficulties that the managers had to face. Team member 2 is a manager and put it this way:

- “The employee has already before the covid situation meetings and virtual meetings in group in addition to what they have in the office. For management I think it’s one of the main problems if you don’t have a group. They don’t have a stage in the office to talk to the audience, don’t have the people close to them. What are you outside that, if that stage and scene has disappeared. Who are you as a manager? What do you bring to the work outside that you are just doing normal supervision tasks.”

Furthermore, the same manager was asked if it was due to communication problems, face-to-face vs. virtual and the manager replied:

- “Of course it is. If you send an email to respond yes or no. It’s just black or white. When you talk to people in real life and you tell them something. To see in their eyes if they understand or not. If you have 20 people in the virtual call and you see or hear nothing you have assumed that they understand but if they are there physically you can see if they roll with their eyes or if they have understood. That, you lose that. You don’t see that. You lose a lot of response. That’s the problem.”.

This is linked with previous statements about losing body language and the ability to understand better what is being said or the reactions of employees.
Managers experienced some difficulties when resolving conflicts internally within their team and at an organizational level. Some managers explained that working virtually and managing their team presented difficulties but not a big issue. When resolving conflicts was a little more challenging than before, but it did not present roadblocks, according to team member 11:

- “Conflict resolution did not present a big issue doing it online. It all came down to talking and getting to the bottom and understanding the reason for frustration. So it requires more time to understand and to dedicate more time to conversation than before.”

When it came to delegation of tasks and explanation, managers confirmed that not much had changed in that sense, they just had to communicate the tasks to be done, the new guidelines and get aligned with their team members. Overall, respondents that were in managerial positions had to adapt quickly to the new situation working virtually, but as most of them were already using Microsoft Teams extensively and were partly virtual it was not that hard. Respondents were conclusive that due to the digital maturity of their respective companies the change was not so drastic and presented some difficulties such as having to show much more support to their team members and being there for them more often for any requests and questions. Managing the team was more time consuming, but as time passed by and everybody started to get used to it, processes were more smooth and autonomous.

An important aspect that was introduced in some of the respondents companies were human resources tools such as 15five, which consists of each employee doing a weekly small report on how they are feeling, what are they lacking at work, if they are motivated or not, what expectations they have and overall how the work week had been. Then also, performance check-ins every quarter and then overall yearly performances. These tools were not implemented before the pandemic and have been broadly used to show support and facilitate managers to understand their team members and for leadership positions to understand how is the employees wellbeing and if improvements had to be done. According to managers the implementation of such reports helped them in managing conflicts and helping each other out.
4.6 Finding the right work-life balance is a challenge

The issue in finding a proper work life balance and overworking is identified as another main theme transitioning into a virtual team. All interviewees mentioned this more or less as a problem and a challenge. For example team member 1 stated:

- “It was hard to have your brakes when we started online. I needed to watch a movie to make sure I really had my break or otherwise I work and eat at the same time. Hard to leave the computer. You have to be disciplined to do that. To have the breaks as you do when in the physical team.”

Other respondents felt that they were working more hours than they had in the contract as they were working from home and it was hard to disconnect. Respondents agreed that working from home was tiring in the sense of not disconnecting and finding time to dedicate to their hobbies or relax. Oftentimes, employees felt under pressure and one way to alleviate this was to work long hours, which at the office due to having to work there, they would leave a little later than usual but not too much. Working from home meant that they could work more hours past their schedule and keep working until for example, dinner, which they could prepare and keep working. Lunch breaks were also a difficult thing to manage since many of them kept working while eating. In general, respondents felt they worked more than they should because they had a hard time to stop.

4.7 Perspective on remote work

Another main theme is the overall perspective on remote work. How it has changed. Interviewees seem open and positive about continuing working from home a few days a week although the majority wants to work from the office as well. They seem to prefer a mix of working from the office and working from home. When asked how their experience has changed their perspective on remote work, team member 2 stated:

- “It has only given me confirmation that virtual work works really well. In the beginning it had some issues but now it works great. In order to do a good job today, wherever you are in the world. It is very good. To work but you can also be with your family or travel on vacation and bring the laptop etc. to be with friends and family more. Not to
tell them to be at the office 7-16. I think most people would like the freedom to decide where they work, when they work and so on. Tomorrow I want to go to Spain and work."

It does look like the new direction for companies is to adjust this new home office concept and adopt a hybrid model in which employees work from home and from the office during the week depending on personal preference and guidelines from the firm. Respondents missed the social interaction part of their work and this was a major catalyst for them wanting to work some days at the office, but the overall view on working from home was positive.
5. Analysis of Results

In this chapter, analysis of the empirical data is presented, contrasting the findings with the theoretical background and analysing it in order to find points in common with previous research and at the same time compare to detect new findings from our study. The analysis will be presented in a thematic fashion. Following the themes presented in the theoretical background.

