The Ideal Workplace Environment Post-Pandemic

Master thesis submitted to Delft University of Technology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in **Management of Technology**

Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management

by

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To be defended in public on August 29th 2022

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Executive Summary

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone has encountered remote working. During this time, employees have become accustomed to remote working habits, and a shift has been made in many lives toward a more flexible work-life balance. Nowadays, with the pandemic almost behind, it gives rise to the question, how will the ideal workplace environment look like post-pandemic? By conducting a broad and extensive literature research two frameworks were constructed and proposed, being, respectively, a productivity framework, and a well-being framework. On top of that, three categories involving the responsibility of these factors were proposed, being, respectively, the neutral, positive, and happy category, linked to the responsibility of respectively, the manager, colleagues, and the employee self. These frameworks and their corresponding factors were connected by the five needs of Maslow and linked to these categories. Resulting in a combined framework that showed promising connections between the productivity and well-being factors that are in need to be verified and validated. This was followed by a survey conducted over 56 participants, including a selection of the factors mentioned in the frameworks. Resulting in many qualitative information on how to establish the ideal workplace environment. However, due to the time constraints, the results of the survey are still open to be analyzed in a quantitative manner. The research was concluded with a part that draws the ideal workplace environment, and on top of that, some advice for managers on how to create their own ideal workplace environment, and how to better support their employees with the focus on remote work. All in all, managers should have an open communication style, be respectful, listen actively to the needs, preferences, and wishes of their employees, and keep up to date with the resources they can provide to support their employees. Resulting in an increase in the mentioned factors from the frameworks, which, in turn, could fulfill the five basic needs of Maslow, and helps employees to live up to their potential. When an employee is able to achieve this, their productivity and well-being will be improved, and they will make more and cost less, for the organization. Therefore, aiming for the ideal workplace environment will benefit all.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is still, nowadays in 2022, the talk of the town, shifting in and out of lockdowns and influencing the lives and practices of many people. While most employees hope to go back to their old ways once the pandemic is over, others have adjusted and prefer the new ways in their day-to-day life. (Caligiuri & De Cieri, 2021) From a management perspective, it is critical to meet the needs of the organization and its employees, but also to know what works most efficiently for the business they are in. However, due to these shifts between lockdowns and regulations, the workplace environment has become a petri dish for novel approaches and experiments. Sometimes adjustments were needed within a few days or over the weekend, which puts managers and employees to their limits to find viable ways to get the work done. (Carrol & Conboy, 2020) Most employees would describe it as completing the job, in harsh conditions, with the resources available. However, some have made use of the opportunities presented, and have found more efficient and preferred ways to assess and complete their tasks.

During the pandemic, due to regulations and the dire need to keep distance, no human contact was possible. Therefore, most organizations had to switch to online practices to still do tasks and complete work. In practice, this would result in, for example, the local toy store would have to put their products on a brand-new website. Another example could be organizations and employees who used the internet to connect and make Zoom calls to continue work and doing business. Nonetheless, most of these changes were radical, changing daily routines and structures, and decreasing human contact. This resulted in chaos and insecurity, which have been or still need to be solved.

Most people have had access to the internet since the 1990s, but until the COVID-19 pandemic, no one was expected to use it in such extensive and broad ways. It could be used when needed, for example, to give guidance to a destination, or get the local weather forecast. (Feldmann, et al., 2021) Due to the availability of the internet and all the services that were built upon, the younger generations were also born in this online part of the world and grew up learning all the possibilities it has to offer. However, the vast majority did not grow up this way and learned some of these possibilities along the way. It has been difficult for employees from the somewhat older generations to learn how to use the internet or how to handle the devices needed for this purpose. Not forgetting, the limitless possibilities of services, software, and products it offers, makes choosing the right ones that much more difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic could be particularly devastating for those people. They need to become familiar with new programs, applications, or even a whole new device within a very short amount of time. It is common for some of these employees to be reluctant to changing their routines or habits just because they have been used to them for decades. This reluctance to change and their dire need for old ways must be considered when changing strategies post-pandemic within the company and changing the day-to-day habits and routines of their employees. (Carracedo, et al., 2021)

All in all, the changes that were needed to keep organizations running were sometimes a lot to ask for. In hindsight, some of these options were not the most suitable or applicable. However, due to the short timeframe, their need was now and not tomorrow. Looking back to two full years of the pandemic, many lessons have been learned, and options for changing are abundant. This creates some questions that are relevant to keep in mind when looking into the future, post-pandemic. What was learned and did some of these options stick around? Did some of these changes become the new normal in the workplace environment or will these changes all be reverted post-pandemic?

To create the ideal workplace environment, it is necessary to start looking for ways and strategies to implement post-pandemic. Despite the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have on most people, it is crucial to learn and improve from those situations, and to re-assess where appropriate. For this purpose, it is necessary to investigate different organizations and their approaches during the pandemic, but also to look into their future plans. Using previous research on various business approaches combined with approaches used during this pandemic gives insight. With this information, general advice can be given to improve on the current and past business models. This can be used to provide thought-out advice and prospects for the future.

To accomplish this, this thesis will provide two connected frameworks for managers. Various aspects of the workplace environment are displayed within these frameworks and are critical for managers to pay attention to. With the use of these frameworks and the advice given, they will be able to help their organization grow and create their ideal workplace environment post-pandemic.

The following research question was proposed and will be answered in this thesis:

"How will the ideal workplace environment look like in the new-normal era moving forward from the COVID-19 pandemic?"

While this research question is broad, it is important to tackle it in a way that is systematic and gives direction. Therefore, several sub-questions were proposed.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of remote and physical work for organizations, managers, and employees?

2. How does the workplace environment affect behaviors of employees and managers?
In terms of factors of productivity and well-being.

3. What characteristics and qualities should managers have to create the ideal workplace environment?

4. How did management styles change over the years and what can managers use to create the ideal workplace environment?

5. How can organizations improve the workplace environment post-pandemic?

To the end of this thesis, a lot of courses and skills, learned during MOT can be applied. Everything that has been learned, for example, how to conduct surveys, including how to create unbiased questions, how to improve workflow efficiency, how to conduct literature research, and how to propose models based on that research, can and will in some form be used to help this thesis. This thesis will help put those acquired skills and abilities to the test and to conduct useful scientific research.

To answer these sub-questions and the main research question, an extensive literature research has been conducted, that was followed by a survey to help in shaping the advice that managers can use to create their own ideal workplace environment in their own team or organization.

The thesis has the following structure, first, components and characteristics will be mentioned in Chapter 2 The (Ideal) Workplace Environment, following with remote work in Chapter 3 Remote Work, which assesses and reviews the advantages and disadvantages. Next, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will be analyzed and put into the perspective of remote work in Chapter 4 The COVID-19 Pandemic. After that, different management styles will be reviewed and will form the basis for the advice and the ideal workplace environment in Chapter 5 Management Styles. This chapter will also define which aspects and characteristics are critical for a manager to be successful to create the ideal workplace environment. Continuing with Chapter 6 The Five Basic Needs of Maslow, will be the extensive literature research on the five basic needs of Maslow. This will be used in Chapter 7 Productivity and Chapter 8 Well-Being respectively, to connect these five basic needs of Maslow to the productivity and well-being factors to propose two frameworks. An intermediate results chapter on the extensive literature research is given in Chapter 9 Results Literature Research, which also concludes with connecting the two frameworks into one combined framework that needs to be validated and verified. To see whether and how some of these factors from both frameworks are influencing employees, a survey was conducted, which is explained in Chapter 10 Survey. This survey is taken from the perspective of an employee, as they can pinpoint exactly what the missing or lacking aspects are of their manager and are able construct their ideal workplace environment, who are only limited by their own mind and ways of thinking. Following with Chapter 11 Results Survey which analyzes the results of the survey and draws conclusions on the implications of these results. In Chapter 12 Discussion the differences between the literature research and the results of the survey are discussed and their potential explanations. This is followed by Chapter 13 Future Research and Limitations, which touches upon the limitations of this research and proposes improvements for future research. On top of that, certain aspects are mentioned that are worth looking into when deliberating research directions. Finally, the ideal workplace environment is drawn from the extensive literature review combined with the results of the conducted survey, in Chapter 1214 Conclusions, which shows what can be improved upon post-pandemic. This will give some actionable advice to managers with several examples to include in their practices post-pandemic.