5.1 Introduction to analysis

After thorough analysis of the empirical findings from the field, the main and most relevant themes have been selected for further analysis and to draw conclusions that will respond to our research questions. Thanks to the study, the researchers deduced that all team members successfully adapted to the new situation that came with the pandemic. At the beginning it was hard to move everything virtually but adaptation was quick from everyone, respondents referred to COVID-19 as the catalysator force for total digital transformation, driving their companies to better digital maturity and the future. It can be argued that the pandemic has been a strong driver of organizational change and from the employee perspective, a new way of working and an adaptation period. The way of working changed and communication as a key component of effective teams also changed, affecting all aspects of team interactions and having an impact on the employees' experiences moving from a co-located team to a completely virtual team. Here we present the main challenges that were found in the field.

5.2 Building Trust

Researchers have focused majorly on trust as it is seen as the major challenge in virtual teams due to the use of digital tools and its lack of face to face interactions. The digital tools make the process of enhancing trust and cooperation more complicated due to the lack of verbal and informal communication. According to Hunsaker & Hunsaker (2008) this decreases the chances of effective cooperation and trust building. In our study, the responses agreed to this statement but only in very specific cases as pointed out by the respondents. According to them, if they had to onboard virtually a new team member, or having to work with someone they have never met before, this process would be very difficult and time consuming, as training and many explanations would have to be given. Due to the lack of verbal and face-to-face
communication, it is harder to explain concepts and often misunderstandings arise. This would decrease at the beginning of the onboarding or working process the effectiveness of the team. Also due to not knowing the person beforehand and never meeting them personally a sense of trust and a perception of the person is not built yet, hence lowering trust on this team member. But that did not mean that trust could not be built, it takes longer than in a co-located team but still it is being built by working on projects together and having continuous meetings, even if it's virtually.

Research conducted by Abbasnejad & Izadi Moud (2012) pointed out trust as the key of efficient teams and team cohesion. These two factors influence the success of the virtual team and it is argued that building trust in a virtual setting is one of the major challenges of a virtual manager, especially in the beginning and creation of a virtual team. Our empirical findings point out that trust was considered pivotal and the base of the team for all respondents, it had to be existent in order for the team to work, especially in a virtual setting. Respondents also agreed that building trust is harder virtually than working geographically at the same location due to this aforementioned lack of face to face interactions and the inability to see the other person and get a perception of them, as mentioned before with the onboarding example.

5.2.1 Existing trust from a previous co-located team

During the process of upbringing a virtual team, our empirical data show that it is a great challenge for both managers and employees to trust each other, build and maintain it in a complete virtual team. This means in a team that had never worked before together or the members did not know each other, or with new members that they did not know. But that is only true in this specific situation. Virtual teams interviewed had begun as co-located, they knew each other physically beforehand and they had the experience of working together previously without geographical dispersion, and had no issues in regards to trust. They were also able to maintain it due to their interpersonal relations built in the past. All respondents agreed that trust during the transition was never an issue for them and they could work and collaborate as efficiently as before. This is strongly linked with the research conducted by Thomas & Bostrom (2010) which showed that trust is built on the perceptions of personal ability, benevolence and especially integrity. The perceptions of integrity were found to have the strongest effects on developing interpersonal trust and this is corroborated by our findings, where respondents considered that knowing personally and having a perception of the person
is a very important step in the trust building process, and hence why they did not have any issues in regards to trust during the transition and their virtual work experience. This points out to a new perspective in the research and gives a new dimension to trust within the virtual team literature.

5.2.2 Greater employee autonomy

Autonomy has been researched in the virtual team literature as one of the factors that is predominant in these types of teams due to the geographical dispersion and nature of the work environment based on ICTs and the lack of spontaneous communication. From our empirical findings, no great changes were experienced in this aspect from the respondents, mainly because they were already quite autonomous in their tasks and projects due to the digital maturity of their companies and an ingrained culture of empowerment and employee autonomy (Griffith et al., 2003). As mentioned before, they had become more independent in the sense that they communicated less for smaller issues that they could resolve on their own rather than having to reach out to team members for support. As it has been depicted in the structure of the different virtual teams by Griffith et al. (2003), virtual teams still are somewhat hierarchical in the sense that even if the members are dispersed there is still a manager that acts as a leader and tracks the tasks done in the team. In one aspect that employees felt they were more autonomous was due to the ease of communication through ICTs and the broad extensive use of them due to the whole organisation becoming virtual. Employees could easily form situational and quick “chat teams” across different department teams and channels, acting as spontaneous virtual teams to resolve issues that come along their work day or for specific projects. These types of situational teams and methods for conflict resolution are broadly used as means for communicating faster, driving attention to relevant issues and prioritizing tasks. Usually team members without the need of manager confirmation would autonomously create these types of collaboration forms. These collaboration teams are what is categorized by Griffith et al. (2003) as spontaneous virtual teams, which are driven by employees. This shows how the organizations become boundaryless, barriers of communication disappeared and allowing for greater efficiencies and knowledge sharing.

Managers had no issues with not being able to supervise the employees in the absence of face-to-face interactions as they knew they had the integrity and ethic to conduct their work even if the manager was not present. During the transformational process of the organization, the built trust between team members helped and supported the desired change, thanks to their
autonomous way of working, it made it easier to work efficiently and maintain the status quo of the business. This fact helped in the experience of employees and the whole organization was benefited from. The leaders and managers had into account this factor that supported the desired change, which is needed according to Ashkenas et al. (1995).