2. The (Ideal) Workplace Environment

The workplace environment is an environment for employees to complete tasks and assignments, and, thus, do their job. This workplace environment influences the way employees do their job and how they interact with this environment. Resulting in a change in job satisfaction, and, thus, in productivity and well-being. On top of that, the workplace environment is changing due to the everchanging nature of people, forcing their environment to change with them or change environments themselves. Combining this with the growing economy and the numerous divergent jobs, employees have a limitless pool of choices to search and discover. (Ajala, 2012)

Therefore, it is essential that organizations take care of these employees. This way, employees will grow attached to an organization and are less likely to leave for better offers. On top of that, employees that are satisfied with their job are more productive, which essentially means more money for the organization that they work in. (Redlein, et al., 2020) (Lister, 2018) (Lister, 2019)

The workplace environment consists of numerous factors, aspects, variables, characteristics, and is still increasing in what it exactly encompasses. These include ambient factors such as temperature, lighting, and ergonomic furniture, but also social interaction factors such as codes of conduct, communication, and conflict. For the purpose of this thesis, the factors that are influencing productivity and well-being are chosen, as both can be linked by the five basic needs of Maslow to see how to make employees happy and connect them to the organization. This will then be summarized and applied to propose a practical advice for managers on how to create this ideal workplace environment and help their employees connect to the organization.

On top of all these factors are the past few years, during the COVID-19 pandemic, that were extremely eventful and had great impact on the workplace environment. The pandemic has jumpstarted the opportunity for changing the workplace environment by its rapid and compulsory regulations. Resulting in many people re-evaluating their jobs and the workplace environment they were working in. Therefore, it is essential for an organization to change their workplace environment post-pandemic or stay behind.

3. Remote Work

Over the past few years, everyone has encountered remote work. Whether it was by themselves, or through relatives or acquaintances, most people can now imagine what it would mean for their own job. During the lockdowns, most employees had to work from home. Nonetheless, remote work has been around for a while and can involve working from flex offices or even from a Starbucks. A job as a writer, for example could easily be transformed into remote work when the right equipment is provided. Nowadays, remote work is often associated with leaving the office to work from home. However, remote work can allow employees distribute their hours flexibly, work autonomously, and choose their workplace environment, for example, abroad.

3.1 Knowledge Workers

When looking into remote work, the term knowledge worker is often mentioned. However, the term knowledge worker is used in many contexts and phrases. In 1954, Peter Drucker was the first to use the term knowledge worker to describe work that primarily uses mental processes rather than physical labor. (Drucker, 1954) For this thesis, the following definition of knowledge worker has been chosen: "Knowledge workers have high degrees of expertise, education or experience, and the primary purpose of their jobs involves the creation, distribution or application of knowledge" Davenport (2005, page 10). Nowadays, 25% to 50% of employees are knowledge workers. On top of that, this percentage continues to rise as businesses are still shifting from physical toward mental labor. (Davenport, 2005)

Due to the nature of this shift, most jobs no longer require employees to physically be somewhere. This is because most tasks that require mental processes rather than physical labor, need concentration and focus. For example, the writer mentioned above, only needs a laptop with some document software to write, which gives them the ability to quickly change locations when necessary. However, when looking at a construction worker, they need to be at a specific location to build such a construction, and they cannot move it, or take it home when some extra time is needed to meet a deadline.

3.2 Boundaries

Remote work comes with a lot of autonomy, but also with the need for boundaries. Strong boundaries, both at home and at work, must be established to facilitate the separation of responsibilities. Resulting in work not interfering with life, and life not interfering with work. This helps to increase well-being, job satisfaction, performance, and physical health, and to decrease stress and strain. (Caligiuri & De Cieri, 2021)

However, when these boundaries are not in place or are seeping into each other, different things can happen. For example, when working from home, interruptions and distractions can arise. These can include pets wanting attention or treats, children wanting some love, or a partner wanting to communicate or do something in the vicinity of the workplace. When boundaries are set, these distractions will become less likely to happen and the negative consequences will decrease.

Another problem, posed by Derks, et al. (2015), is the use and perception of technology. The use of technology can further blur these boundaries between work and life. For example, smartphones are used for both work and personal applications. The flexibility of technology can improve the balance between work and life responsibilities, but it poses a danger to the boundaries. Therefore, it is necessary to have regulations and policies in place on where and when to use technology outside of working hours, if at all.

3.3 Technostress

Working remotely gives the possibility to be more flexible for employees. However, it also causes the feeling of always being online, and never really being off duty. This introduced the term "always-on culture", which resulted in more stress for employees.

The term "always-on culture" came to light when investigating the knowledge workers. It describes a situation in which employees are constantly online and never really leave their work.
(Derks et al., 2015) This was often due to expectations coming from their manager and colleagues.
(Charalampous, et al., 2019) This created a situation where employees felt the need to be constantly available and answer any request or question immediately, resulting in higher stress levels.

This technostress, employees are experiencing, is coming from the need to prove their presence and progress to others, for example, their manager or colleagues, which is typical for remote work. Especially, with the mental work they do, it becomes less apparent to prove their worth, as results and accomplishments often only come together after all the work is done. Their progress is often challenging to present as their work is not linear but rather an iterative process in which most will lead to dead ends. This can blur their boundaries, as they become more willing to prove themselves by working late or responding to messages after working hours. Which creates the expectation that they always will respond or work late. Resulting in a positive feedback loop that will only get worse with time, unless there is some sort of intervention presented.

3.4 Digital Platforms

On top of the technostress, induced by the always-on culture, there are the limitless options of various digital platforms. Nowadays, almost everyone uses some sort of platform or software to get their ideas for innovation to others. Ciriello, et al. (2017) have studied the impact of PowerPoint on these innovation processes and their paradoxical nature. They have concluded that while PowerPoint is a useful tool to use in getting ideas across digitally, it is limiting in its use. PowerPoint can be useful for creating digital ideas, modeling, prototyping, and persuading investors, but it can also constrain these processes by its limitations in design elements. As a result, employees are limited in their creativity. While they have concentrated on PowerPoint and its impact, they are convinced that these problems do not exclusively occur within PowerPoint but also with other digital platforms and software.

As a result, these limitations caused by digital information systems need to be considered, as well as their interactions with each other. However, nowadays, cutting-edge platforms and software are sprouting everywhere and will solve almost any problem that may arise to fill these gaps in the market. This poses a whole new problem, where it can become normal to learn a new piece of software for every problem encountered. However, this will most likely result in an inefficient way of solving problems, all while problems become more challenging to solve. Resulting in another positive loop that needs intervention.