5.3 Change in Communication

5.3.1 Lack of body language pose as a challenge to communication

Previous research on virtual teams has named several dominant challenges that might hinder effective work: communication, creating and maintaining relationships, trust and lack of social interactions (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Zigurs, 2003; Brahm & Kunze, 2012). Issues related to communication were also one of the main challenges identified in our empirical findings. Most of the interviewees struggled to feel understood or to understand signals like body language to a larger degree than in normal face-to-face communication. Furthermore, many interviewees experienced some form of translation loss of the message they tried to get across in the virtual environment or that they had to be extra clear as compared to a normal face-to-face communication. This has made it harder to communicate in the virtual teams but it does not seem to hinder any operational processes for the individual team members. However, it does pose a challenge when it comes to transitioning co-located teams into virtual teams.

5.3.2 Digital Maturity helps in digital communication

Griffith et al., (2003), depicts several perspectives such as organizational environment and having qualified individual members in the team as being of importance for a virtual team. Our empirical data supports this statement and it was clear that when the firm had a high level of digital maturity according to the interviewee, the interviewee did not perceive communication as a factor hindering any operational processes. Only that it could lose effectiveness at times when it was of more importance to see body language and reactions of the other people in the communication process. The transition being easier due to digital maturity is also supported by our empirical findings.
5.3.3 Frequency of communication is important

When it comes to communication challenges the frequency of communication is defined as one of the key factors in the virtual team environment. The relationship between team effectiveness and communication explored by Morgan et al. (2014) found that a limited range of communication tools should have little to no effect on team effectiveness, at least not be a major factor. Our interviewees never stated that they experienced a limited range of communication tools but overall they kept the same digital tools to communicate as they had before and it did not affect team effectiveness negatively when it comes to operational aspects. However, our empirical findings support that the lack of informal and daily chats does contribute to less frequency in communication in which our interviewees did express as a negative factor for team member interactions. Our empirical findings then support that frequency of communication is of importance for the virtual team environment.

5.3.4 Digital communication differences

Our empirical findings were in accordance with Morgan, Paucer- Cacere & Wright (2014), ICTs did contribute and enable effective communication although not to the same extent as face-to-face communication. However, since our team members were co-located previously to become a virtual team they had already built relationships on face-to-face communication which enabled effective communication to be easier achieved. This was also in combination with the individual team members expressing their organizations to be digitally mature. As stated, factors such as instant feedback and face-to-face interactions are important in avoiding miscommunication and misinterpretations. The loss of body language such as facial expression and gestures can also contribute to inefficiency in communication. Oakley (1999), stated that loss of such valuable information in communication can have a negative impact on organizational change management and business performance. Our empirical finding supports that such factors had a negative impact on communication but not to the extent that operational processes, organizational change management or business performance suffered to any greater extent as perceived by the individual team member. This is likely a contribution of digital maturity in combination with the team being previously co-located.
5.4 Social interactions

5.4.1 Informal interactions

Furthermore, communication plays a major part of social interactions but there is more to social interactions than communication. Social interactions have been researched previously by Saunder & Ahuja, (2006) & Morgan et al. (2014), both depicting them as powerful influencers of trust and closeness between team members and affecting team effectiveness. Our findings support this view as social interactions and spontaneous messaging was held to a minimum or at least it was lower than when the teams were co-located. Most messaging was concerning work topics and projects. Our respondents agreed that it is harder to build a relationship and trust solely in a virtual environment because of this lack of social interactions, which at the office is perceived as a great way of getting to know their peers, get a perception of their personality and build relationships. Spontaneous communications are crucial for building group cohesion, and building a sense of group cohesion can become a challenge in virtual settings (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005), which is supported by our findings. The virtual teams interviewed had already built a group cohesion from working co-located, so they were not so affected by this, their performance was maintained as it was before, they were more affected in the aspect of maintaining the relationships.

Hence, we can conclude that building a group that is cohesive is not such a big issue for teams that already worked co-located. This is due to the affinity of the group, which refers to the close relationships between individuals that they had before the pandemic which leads to more cohesive groups. This fact can be understood thanks to the research by Chang & Bordia (2001) that depicts that there is a positive relationship between group cohesion and group performance, when cohesion is increased, so does performance.

5.4.2 Collaboration & Knowledge sharing

On the other hand, Morgan et al. (2014) mentions that the more spontaneous social interactions happen it can trigger better collaboration between team members and the less interactions will have a negative effect on knowledge sharing. Our respondents did not experience decreased collaboration between them even though they had less social interactions. It was the other way around, due to becoming virtual, everybody on their teams was very supportive and enhanced collaboration between the team members, cross-teams and departments, everybody helping
each other out whenever possible. Knowledge sharing was also not an issue, the implementation of daily meetings by the managers kept knowledge sharing at high levels and the sharing of information on cloud services augmented during the transition, increasing the ability of employees to reach for any information they wanted. Respondents agreed that they reached out less to the other team members for smaller issues and questions, they became more independent trying to solve them on their own, in this aspect knowledge sharing was lower but did not have any negative impact on effectiveness. These findings are in line with Zigurs, (2003) & Alvesson, et al., (2017) that mention that the lack of social cues and spontaneous communication creates an environment that tends to need more adaptation and where team members crave more autonomy rather than control. In general, the loss of spontaneity is not considered inherently negative on the effectiveness of the team.

5.4.3 Enabling more interactions

These contradictions with previous research are due to the importance of the managerial strategy and the organizational change management approach taken by the virtual team leaders in order to minimize the impact on the team effectiveness because of these two factors. As mentioned by Morgan et al. (2014), virtual teams have to be managed carefully and properly in order to not negatively affect the organization. The way to manage a virtual team is different from managing a co-located team, as the way of interacting has changed and management is practiced through communication and interactions. This new way of managing can cause restrictions that could hinder effective management (Zigurs, 2003). Bell & Kozlowski (2002) have shown in their research that team leaders that enable more frequent communication and member interactions will have more efficient virtual teams. This is supported by our findings on the importance of the daily meetings during the transition as a great way of keeping the team aligned, stipulating owners of tasks, setting goals and enhancing social interactions. This style of management based on a democratic leadership style, cooperative and with communication flows that bring contact between team members frequently was key for team effectiveness (Garner, 2012).

5.4.4 Employees well-being

One negative downside from social interactions is the feeling of team members of disconnection from their peers. Most felt that they missed the office and interacting more
informally with the other team members, this could affect them in ways such as decreased motivation, less affection towards peers and loneliness. Feeling lonely can have a negative impact on motivation and trust and that it can be present when the level of social interactions is low (Jarvenpaa & leidner, 1999). This is one of the main reasons why respondents wanted to get back to working at the office. Affection is key for enabling good member relationships Morgan et al. (2014) and this is one aspect in which virtual team settings have a negative impact on team cohesion, since it is harder to maintain the relationship through interactions.

5.5 Digital Transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unplanned change imposed by external forces that disrupted the organizational environment and its operations. According to Shaw (2018) this type of change requires organizations to be quick and impose a new strategy in order to minimize negative effects and transform the situation into an opportunity. Due to the lack of time and preparation, employees found themselves from one day to the other in a particular situation that they had never met in their life. They had to work from home suddenly and adapt to the new situation no matter what. During those unplanned changes there might be barriers to the changes that can be a threat to the organization and to the employees experiences (Rafferty et al., 2013). From our empirical findings this was not the case in the interviewed organizations. Everybody had to adapt to the new change, because of the restrictions imposed on society at large and from an organizational change perspective it did not differ or alter their way of working so much.

5.5.1 Digital Maturity

What was clear from the respondents was the fact that the pandemic accelerated the total digital maturity of their companies. All the companies interviewed were already quite digital in the sense that most of the work processes and tasks could be done digitally. Employees were working from the office but a great part of their day was spent on the computer and attending virtual meetings with other departments in other countries for example. In this sense, their work did not change much, the biggest change was that the communication was not informal anymore and the lack of social interactions became present. Change within organizations usually is a complex process, where an innovative dynamic is built mixing the old and the new (Castel & Friedberg, 2010). In our cases there was not much of a difference between the old
and new, rather it was different due to the instability and uncertainty created by the pandemic and how to maintain efficiencies without face to face meetings.

The general view on the change from the respondents perspective was that the pandemic increased the digital maturity of the companies but did not make drastic changes to them. But that did change for a lot of other companies and the world in general became “a virtual environment” itself. This global change really increased the digital transformation processes and maturity of most organizations and had effects on everybody. Respondents felt that now with their experience working completely virtual and with the rest of the world doing the same and becoming accustomed to this new normal, they could become more efficient in many aspects. One of such could be streamlining their operations using digital meetings instead of physical meetings. New operational models could arise from this, where efficiency is sought and implementation of more autonomous and dynamic technologies are leveraged. For example, having sales meetings virtually would increase efficiency in not having to meet all clients separately or at the same spot. They could become more free and less strained to a physical place than before thanks to remote work. Many respondents said that they could easily live in any other place where their work and efficiency would remain the same. Holton et al. (2016) on coping with change describes that availability of organizational resources projects a tendency to shape the employees perceptions of certainty and control regarding stressful situations at work, hence helping in determining a proactive coping strategy, this is corroborated by our findings, employees felt that as their organizations were digitally mature and they already had the resources needed to work completely virtually they were coping with change in a positive way. Even though there was lots of uncertainty in the world and in the company, they coped well with the change and negative emotions were held to a minimum.

5.5.2 Employee involvement in the change process

From their experience in this change, they felt that leaders were more preoccupied with their wellbeing and that all their employees' needs were met. As it was a new situation for everybody, managers were asking continuously for feedback, involving the employees in the change process and allowing discussion in order to become better and more efficient. The digital workforce was considered by leaders a pillar in maintaining their business share and they had to allow employees to be involved in the decision-making process since they were the key component of all their success. This leadership-employee relationship built more trust and
helped in developing more commitment, reducing resistance to change and integration. This helped employees to cope better with change. These empirical findings are in line with research conducted by Alvesson (2017) in which in order to have effective changes and leadership, employees have to be considered active co-producers of leadership. These findings are in accordance with research done by Morgan & Zeffane (2003) where leadership is mentioned as the enabler of the change process and the need for employee involvement in this process. In the same lines, Pierce et al. (2002) found that employee involvement is really important in these organizational changes in order to build better organizational performance and well being, creating incentives and providing emotional support for employees. This was greatly supported by our findings, where leadership roles had become more involved with their employees and communication had increased greatly, acting as incentive and support for them.