Therefore, it is necessary for the manager to consider these digital platforms and find the balance between the number used and which ones are used over the whole team, and the freedom their employees have to choose their own.

3.5 Fear of Exile

The fear of exile, as mentioned by Hafermalz (2021), is the fear of missing out, being excluded, disregarded, overlooked, shunned, or even banished. It is intensified by job security and reinforced by individualization. The fear or the threat of exile gives employees an incentive to consider their perceived visibility within the organization. Therefore, this fear is driven by negative emotions and is often challenging to solve individually, as there is a need for external recognition.

Hafermalz (2021) conducted interviews with remote workers and concluded that the feeling of exclusion became more intense when remote workers visited the home office. They expected to come home to open arms and have conversations with their colleagues, but got a rather cold reception, with employees working and having no time to talk. This gives opportunity for improvement and solutions and gives rise to the first piece of advice. These pieces of advice, which will be given throughout this thesis are actionable pieces and can be used to create the ideal workplace environment. All the proposed pieces of advice, and tips, which will be mentioned in-depth below, are also summarized and taken into an actionable plan in respectively, Chapter 9 Results Literature Research and Chapter 14 Conclusions.

A1: Make use of the office as it can be used to reduce the fear of exile.

On a side note, some employees seek remote jobs that have minimal interaction with others. These employees often do not possess a fear of exile or need a sense of belonging to function properly. However, these employees know how to get these needs met when they have them or they are lacking. They will ask for certain measurements that can be put into place when needed, resulting in their needs being met.

3.6 Teams

Whether employees are working in the office or remotely, most of the time, work occurs in teams. These teams are guided by a manager, who plans, organizes, keeps track of progress, and helps lead their team in completing a certain task or project. A comprehensive definition of teams from Kozlowski and Bell (2003, page 334) is: "Collectives who exist to perform organizationally relevant tasks, share one or more common goals, interact socially, exhibit task interdependencies, maintain and manage boundaries, and are embedded in an organizational context that sets boundaries, constrains the team, and influences exchanges with other units in the broader entity." This states the importance of interactions between employees and their manager. Therefore, it is necessary to look in-depth at what a manager can accomplish for and will help their team so that all their employees are the happiest and are living up to their potential.

Managing a remote team is different from managing a face-to-face or onsite team. Managerial guidance helps remote teams to function better. (Wakefield, et al., 2008) Additionally, Jarman (2005) concluded that to make remote teams successful, managers need to build a foundation, as a lack thereof will likely be more problematic than in their face-to-face counterparts. This can be done by focusing on team dynamics before diving into the projects or tasks. This gives rise to the second piece of advice.

A2: To successfully lead, first, focus on the dynamics before tackling projects or tasks.

For evidence to confirm this second piece of advice, team processes can be investigated. Looking at teams in organizations a few stages in team processes can and should be recognized. These team processes can be divided into three categories: transition, action, and interpersonal. During the transition stage, a team establishes ground rules and goals, creates a plan, and develops strategies. When this is complete, a team transitions into the action stage, where they focus on tasks, and accomplishments, monitoring progress, coordinating team members, and helping them where necessary. The final stage, interpersonal, involves conflict and affect management. Which, in turn, influences the other categories and is influenced by them as well. Therefore, the interpersonal stage is the most significant, as it will impact and affect the entire process. (Mathieu, et al., 2008)

3.7 Trust

Trust lies at the foundation of social interactions and therefore, the ideal workplace environment. Nonetheless, trust is almost dormant as presence of it goes undetected, but when there is a lack or deficiency, it immediately poses a problem that is challenging to solve.

Trust in remote teams compared to face-to-face teams, can be impaired by the inability to transfer social cues. Additionally, trust is heavily reliant on the individual identification of an employee with their team. Employees are reluctant to trust other members of the team without this identification. This could result in a reduction of their willingness to cooperate and putting their personal goals in front of the team goals. (Geister, et al., 2006) (Gilson, et al., 2015) However, the social relationships in remote teams could be stronger than in face-to-face teams. As these remote teams are often more inclined to form strong bonds based on interests rather than unimportant small talk. This implies that the depth of social relationships is not necessarily a problem, and that the impairment of social cue transfer is not critical for these relationships. (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005) This results in the first tip, unlike the pieces of advice, which are actionable and are stand alone, these tips need to be kept in mind, when being a manager.

T1: Trust is the building block of relationships, and is therefore,
essential for the ideal workplace environment

3.8 Culture

Cultural differences are necessary to consider when creating the ideal workplace environment. When considering remote workers, this becomes even more evident as the frequency of different cultures within teams increases. This is because in remote teams, there are no physical boundaries to search for and find expertise, and anyone can chime in from their end of the world.

These differences between employees, on top of the personal preferences, are described by their cultural habits and needs. Employees from different nationalities or cultures have different expectations of the formal structure of an organization, but also of informal structures like patterns of interaction. (Pavett & Morris, 1995) For example, employees can have a more formal approach to decision-making or task division, while others can prefer to discuss it only when it comes up rather than upfront. This can also impact their self-image and sense of belonging. (Au & Marks, 2012)

The manager needs to know of these cultural differences within a team, but also has a responsibility to look out for sub-groups that are formed within such a team. Remote employees are likely to form such sub-groups with other employees who share the same cultural background or geographical region. (Au & Marks, 2012) This is because similar values and beliefs are carried across cultures, and these similarities make identification with each other easier. Resulting in close bonds, and easier interactions and communication. However, these sub-groups can cause conflicts between other sub-groups while participating in the same team.

3.9 Conflict

Remote teams are more susceptible to situations that involve conflict. This is because they are less experienced, and less research has been done on conflict in remote teams opposed to their face-to-face counterparts. On top of that, these remote teams are a deviation from the norm, which means that they encounter different causes for conflict, for example, misunderstandings due to the inability to transfer social cues, or the cultural differences that lead to, the above mentioned, sub-groups. (Au & Marks, 2012)

The problem of team conflict is a pressing matter. However, team conflict due to the nature of remote teams makes it more difficult to manage these teams. Three types of conflict have a significant influence on team performance, being task conflict, relational conflict, and process conflict. Task conflict is the unclarity of tasks and goals, resulting in miscommunications and misunderstandings. Relational conflict is conflict that is not focused on a specific task but comes with negative emotions due to a lack of knowledge or information about an employee. While process conflict occurs when there are disagreements on how to execute the work or the methods used to solve problems. (Wakefield, et al., 2008) These types of conflict will be tackled in Section 7.2.4 Goal Clarity, 7.2.5 Social Cohesion, and 8.3.2 Autonomy, respectively.

It must be mentioned that conflict is not necessarily a negative thing. However, it is the responsibility of the manager to make sure the conflict does not escalate and gets resolved. To this end, the manager can help their employees understand what caused the conflict and make suggestions on how to solve it. The manager may need to assume specific roles to fit the needs of their employees and to manage the pressing conflict, as mentioned by Wakefield, et al. (2008). They also discovered that regardless of the type of conflict, electronic communication increased when conflict decreased. This implies that communication is key in conflict especially when considering remote work. However, the reverse is also true, poor communication will most likely lead to conflict that, in turn, needs to be resolved by more clear communication. (Au & Marks, 2012)

4. The COVID-19 Pandemic

Spanning over a period of four years, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many lives drastically. Nowadays, the pandemic is receding from daily conscious decisions. As a result of the pandemic, people were exposed to a variety of technologies, software, and the use of the internet, which are now prominent in their daily lives. The literature on these changes in the workplace environment is limited because the changes were adopted under high time pressure and are still being researched. On top of that, there is uncertainty about the long-term effects of these changes, which makes drawing solid conclusions more challenging. This leaves a trail of less in-depth, but very recent research. Therefore, the short-term changes need to be investigated and put to the test to see if they could work for the long term.

As mentioned by Richter (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has provided new possibilities and opportunities for remote work to become more normal and accepted in settings that were not used to doing everything remote, digitally, or online. However, boundaries have become less distinct, and work has started to seep into personal lives as well. Thinking about work-from-home, pictures for most, video calls and meetings with children running around or a cat walking over a keyboard. As a result, most employees have dealt with this pandemic in a way that does not lead to positive associations. This often led to stress and chaos while keeping their heads above water and doing everything they could to keep the organization running. (Pass & Ridgway, 2022)

While the pandemic has painted a relatively negative picture of remote or online work, some employees still saw the upside. These employees saw some of the advantages to working remotely, for example, less commuting to work. When less commuting time is needed, employees have the option to fill this time themselves, with, for example, family, or sleeping in. Additionally, the home office can be decorated according to personal preferences including, for example, the temperature, lighting, snacks, and personal belongings. To paint a better picture, the combination of advantages and disadvantages of remote work must be taken. These should include pandemic experiences, but also experiences from before the pandemic.

4.1 Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic had a wide range of different impacts. Some of them are already forgotten, but others are still lingering and influencing the day-to-day lives of people. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to evaluate the impacts on the workplace environment. This way lessons can be learned, and the best practices can be carried forward into the future.

4.1.1 Boundaries

Due to the nature of the pandemic and the radical and time-pressured changes, the impact of switching from the office to working at home was immense. Many, if not all, had to quickly take their things from the office and start working from home indefinitely. Normally, working from home was associated with the ability to reduce work-home conflicts, due to its flexible characteristics. However, as a result of the pandemic, it was not by choice to work from home, and several distractions and interferences occurred. For example, children were not allowed to be sent to school, so they were required to be homeschooled, as well as the presence of a partner or spouse could cause distractions or irritations. As a result, many employees experienced a reduction of boundaries between their work and life. Resulting in work slipping in during off-time, and family attention that was needed during worktime. This was even more so for employees who started working from home for the very first time, as they needed to become accustomed to these practices and look for the right balance. During the same time their family was also adjusting and looking for this balance.
(Caligiuri & De Cieri, 2021)

4.1.2   Distractions

When choosing remote work, during normal circumstances, employees are prepared or are getting prepared to choose a suitable remote workplace. This could mean that they had to transform their home into their home office. However, due to the time-pressing manner, in which these regulations took over, employees had little to no time at all to prepare for these changes. This impacted their work-life balance and the home environment as well. Resulting in a chaotic house full of distractions and a need to be flexible for the needs of their family. Therefore, employees needed to come up with novel and creative new ways to do their jobs at home or remotely. This caused organizations to be flexible as well or lose those employees altogether. While most employees meddled through the pandemic, some quickly found their way into this remote part of their job and were able to limit distractions and increase productivity.

4.1.3   Technology Use and Tools

The internet has become the main place to meet during the pandemic and was used for many reasons, for example, gaming, meeting, chatting, leisure, work, entertainment, education, shopping, and many more. Feldman, et al. (2021) found that over the course of a year, the internet traffic increased by 40%, which was much greater than the expected annual growth. These findings also included the visible decrease in differences between workday and weekend patterns.

Not only has internet traffic increased, but also the various tools people could use, have increased during the pandemic. For example, many employees, but students, in particular, have learned to use Zoom for online lectures, or other platforms like Microsoft Teams. These platforms include the option to meet online via speech and video. However, the endless supply of tools does not end with video calls. Instead, it extends to designing tools like Canva, presentation tools like PowerPoint and Excel, and management task tools like Trello. Even social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are part of the increasing usage of the internet. On top of that, technologies like the Cloud, Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Machine learning are part of these technologies and help shape future ones. (De, et al., 2020)

This poses a lot of choice when looking to changing strategies when aiming for the ideal workplace environment. As a manager it becomes increasingly difficult to keep up with the new innovations and software releases. Therefore, they need to make a shift in time allocated for these purposes as they become more prevalent. To do this, the manager can, for example, give their employees more autonomy to create this time needed. This results in the third piece of advice.

A3: Managers should give more autonomy to their employees
to create more time to keep up to date with new innovations and software developments.

4.1.4 Technostress

During the pandemic, the radical changes and the chaos were causes for stress and disorder. The employees were expected to do it all and on top of that, do it all at the same time as well. The shift to an online environment created a lot of expectations and erased boundaries. Resulting in stressful situations and choices that needed to be made, for example, family that needed to be tended to during work hours, and work that still had to be finished, after hours. On top of that, employees were required to be constantly up to date with changes in the office, the regulations of the government, and their family and friends. Resulting in a constant need to be online and share updates. Altogether, this resulted in the increase of technostress.

Due to the chaos of the pandemic, these boundaries and expectations were not agreed upon or even set at all. Therefore, employees felt the need to make up for the difference between the normal work situation in the office, and the new one at home. In the office, the manager would regularly check-in with their employees and make some small talk before moving along. In the new situation, the manager was more of an invisible force, which needed to control and see constant progress happening as they could not check if their employees were really at their desk working. All in all, this increased technostress. Which results in the need for solutions and other approaches, leading to the fourth piece of advice.

A4: To prevent or reduce technostress, expectations and boundaries must be set and agreed upon.

4.2 Normalization Process Theory

As also mentioned by Carroll and Conboy (2020), the workplace is still an understudied issue. They also mention the urgency during the pandemic, which led to many and varied changes in the workplace environment. There was little to no room for planning. From one day to the next things needed to be changed to follow the latest regulations or old ones that were being canceled or changed. Because of the ever-changing nature of the pandemic, there was almost no time to reflect on previous decisions. Carroll and Conboy (2020) rely on the use of Normalization Process Theory (NPT) to look at the provoked changes caused by the pandemic. NPT considers implementation, embedding, and integration into the structure and strategies of the companies. There are four constructs, the NPT consists of coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring. In addition to these four constructs, they have added four components to each, to create an adapted table on how to measure and apply the NPT to the pandemic.

4.2.1   Coherence

Coherence reflects the rationalization of changes, applying the routine, to day-to-day practices. It consists of the meaningful qualities of a company or routines, and it includes aspects such as differentiation, communal specification, individual specification, and internalization. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020)

Differentiation

Differentiation entails looking at old and new practices to visualize the differences by comparison. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This can best be done by managers, so they can come up with specifications and a plan to conduct these changes and present the result to their employees. When including the employees in the decision-making process on certain aspects, they can feel included, which in turn can have a positive effect on their need for love, or in other words, their sense of belonging, which will be explained in-depth in Section 6.3 Love. Looking at the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the differences it has jumpstarted, the most obvious one is comparing remote working with traditional office work. This shift from an office environment to a home environment has impacted not just employees, but also managers. These changes include the different aspects which were mentioned in the section above.