5.6 Effective Virtual Management

Respondents agreed that once the whole organization became virtual, it accelerated the pace of digitalization of the company. Firstly, beyond having the right technological tools, a fully digital environment was created based on strategy, trained workforce, organizational culture and structure. This allows for a huge amount of data to be generated in a virtual organization and it allows for analyzing better the work processes, evaluating performed work more individually and assessing or improving on the feedback received. This is supported by the literature on virtual leadership, Griffith et al., (2003) means that the leaders have to search and observe the events that occur when the team performs their tasks, they have to be able to track back on the work and the source of the work in order to understand how the members of the team operate. It is essential to find what critical issues might affect the performance of the team. The digital transformation into a completely virtual organization allows for this type of tracking and performance check-ups, becoming more efficient than before. Respondents agreed that information was more accessible in the new rearranged organization, they missed out on less information and everything was recorded in some form or way, either on briefing tickets, chat messages, emails or shared docs. This is supported by Zaccaro & Bader (2003) who found that it is of great importance for successful virtual teams that the leader acts as: team liaison, team direction setter and team operational coordinator, and they are able to easily conduct these roles due to the information available in the new reorganization.
5.7 Theoretical Framework

Through the analysis of the empirical data we propose a theoretical framework which highlights the main positive and negative outcomes that employees have experienced shifting towards a virtual team setting. Applying organizational change management theory, we suggest Kurt Lewin's three step model as the basis of the change process. The unplanned organizational change caused by the external force COVID-19 pandemic is the catalyst of change, causing the unfreezing of the organization, leading to the implementation of virtual teams as the means of working, enabled by the digital transformation needed for the change and the digital maturity of the organization. Last step would be the refreezing stage, where the focus of the study is, we explored the experiences of employees in the transition to virtual teams. As you can see, the model follows a scheme ranging from firstly the organizational level, to the working team level and finally to the individual and its own perceptions, experiences and responses to the organizational change. All outcomes are the main themes and categories that affect virtual work and that have changed during this shift:

![Theoretical Framework Diagram]

*Figure 5: Theoretical Framework by Daniel Scherling & Iván Camarero Lind (2021)*
6. Conclusions

The last part of our study, here we will conclude and present the biggest findings from the study. Answering our main research question and sub-questions.

This study explored how individual team members have experienced the organizational change of transitioning co-located teams into virtual teams. With a focus on how trust, communication and social interactions within the team have changed as experienced by individual team members. This is of importance due to the fact that how employees perceive, communicate and embrace organizational change in virtual settings still remains an under researched topic. Furthermore, this needs to be understood to implement more effective organizational change. This transition was an unplanned organizational change forced by external factors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. From our study, we found that there are differences between building a complete virtual team from nothing and building a virtual team that was previously co-located and already had experience working in the same geographical location. In the coming part we will answer our research questions.

RQ1: How have individual team members experienced the organizational change of transitioning from a co-located team into a virtual team due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Employees experienced a great shift from working co-located to working virtually. The unplanned change came rapidly and drastically from one day to the other, so most of them had to adapt quickly to their new working conditions. From our analysis we conclude that employees did not become less efficient and their team performance did not decrease due to the team already being co-located before. They had already built personal relationships that were the base of their trust and group cohesion. Hence, presenting a minimum challenge for them. Successful managerial strategies that allowed for greater number of interactions and communication maintained the group cohesion and relationships, enhancing team performance.

Digital mature companies did not suffer big changes from the pandemic due to the widespread use of ICTs already ingrained in the work processes, individual employees did not need to adapt to complete new ways of working. The pandemic accelerated the shift into a completely
virtual organization and had a positive effect in the leadership-employee relationship. Firstly, the digitization process was accelerated, which is converting all analog information into digital information and facilitating access to it. This process mitigated knowledge sharing issues and loss of information. Secondly, managers and leaders sought to involve the employees into the organization changes in order to find efficiencies and problem solving solutions and found great results from this. Knowledge sharing was increased and organizational change communications were more frequent. Employee involvement and frequent communication had positive effects on organizational change management and employee well-being.

Furthermore, perceptions on the new way of working were positive. The change was said that it was here to stay and most respondents wanted to keep working virtually some days of the week while working some other days at the office. The main reason being that they missed the socializing part of work and missed their peers. This part was considered important to maintain their personal relationships as virtual communications were not considered enough to satisfy their social needs. Before the pandemic the perception of remote work was more negative and respondents questioned if it would even work. After the pandemic, it turned to a positive perception and a successful transition into a more digital and virtual working environment.