Communal Specification

To ensure that everyone is aiming for the same, common goals and values are made explicit with the help of communal specification. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This is in line with the goal clarity factor, which will be explained in-depth in Section 7.2.4 Goal Clarity. When considering the pandemic, it suddenly became a common goal to work remotely and stay flexible. It is unknown if some of these practices will remain after the pandemic is over. This is mainly due to the harsh conditions they were introduced to, and some will be reluctant to keep them after the pandemic is over. Nonetheless, remote work and its flexibility create opportunities to adopt certain practices for the better, for example, managing obligations and tasks by frequent check-ins with management and colleagues.

Individual Specification

The individual specification focuses on the perceptions of an individual to their tasks and responsibilities. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This is in line with the perceived work ability, which will be explained in-depth in Section 7.1.4 Perceived Work Ability. The pandemic greatly influenced practices from the office to the homes of employees. While normally, managers have been able to walk around the office and check-in with their employees to determine where they were at, suddenly they were monitoring progress via tools and software. This resulted in an increased amount of stress for their employees, as they felt like they needed to prove their worth by being "always-on" and making visible what they were doing. This is in line with the term technostress, mentioned in Section 3.3 and 4.1.4, respectively.

Internalization

Internalization involves evaluating the perception of employees on the values, benefits, and importance of new practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This can also lead to more inclusion, which increases the level of the love need.To consider which practices should stay, get changed, or even get dismissed completely, employees and their perceptions are at the core. Therefore, it is imperative to see which values have changed over the course of the pandemic, and what can be done to sustain and fulfill these values.

All in all, coherence is focused on making clear what has changed, and where and how things have changed. Moreover, it focuses on how to make sense of it in the practices that follow. Looking from the perspective of a manager, this means that managers have the task of evaluating the previous goals of teams and individual employees. On top of that, they need to align them with the revised practices. By doing so, employees stay engaged, feel like they are part of the team, and they can opt for their self-actualization within these improved practices.

4.2.2 Cognitive Participation

Cognitive participation measures the why and how stakeholders participate in the adopted changes. This includes the actions, commitments, and engagement of the employees who participate. It includes aspects, such as initiation, enrollment, legitimation, and activation. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020)

Initiation

The initiation looks at which employees are pushing the new practices forward and are incorporating them into day-to-day practices. Furthermore, it examines which employees are reluctant to adopt the updated practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This process involves several factors, including trust, as mentioned in Section 3.7 Trust, which in turn is responsible for a sense of belonging, performance, engagement, creativity, and many more, which will be explained in Chapter 7 Productivity, and Chapter 8 Well-Being.

Enrollment

Enrollment makes sure that for the revised practices to be adopted, certain things must change, for example, the organization or re-organization of teams. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) With the rapid changes during the pandemic to remote work, including remote teams, novel practices needed to be introduced to ensure a healthy and safe work environment. This is in line with several factors, including engagement, the love need, and presenteeism.

Legitimation

The legitimation ensures that employees are included and have the same goals to ensure that they stand behind these new practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This is in line with goal clarity, which will be explained in-depth in Section 7.2.4 Goal Clarity. Looking at managers, it is important that employees feel valued and still feel like they have value in the new practices. They can do this by assuring that their specific skills are used and praising them where possible, but also by making sure that they are still part of a team by, for example, including them in team-building events, and incorporating rewards of some sort.

Activation

To sustain and commit to these new practices, employees need to be made aware of what they should do. This is called activation. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) When this is achieved, it will help in the activation of the employees and their willingness to try. When including activation in the team practices, trust is the most important factor to consider. This can result in more open communication and alignment of goals and values of employees and managers, which in turn results in a higher degree of activation.

All in all, cognitive participation involves the thought processes behind the new practices and ensures that they are built to last. Managers should therefore be aware of which processes have worked in the past and why. Additionally, they should know how to integrate those characteristics into new practices that will sustain in the future.

4.2.3 Collective Action

To change certain habits and routines, collective action is required, from individuals and teams. It includes aspects, such as interactional workability, relational integration, skillset workability, and contextual integration. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020)

Interactional Workability

When using interactional workability, a team is looking for certain procedures and elements from different practices to make their own and incorporate into their everyday practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This includes different tools that are utilized during the workday. For example, during the pandemic, almost everyone has used Zoom, at least once, to meet online. The inclusion of these tools, as well as others, will ensure that the revised practices are sustainable and actionable.

Relational Integration

This relational integration relates to a level of knowledge that is required to create accountability and maintain a certain level of confidence in the practices and the team itself. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This knowledge can come in the form of reports, analyses, blogs, presentations, and so on. On top of that, this knowledge, and the transfer of this knowledge, by reading, listening, or perceiving it in some other way, helps teams to conduct efficient work and be aware of their colleagues and themselves.

Skillset Workability

The skillset workability evaluates certain tasks and divides them among employees by the characteristics of a set of practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) Applying this to the pandemic, almost every job had to be reevaluated on how it could be done remotely. This was because of the regulations imposed by the government. Resulting in an assessment of the core tasks of an organization, a manager, a team, and individual employees. Nonetheless, because of the time pressure and the conditions of the pandemic, a lot of these assessments can be improved. Getting to the core of a job can provide key insights into how to do it most efficiently. Combining this with the well-being of employees can increase job satisfaction and productivity.

Contextual Integration

Combining resources with protocols, policies, and procedures to manage certain practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This contextual integration is especially relevant for managers, as they are considering how to best manage all these new practices, by considering resources, protocols, policies, and procedures. Therefore, it is important to know how certain new practices will influence an organization and its employees.

Ultimately, collective action focuses on involving everyone to change and sustain the new practices. To make this happen, it is paramount for a manager to know what needs to be done collectively, and how to make sure that everyone will comply and execute their new objectives.

4.2.4 Reflexive Monitoring

Reflexive monitoring includes reflection and assessment of the habits and routines that are present in a company, and how to change them for the better. This process involves the stakeholders and actors that participate in these routines and habits. It includes aspects, such as systematization, communal approval, individual appraisal, and reconfiguration. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020)

Systematization

Systematization is used to determine the effectiveness of a certain practice, and how it affects employees and managers in terms of, for example, usefulness. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This systematization allows for the evaluation of different practices and can help determine which practices are best considering the flexible nature of remote teams.

Communal Appraisal

Collaboration across teams enables the evaluation of different practices, through experimental and systemized practices. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) This communal appraisal can help organizations and managers to exchange tools and practices, evaluated by experience, which in turn can help their teams. Additionally, it can serve as a common tool used throughout the organization as necessary for their goals.

Individual Appraisal

An individual appraisal evaluates the effect of changing practices on employees and the context of the situation in which they operate. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020) It is vital for employees to be able to share concerns with each other and management. This way different evaluations are occurring simultaneously, and together they can form an informed judgment in a certain situation, tool, practice, or something else. Taking the perspective of a manager, it is important to look at employees and see where their needs lie, as well as what can be improved, and what the negative consequences are of new practices. This way, the team can become better, and more satisfied as their needs are being met.

Reconfiguration

Certain individual practices by employees or teams can be incorporated into existing ones by redefining them or modifying them. (Carroll & Conboy, 2020)

All in all, reflexive monitoring focuses on what the new practices mean and what kind of changes they bring about. By evaluating these changes and the effects on the practices, employees, and workplace environment, the practices are put to the test and can be adapted where needed.