- **How has trust within the team changed due to this transition?**

In contrast to popular belief and existing literature our empirical findings contradict the statement that trust would be a major challenge in virtual teams, affected negatively in a virtual environment or to be lower than traditional co-located teams. We contribute our findings to the aspect that the team members of our study were previously co-located and had already established a deep level of trust before transitioning online while literature mostly have researched virtual teams that were not previously co-located. The individual members of the teams we researched had been able to build trust in face-to-face communication and a traditional work environment in the office. While the teams of our study were formed as co-located teams. Furthermore, trust is a very important component of the virtual team and it does allow for effective collaboration as supported by our empirical findings. However, trust did not act as a major challenge in the virtual teams as compared to what literature has found. Our team members managed to maintain the trust built in the past while operating in a fully virtual environment.
How has communication within the team changed due to this transition?

Our empirical findings show that communication has changed due to the transition and that it has carried favourable and negative aspects to communication as a consequence. Valuable information in the communication can be harder to get across without the use of effective body language as would be possible in a face-to-face conversation. It’s also more complex to understand the reaction of the receiver in a virtual environment when communicating. The camera can help but it won’t act as a perfect substitute for face-to-face communication. On the other hand, communication has become more direct and you are less likely to be disturbed by surrounding communication from the office. However, third party input and frequency in communication has decreased which are appreciated in the team. The changes seen in the communication are not drastic enough to hamper the operational effectiveness or success of the organization. However, it might complicate communication that requires more complex and rich details and in which you need to see how the message is received.

How has social interactions within the team changed due to this transition?

Social interactions are closely tied to communication but still differ as a theme. Although, our findings do support existing literature on the premises that social interaction does build trust as closeness. While social interactions have worsened between individual team members transitioning online they had already established trust and group cohesion and it did not have negative effects on team performance. However, it would have been harder to do so if they had not been previously co-located. As found, social interactions became less frequent and more work related. Less spontaneous messaging and more focus on work when interacting in the virtual environment. The lack of social interaction led some team members to feel lonely, some more than others and it could have an effect on the well-being and performance of the individual team member. This is important to consider in organizational change management.
7. Discussion

This chapter will discuss the study via theoretical implications, practical implications, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

7.1 Theoretical Implications

This study indicates that trust, communication and social interactions are interrelated and very important for a virtual team to function. Trust is often being built through communication and social interaction while trust also works as a benefactor in establishing more efficient communication and social interactions. In contrast to existing literature our empirical study did not find trust to be a major challenge in virtual teams, this is believed to be due to the researched virtual teams previously being co-located and already had a deep level of trust established. Digital maturity played a large role according to the team members’ own experiences in how easy the transition from being co-located to becoming a virtual team was. Communication was not found to be any major obstacle in the virtual work environment. However, it did become harder when body language played a large role in the communicational effectiveness. Furthermore, social interactions did suffer from the virtual transition and affected some team members emotionally as well. While communication and social interactions changed, trust had little to no change transitioning into a virtual team.

7.2 Practical Implications

When undergoing organizational change, organizations should invest in more research and give more attention to the ways the employees perceive, communicate, manage and embrace organizational change in their work. Furthermore, digitally mature firms should invest more into creating hybrid models in which their teams can work from home and from the office each week based on individual or team plans. This could increase the possibility to hire talent further away but also for individuals to gain more freedom and flexibility in their everyday lives.
Something that can make an employer much more attractive to employees. We move towards digital transformation and not away from it so it would make sense that firms continue to tap into their digital resources to optimize work processes. But in order to do so the employees must be considered and understood. How they will perceive organizational change, what they want and how they can best embrace it. Furthermore, it looks very possible to transition co-located teams into hybrid virtual teams without any larger issues when it comes to operational performance.

From a managerial perspective, it is clear that in order to have an effective and functional virtual team, interactions and communication have to be encouraged, by having daily meetings and showing support to employees. Having a cohesive group is key in order to maintain trust and personal relationships within the team. That will enable better team performance and effectiveness. This is the great challenge that all virtual managers face. It is yet to be researched if there are more effective methods of certain technological tools that will make this challenge easier.

Our research also highlights the importance of the employee during the change process. It is fundamental that organizations looking to implement new changes in the organization should involve the employee more in the decision-making process. Organizations can use this study to know what experiences the employees had working virtually, what differences exist between remote and present work styles. What aspects of their work were enhanced, what aspects worsened and could be improved instead. By involving the employee in the process and creating more communication between leadership roles within the company and employees the relationship can be improved and a healthier organization could arise.

7.3 Limitations to Study

It’s of importance that organizational change management and virtual teams can be researched from many different perspectives. In this study the research purpose and therefore our focus has been on individual team members’ experience, transitioning from a co-located team into a virtual team. We did not focus on team performance, efficiency or a team that was created as a virtual team. This study concerns an unplanned organizational change forced by external factors. Furthermore, the interviewed team members worked for digitally mature
firms. In addition to this the sample size could be seen as a weakness although it’s acceptable in terms of explorative in-depth interviews for a qualitative study and with this time window. Focusing on less digitally mature and advanced firms could bring other results. As well as teams that have not previously been co-located.

7.4 Critique of Method

By having a larger sample size we could have strengthened the generalizability. However, for our purpose the sample size was sufficient since themes repeated before all interviewees were carried out. One strong point was the ethical considerations and detailed processes when it comes to data quality. By establishing a clear and detailed research process beforehand we could conduct our research more precisely and accurately. One weakness could be the primary data collection via digital interviewees since it’s harder to establish trust and understand body language over a video interview. On the other hand we were more or less forced to take this precaution due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.5 Future Research

Future research could focus on less digitally mature firms and explore how team members experience the transition. This could be of interest to see if it would impact factors such as trust, communication and social interactions differently. Research on smaller firms might prove to yield different results.