Everyone involved in an organization can propose to modify practices. Especially, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more critical than ever that everyone evaluates the past three years and investigates what worked and what did not. This way, not only managers but also employees, get a say in management decisions on new practices that will be sustainable in the long run. Combining the efforts of not only managers and their newfound methods to managing remote and office teams, but combining them with the experiences, preferences, and needs of employees, improvements can be made in the workplace environment.

4.3 Benchmarking

To know where and when something needs adjustments or improvements it is necessary to compare certain measurements with a reference point, also known as benchmarking. The definition which will be used for the purpose of this thesis is the definition by the Business Dictionary (2022), benchmarking is: "A measurement of the quality of an organization's policies, products, programs, strategies, etc., and their comparison with standard measurements, or similar measurements of its peers. The objectives of benchmarking are (1) to determine what and where improvements are called for, (2) to analyze how other organizations achieve their high-performance levels, and (3) to use this information to improve performance."

There are three main phases when talking about benchmarking: preparing, comparing, and improving. During these phases, everything that is relevant will be discussed and evaluated, allowing for the most efficient process. In the preparing phase, certain goals are set, key performance indicators will be defined, and the employees involved will be selected. In the comparing phase, data will be collected and validated. To get to the last phase, improvement, several reports can be made based on the data collected. This is to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. (Schaad & Hofer, 2020)

An organization should start with evaluating what is already happening in their processes, for example, in line with the purpose of this thesis, the well-being of their employees. Analyze which processes are already in place to help employees with their well-being and if these measurements are working. For example, are there physical measurements in place, such as ergonomic furniture, or are there also mental measurements in place, such as a monthly talk with an in-house psychologist.

In the literature, there is a distinction between two types of benchmarking, process-step-based benchmarking, and cost benchmarking. Process-step-based benchmarking is a highly time-consuming process but leads to a high level of detailed information. Cost benchmarking analyzes the potential of a process, but has less meaningful results, and therefore only provides a general overview. While this could be helpful to start with and see if a process to be further investigated, for this thesis, process-step-based benchmarking is preferred as the goal is to find the ideal workplace environment. (Schaad & Hofer, 2020)

5. Management Styles

To grow as an organization, it is necessary to look into the future. However, no glass sphere will provide this all-knowing insight. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the past and learn from this to do better in the future. This can also help in gaining information on how to act when certain situations occur. Until recently, organizations were relatively set in their ways and approaches as they were able to establish policies and guidelines due to stability. Nowadays, organizations have changed and are as diverse as possible, as they were jumpstarted by the pandemic, but nonetheless, this resulted in an influential shift in work ethics and values. Therefore, it is now the responsibility of the manager to take these changes and shifts and apply them to the new normal.

As a manager, it is essential to provide employees with values, goals, and an infrastructure that could fully support them. To accomplish this, the organization also needs to have a strategy that will form a shared goal forward for all their employees. This way, it becomes clear for everyone what to expect from the workplace environment, and what tasks should be divided amongst managers and employees.

All in all, a new way of managing must be found to accommodate all the evolving wishes and desires of employees. On top of that, a lot has been learned in terms of efficient working styles and remote work approaches. This, in turn, can be used to better manage resources and, thus, employees.

5.1 Two Dimensions of Style

As mentioned by Purcell (1987), there are various organizations, and they all need different management styles to run best. However, to clarify this and to extend this beyond frames of reference, Purcell (1987), has suggested two dimensions of style, individualism, and collectivism. These styles are constructed around the belief that management styles originate from philosophies and policies that will influence actions. Therefore, style is closely related to business policy.

5.1.1 Individualism

Individualism refers to what an organization does to make sure every employee feels heard, acknowledged, and to make sure that they are living up to their potential. Organizations that will value individualism will focus on employees as their most important asset and care for them in that way. To this end, they will conduct surveys to assess the efficiency of their employees and maintain an open communication structure with various media and personal contact with managers. Resulting in employees that feel valued and can grow in the organization. However, organizations who do not value individualism in their employees are inclined to see employees solely as numbers, as part of the cost-benefit analysis. Some tend to say that organizations that care about individualism feel paternalistic. Looking at paternalism, the focus is more on employee development, and less on individual development. Therefore, the improvements tend to increase the abilities as an employee, but not as a person. All in all, high individualism implies employee development that is guided by extensive policies. (Purcell, 1987)

5.1.2 Collectivism

Collectivism refers to the amount of say that employees have on matters that concern them. There are many ways to have employees be represented in management decisions. This can be done by, for example, electing a select few that speak for the group, or by having a democratic structure in place. Some organizations are more likely to have these collective representations throughout the organization, while others will only have them at certain levels of hierarchy. All in all, high collectivism implies management incorporating the representation and participation of the employees in their decision-making processes. (Purcell, 1987)

While both these styles are relevant and can co-exist, it is more appropriate to look at the specific situation and organization at hand. This way, a manager can make a deliberate choice on which management style to follow or find a balance between both. When considering remote work, employees tend to feel more individualistic and autonomous. (Kjörling, 2020) Therefore, the individualism approach to managing these employees could be beneficial. With this management style, they are given opportunities to invest in themselves as employees. This can increase job satisfaction, which, in turn, leads to higher productivity and well-being.

On top of that, most remote work is based on projects. These employees are often only hired for a short amount of time, for example, only one or a few projects before moving on to another organization. This also reduces the need for involvement in radical management decisions. (Lister, 2019) Or they have the chance to do things differently the next time they start a new project and improve incrementally. Next to that, most project-based work is done in teams, and these teams get a certain assignment that has a deadline. How this team decides to do this, is up to them, which leaves a lot of room for their own decision-making processes, resulting in a lot of freedom. Lastly, it could be challenging to plan such meetings with management, as some remote workers may come from different parts of the world working in different time zones.

All in all, taking the perspective of this thesis, it becomes apparent that the individualistic approach can help individual employees with their needs and wishes to work remotely. When these employees feel heard and the managers know what each of them wants, the ideal workplace environment can be created. Therefore, the individualism style seems most appropriate moving forward post-pandemic. Resulting in the proposal of the second tip.

T2: Remote employees must be considered as individuals and cared for in the same manner.

5.2 The Four Management Systems of Likert

Rensis Likert has developed four management systems in the 1960s, by studying the patterns and styles of managers for three decades. These systems described the relationship, involvement, and roles of managers and employees. The four systems Likert has found were exploitative authoritative, benevolent authoritative, consultative, and participative. (Anon., 2020)

5.2.1 Exploitative Authoritative

As the name suggests, this system is authority driven. Everything is chosen and decided by the highest people in the hierarchy and there is no trust downward. Fear of threats causes employees to perform well despite the lack of motivation. There is little to no concern for employees in terms of psychological health or decision-making. Employees are expected to put in more hours than they are hired to do and are forced to always excel not considering the risks it might involve. This results in a negative working environment, accompanied by low pay, substandard benefits, dissatisfaction, and demotivation. There is almost zero to no communication between colleagues as the only communication allowed is on the managerial level which is focused on decision making. (Juneja, sd) (Anon., 2020)

5.2.2 Benevolent Authoritative

Only the highest people make decisions, and therefore the benevolent authoritative system gains control and motivation by the introduction of reward and punishment systems. Most of the communication flows downward in the hierarchical structure, and little to no communication occurs upward. This results in trust issues and skeptical employees. These employees can involve themselves in policymaking and group problem solving, but the most significant matters are still solely decided by upper management. This system can result in hostility among employees due to the competitive nature of the reward and punishment systems, leading to conflict and lying. While job satisfaction is extremely low, productivity is relatively high. (Anon., 2020)