It could be of interest to research hybrid teams that work both from the office and their home office. To see how it compares to this study or other studies that focused solely on co-located or virtual teams. We have researched virtual teams from the individual member perspective, the collective or manager perspective could also prove to be a useful suggestion for future studies.

Working from home can be great but also bring drawbacks. Work life balance was found to be one of them. An interesting perspective is to focus more on work life balance and the well-being of the employee working from home. To explore how employees can manage working
their normal hours and disconnect better from work. It has proven to be a challenge to do so when your home suddenly becomes your office.
8. Reference List


Bell, B. S., & Kozlowski, S. W. J. (2002). A typology of virtual teams: Implications for effective leadership. Group and Organization Management, 27, 14–49


Shaw, M. (2018). Unplanned Change and Crisis Management. Global Encyclopedia Of Public Administration, Public Policy, And Governance, 6058-6063. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_748](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_748)


Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

**Background Questions:**

1. Do we have your permission to record the interview?
2. Are you part of a virtual team at work?
3. Was your team co-located before?
4. What is your current position at the firm?
5. What are the main tasks you perform?
6. Can you describe your role in the team?
7. What are the main tasks that your team performs?
8. Have you been part of a virtual team previous to the covid-19 pandemic?

**Main Questions:**

1. How have you experienced the transition from a co-located team into a virtual team?

2. How has collaboration in the virtual team been affected from the transition of moving online?

3. Did you experience any main challenges when transitioning into the virtual team?

4. How did you manage the changes transitioning from being co-located to becoming a virtual team?

5. Did you experience any emotional or mental challenges working in a virtual team?

6. How did you experience the support from team members in the virtual team?

7. How did you experience the support from the leader in the virtual team?
8. How has delegation of work tasks changed transitioning into virtual teams?

9. How has the coaching of tasks changed transitioning into virtual teams?

10. How has trust changed transitioning into a virtual team?

11. How has communication between team members been affected transitioning into virtual teams?

12. How have social interactions between team members changed transitioning into a virtual team?

13. How do you experience autonomy after the transition into a virtual team?

14. How has your personality affected your role in the team differently moving into a virtual team?

15. Did you experience any challenges that could hinder effective team member interaction?

16. How has the leadership style changed due to the transition into a virtual team?

17. Did you experience any restrictions that could hinder effective leadership?

18. How has the management communication changed going virtual?

19. How has the access to information changed transitioning into virtual teams?

20. How has your perspective on communication changed due to the transition?

21. How has your perspective on remote work changed due to this experience?
### Appendix 2: Examples of coding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase from the interview</th>
<th>Associated code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 1:</strong> “The body language is a little bit more difficult to understand. So I have to make an extra effort to try to understand, right? What is the problem and how to solve it for example. Because it's real. It's true that the body language you lose it, even if you have it on the screen and in the media, you lose a little bit of the feeling.”</td>
<td>Lack of Body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 2:</strong> “Yes, maybe I communicate in a different way since I have to do it in teams. I don’t use the camera so I can’t see how the receiver reacts but I can hear the voice. Maybe I have to be more clear now. It's training also, you get better if you do it every day.”</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 3:</strong> “Before I did not speak to certain team members for months because our tasks are so different so we did not interact much. I think it’s important to interact with team members.”</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 4:</strong> “We only talk about work. It's really weird to talk about personal or like other things if you don't already have a bond created. So I think it has been affected by us working from home. We communicate less for other things that are not work for example.”</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 5:</strong> “It has not changed so much. Because the people I was placed with physically. I have known them a lot since before. No, it’s quite the same.”</td>
<td>Existing trust from a previous co-located team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 6:</strong> “The trust has been built over the years, the way to work, measuring what people are doing, we already know how we work.”</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 7:</strong> “The people in my team are very autonomous, we do our things and then align on our meetings. So we have free hands to do our tasks however we want, at our pace and without the need of the manager checking what we do.”</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 8:</strong> “We are very autonomous. They know very well what they have to do and they know exactly when they have to ask for support or for help. I fully trust my team.”</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 9:</strong> “But I still feel lonely sometimes. It’s nice to have people around you and just talk sometimes.”</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 10: “The daily talk at lunch or around a coffee. Even though we try to have the virtual fika some are participating and some not. Most is about working in the discussion, not so much private. The noise of talking and different conversations, we have lost it.”</td>
<td>Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 11: “In my impression, I think the level of collaboration has increased. Now it is very easy to access anyone in the company, if you have a request everyone is very fast responding and trying to support. In terms of collaboration I don’t see any issues or that it has suffered.”</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 12: “When it comes to creative meetings it is harder to share ideas and create new things. We were used to working in a physical space with a whiteboard. Now in order to explain we have to create short videos or pictures. Often we have to already come with something prepared in order to present the idea.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 13: “We have different teams in Microsoft Teams and different channels in teams, where you can have immediate information for instance, right if a logistic problem comes I can have automatically information about it.”</td>
<td>Knowledge Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 14: “Everybody’s with this app open and with all the information very very fast and then we send documents everything is in the cloud.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 15: “We had daily meetings to create this sense of being partners so that we create this sense of belonging to the team and that was made to not lose anybody who could feel completely alone at home, but that we were with him.”</td>
<td>Enabling More Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 16: “So what I did is to create a daily meeting. First thing during the day. We meet together with all the team and we share what is going on, what are the main priorities, what is happening, if there is an issue, and the purpose was to make sure that everybody was aligned with everything that has to be done and that the communication was going smoothly to everybody.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 17: “I will say that after one year, I feel and I see that the people are starting to be a little bit tired and they miss it, the personal contact or another way to communicate.”</td>
<td>Employees Well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 18: “I can understand that someone in my team that is a little bit more new or has not so many connections with the team can feel really alone and can have some difficulties to find out who they work with and get to know them.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 19: “Our company has a very strong culture of delivery of work and we</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were using a lot of the digital tools already. It gave us flexibility and the ability to respond to the pandemic and quickly we were up to date and working efficiently. It was mostly due to how well built the company was.”