5.2.3 Consultative

Employees in this system are mainly driven and motivated by rewards. However, there is still some punishment and little involvement in the decision-making processes. In this system, communication is more of a two-way street on the hierarchal ladder, but there is still a limitation on communication upward. Additionally, there is more communication between employees and their managers, as their manager listens to what they have to say. In this system, employees have more freedom to make decisions that directly impact their work. This increases both job satisfaction and productivity. (Anon., 2020)

5.2.4 Participative

In this system, employees are driven by participation and involvement in decision-making processes. Organizations encourage participation by putting in place systems such as money or other rewards. Resulting in a lot of knowledge sharing, which increases the sense of belonging. By acknowledging reoccurring problems between employees, managers become more involved in conflict resolution and improve the workplace environment. Due to the ability to communicate both vertically and horizontally, creativity and skills are shared amongst all. This results in higher job satisfaction and productivity. On top of that, it helps to establish trust between both sides of the hierarchical structure. (Anon., 2020)

Looking at remote work, both consultative and participative management systems can be beneficial. When looking at teams and project-based work, consultative seems appropriate, as this involves communication with the manager, but less with the rest of the organization, which was mentioned before as not necessarily essential. In addition, they are given the freedom to make decisions regarding their tasks and problems, which was mentioned before as what employees need. The participative management system could help remote employees to feel more included. This promotes communication and knowledge sharing between colleagues and with the manager, which was also mentioned in Section 3.5 Fear of Exile. Both of these management systems increase job satisfaction and productivity, which is beneficial for both the employees and the organization itself.

All in all, a manager should motivate employees to communicate and share knowledge, with the notion that they have the freedom to decide on how to tackle tasks and problems. This will result in higher job satisfaction, which in turn, increases productivity and well-being.

5.3 Characteristics

Managers must have certain characteristics to be considered successful managers. They and their abilities are constantly put to the test as situations and challenges emerge in their workplace environment. Therefore, a manager should be able to react appropriate to various situations and demands that they encounter along the way. Managers also need to have a keen perception of the needs of employees and have several ways prepared to meet these needs, for example, changing their behavior to complement them. On top of that, a manager should be able to change their role and behavior accordingly, for example, during conflict, understanding both sides and to bring them back together. All in all, managers need to have a keen perception and be highly flexible to meet the requirements of various situations and challenges. (Wakefield, et al., 2008)

Looking at remote work, managers need to stay updated on progress. Therefore, the manager must be kept informed by their employees or via some progress tracking software. As is explained in-depth in Section 3.3 Technostress, it would be wise for a manager to passively track progress to reduce stress among their employees. It is also critical for a manager to know where to help and meet the needs of employees, while being invisible.

Considering the findings of Konradt and Hoch (2007), they found that managers who motivated, and clarified the roles of employees, priorities, and directions had more team success. Resulting in job satisfaction and team success for employees. Additionally, they found that managers were often less needed to do it all since their employees were more professionally mature and needed less managerial control. This confirms the third piece of advice, which was mentioned in Section 4.1.3 Technology Use and Tools. Last but not least, they found that being proactive and enthusiastic can help increase the formation of trust. Therefore, it should be a characteristic for managers to aim for.

All in all, a successful manager needs to know where and how they can help their employees to get them to live up to their potential. This way, employees will have high job satisfaction, thus, have increased productivity and well-being.

5.4 Leadership

Leadership of managers is a key component of their performance and to be successful as a manager. In particular, when it comes to remote work, there is room for improvement over their face-to-face counterparts. The challenges associated, include, among other things, decreased social behavior recognition, and impaired processes. (Konradt & Hock, 2007) (Whitford & Moss, 2009) Managers are essential to increase motivation and coordination, which are initially lost by switching to remote work, and on top of that, maintaining team effectiveness. Findings suggest that managers put in more time and effort, as remote employees are more difficult to manage, for example new technological resources that must be researched, learned, and tested before suggesting them to their employees. (Capece & Costa, 2009) (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014)

To overcome these challenges, researchers have suggested supplementing managerial functions with structural supports, such as rewards and responsibility distribution. This empowers and helps employees grow as individuals. These structural supports help in reducing the chaotic nature of remote work by increasing stability and clarity. When working with reward systems, fairness and justice need to be considered. This is because these rewards need to reflect the time, effort, and performance of employees. Distributing responsibility increases trust, social cohesion, and commitment. (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014) This helps confirm the third piece of advice even more.

As mentioned by Ruggieri (2009), there is a distinction between two types of leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership. These two are examined and evaluated in terms of remote employees and their manager.

5.4.1 Transactional Leadership

Transactional managers view the relationship between the employee and the manager as a transactional one, with the use of reward and punishment systems. (Ruggieri, 2009) This implies that every action or interaction has some sort of cost-benefit associated with it. On top of that, this resembles the structure used in the benevolent authoritative system, mentioned before in Section 5.2.2 Benevolent Authoritative. A transactional manager will promote and encourage employees to do the best they can by fulfilling the goals that are set. (Whitford & Moss, 2009)

5.4.2 Transformational Leadership

On the other hand, transformational leadership works with four main factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The four main factors can be summarized in short to get a comprehensive look at what a transformational manager will execute and convey. With idealized influence, managers will help their employees see the vision of the future and align all their individual goals with them by being supportive in terms of encouragement, advice, and coaching. Considering inspirational motivation, managers will underscore the qualities, skills, and strengths of their employees. With intellectual stimulation, managers try to let their employees think outside of the box and challenge conventional assumptions to ensure that creativity will flow into their processes. Through individualized consideration, managers recognize and praise the accomplishments of employees. (Whitford & Moss, 2009)

This is in line with the three aspects of a coaching manager, motivational, consultative, and educational. The motivational aspect is the encouragement of processes, the consultative aspect is the advice given on strategies, and the educational aspect is the knowledge and skills that are given or learned. (Mathieu, et al., 2008)

Transformational managers focus on inspiring and stimulating employees to reach further and beyond in their aspirations. (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014) It is their mission to unify goals, change, elevate, and inspire to achieve shared goals. Which creates more intrinsic motivation, work engagement, job satisfaction, commitment, increased performance, and creativity in employees. A transformational manager will change the goals set for the better, so that their employees can grow and live up to their potential. (Whitford & Moss, 2009)

In terms of job satisfaction, Ruggieri (2009) found that remote employees prefer transformational leadership. The reason for this preference could be the fact that inspirational managers convey a clear vision of the future, which, if looking at communication over long distances, is beneficial. (Whitford & Moss, 2009) Employees are more likely to get a broad sense and the meaning of a message through non-face-to-face communication than the whole picture. It is therefore pertinent for a manager to have a clear understanding of what the goals are for remote employees and have ways to convey these messages effectively. On top of that, managers should learn how to and on what to focus on as a transformational manager, as this is beneficial for remote workers and helps managers improve their managing skills.

5.5 Communication

According to Henderson (2008), there are two main behavioral factors for a manager of remote employees, being: encoding and decoding. These communication competencies are essential for a manager as they influence different characteristics and the behavior of their employees. These communication skills reflected the managerial performance, as well as the outcomes of the goals of the organization. This is sometimes related to emotional intelligence, which involves being sensitive to needs, paying attention, responding quickly, active listening, saying the right things at the right times, and expressing in an understandable and comprehensive manner.