**Example 20:** “Like we were used to working with our computer, and we are a team, even though we’re in the same space, we were working through chat. So it's not that different.”

**Example 21:** “The first thing they have done and the company has done is to send a questionnaire to understand what is not working and what changes are needed. This way they succeeded in understanding how we feel and we can give opinions to become better.”

**Example 22:** “Having us involved in making improvements always helps in the engagement of employees with the company and always helps to increase some kind of unofficial relationships with management and become better.”

**Example 23:** “we’ll always sometimes miss out information but I think right now you can have more access to everything. I think we improved in your organization, going virtual and online. Everything is in the cloud and this is super important for our work, so the manager ensures that we have access to everything and everything is uploaded”

**Example 24:** “These daily meetings I think that was the key. The key daily point of contact in order to really do what we had to do to stay afloat.”
# Appendix 3: Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some members work during the meetings</td>
<td>Difference in communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication is different</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are quite in the meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No face-to-face conversation anymore</td>
<td>Lack of body language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harder to understand body language on the camera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the camera is off you can’t see the other person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital readiness</td>
<td>Digital maturity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already had many digital meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We talk less often</td>
<td>Frequency of communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication is more scheduled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly work related communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose contact with some team members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already established trust</td>
<td>Established trust while being a co-located team</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known each other for a long time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change to trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established perception of employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More flexible work hours</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working independently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No social Breaks</th>
<th>Informal interactions</th>
<th>Social interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No random talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly work related interactions</td>
<td>Informal interactions</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No shared lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly one on one digital interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower activity in meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower participation in meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting alone</td>
<td>Employee well-being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work too much</td>
<td>Knowledge sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take too few/short breaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss personal contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less third party input</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily meetings</td>
<td>Enabling more interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Coffee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized social meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital meetings</th>
<th>Digital Maturity</th>
<th>Digital transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cloud services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital readiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can bring equipment home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support with equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work more hours</td>
<td>Work more than before</td>
<td>Work Life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on breaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too few breaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too short breaks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check computer before sleep</td>
<td>Problem to disconnect work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check emails when not working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t leave work at the office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harder to forget work at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: GDPR Form

GDPR Thesis Study Consent Form

Required by European Union General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679

GDPR Consent for Transitioning co-located teams into virtual teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Taking part in the study
I consent to JIBS processing my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.

☐ ☐

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

☐ ☐

My signature below indicates that I choose to take part in the thesis study and consent to JIBS treating my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.

_________________________  ______________________  ________________
Name of participant        Signature                  Date

Thesis contact details for further information
[Name, phone number, email address]

Version: January 2020
Participant Information Sheet

Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a thesis study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study collecting personal data?

The aim of the study is to explore the experience of team members when transitioning from collocated teams to virtual teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is a Master Thesis within Business Administration at Jönköping International Business School and is for the duration of the spring semester 2021. These semi-structured interviews will contribute to the empirical study of team transitioning described above. This paper's field of study is Organizational Change Management.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to give your consent. All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications.

Under GDPR you have the following rights over your personal data:

- **The right to be informed.** You must be informed if your personal data is being used.
- **The right of access.** You can ask for a copy of your data by making a 'subject access request'.
- **The right to rectification.** You can ask for your data held to be corrected.
- **The right to erasure.** You can ask for your data to be deleted.
- **The right to restrict processing.** You can limit the way an organisation uses your personal data if you are concerned about the accuracy of the data or how it is being used.
- **The right to data portability.** You have the right to get your personal data from an organisation in a way that is accessible and machine-readable. You also have the right to ask an organisation to transfer your data to another organisation.
- **The right to object.** You have the right to object to the use of your personal data in some circumstances. You have an absolute right to object to an organisation using your data for direct marketing.
- **How your data is processed using automated decision making and profiling.** You have the right not to be subject to a decision that is based solely on automated processing if the decision affects your legal rights or other equally important matters; to understand the reasons behind decisions made about you by automated processing and the possible consequences of the decisions, and to object to profiling in certain situations, including for direct marketing purposes.