5.5.1   Encoding

Encoding is the active, and productive sending of messages. This implies that encoding involves all processes around the transformation of information into messages and sending those messages. For a manager, this means being able to clearly express themselves, in an easy-to-understand manner. The encoding competency of a manager increases both employee satisfaction, as well as team productivity. On top of that, the degree of virtuality was not negatively affected by the encoding competency. This implies that when one is more distant and reliant on virtual tools to communicate, it does not affect the encoding competency. (Henderson, 2008)

5.5.2   Decoding

The process of decoding involves active, and receptive listening to messages. This implies the transformation from senses into information, for example, hearing and seeing as they transform from listening and reading into information. It also includes the perception of things like social cues. For a manager, this means being able to actively listen, respond quickly, and be attentive. The decoding competency of a manager increases employee satisfaction. On top of that, the degree of virtuality was not negatively affected by the decoding competency. This implies that when being more distant and reliant on virtual tools to communicate, it does not affect the decoding competency. (Henderson, 2008)

Henderson (2008) did, however, recognize the importance of emotional intelligence as a manager, as it ensures the encoding and decoding competency. To this end, managers should receive training in both competencies as well as emotional intelligence, since they are directly related to improving performance, and thus, productivity and well-being.

Summarizing all the characteristics mentioned in this chapter lead to the following tip on how to be a successful manager for remote employees, the third tip.

T3: To be a successful manager for remote employees, a manager needs to have emotional intelligence, a keen perception, an open communication style, and an individualistic approach. On top of that, they need to be highly flexible and give autonomy and clear goals to employees. Lastly, they need to inspire and stimulate employees to live up to their full potential.

6. The Five Basic Needs of Maslow

According to psychologist Mario Conforti (1972) to increase job motivation, employees require help to increase personal satisfaction. Based on the five basic needs of Maslow, psychological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization, Conforti claims that employees should relatively satisfy the psychological, safety, and love needs, but need esteem and self-actualization as motivators.

Diving deeper into the five basic needs of Maslow and considering how they can be adapted to the workplace environment is an effective first step to determining what organizations and managers can do to improve the job satisfaction of employees and therefore, their productivity. On top of that, these five basic needs of Maslow can also be used to improve the well-being of employees.

While Maslow and the five basic needs are critiqued, these needs are still used, even from a remote work perspective. Recent studies, for instance, Redlein, et al. (2020), have shown that it combines simplicity with complexity. Each of these five needs can be explained in a few sentences, but when diving deeper, each can be found in various workplace aspects. This provides an opportunity to link productivity and well-being to each other and to see more clearly what managers can do to create the ideal workplace environment.

6.1 Physiological

The physiological need is inherently intertwined with health. When improving the health of employees, they will feel an increase in energy and are more willing to do a better job. To this end, different things can be installed or provided for the office or the remote workplace that could promote health. The office could have, for example, a cafeteria or canteen that provides healthy food, an office gym or yoga sessions, an office layout that promotes walking and being active, natural lighting, fresh air, comfortable temperatures, noise reduction, ergonomic equipment like chairs, computer mice, an adjustable height desk, et cetera. (Redlein, et al., 2020) All these examples will promote health and could increase the level of this physiological need.

On the flip side, when there is a level of poor health in employees, this could reduce engagement, increase overtime, require more people to do the same job, which is a decrease in effectiveness, and make employees more prone to accidents. Ultimately, this will lead to more costs for the organization than it would to keep these employees healthy, happy, and engaged in their day-to-day work. (Lister, 2014)

6.2 Safety

The need for safety covers, for example, stability and predictability. When a workplace environment has certain guidelines on how things should be done or treated, a sense of safety is established. To feel safe in the workplace, employees require equal and fair treatment, realistic work schedules, practices, privacy, boundaries, and ways to reduce stress, and many more. (Redlein, et al., 2020)

On the other hand, when safety is a concern or safety is not established in a sufficient manner, employees can feel insecure. This insecurity can result in a hesitant approach to work and interactions, which could decrease productivity. On top of that, it can also increase the chance of mental health problems, which, in turn, also decrease productivity, and, on top of that, well-being.

6.3 Love

To feel loved in the workplace environment, a sense of belonging is needed. To accomplish this, clear and open communication is a necessity, which helps in building trust. Employees working remotely, for example, from home, could feel remote in the sense that they feel excluded. With the clear and open communication, remote workers can consider themselves like part of the team. Interactions at work often provide a sense of belonging, for example, small talk that happens when on a break, walking to the restroom, or getting some water or coffee. Even office gossip tends to create strong bonds between employees and gives them opportunities to vent to each other instead of building up resentment. It is only possible to function properly when working remotely, or in the office, if there is mutual respect and equal treatment between employees, managers, and the organization. On top of that, team-building exercises and events can help foster relationships and a sense of belonging. (Redlein, et al., 2020)

6.4 Esteem

To improve the sense of esteem, there is a need for autonomous and independent tasks, including sufficient variation. The manager plays an important role in creating esteem in their employees as they are the ones whose judgements counts the most toward self-image in the workplace. They can increase the esteem of their employees by, for example, giving praise, constructive feedback, rewards, or by being considerate, helpful, and supportive. Nonetheless, employees must assess their well-being to develop their sense of self-esteem. Praising employees gives them recognition for the work they have done, which increases their well-being. (Redlein, et al., 2020)

However, when there is a lack of esteem in an employee, this could result in insecurity about completing tasks and doing their job autonomously. An employee with a low level of esteem will be dependent and can need others to help them correct or complete their work.

6.5 Self-Actualization

When looking at self-actualization, it is critical that not only the work is valuable, but also that the workplace environment supports their employees in personal development and helps them to reach their personal goals. This involves choices in all aspects of work, for example, being able to work independently, and being able to choose when, where, how, and even what. This fits perfectly, although it does not exclusively support remote work. Besides, the values of the organization should also be considered. When working for a company that shares the same values, for example, sustainability, it could give work added value and increase motivation to perform boring and daunting tasks. (Redlein, et al., 2020)

6.6 Preconditions of Conforti

Conforti (1972) claims that certain preconditions need to be met before considering the five basic needs of Maslow. In fact, when looking deeper into those preconditions, they seem to be heavily ingrained into the five basic needs of Maslow. However, these preconditions are necessary to help satisfy these needs. Therefore, investigating and linking them to the five basic needs can prove helpful in determining the ideal workplace environment. To get a comprehensive picture of which of the five basic needs of Maslow are related to a certain precondition, two points of view will be taken for each precondition. First, what happens when that condition is absent, and which basic needs will be disrupted by that absence. Second, when this condition is met, what are the consequences and what will they entail, and which basic needs are connected to this presence.

6.6.1   Freedom to Speak

Freedom to speak entails being able to speak freely, as the name suggests. An employee should be able to talk about what is on their mind without being stopped or interrupted. When there is no freedom to speak, a certain feeling of unsafety will be created. Which was the case in both the exploitative authoritative and benevolent authoritative systems, mentioned in Section 5.2.1 Exploitative Authoritative and 5.2.2 Benevolent Authoritative. Being unable to express themselves in the form of speech, but having to comply with commands from others, creates a sense of disrespect and distrust. When an employee cannot communicate any form of opinion, they are downgraded to almost an animal or a robot. This is because they are instructed to follow commands, without thinking for themselves. The absence of freedom to speak also decreases the levels of the love and esteem needs. The decrease in love follows because there is no form of communication to create bonds and a sense of belonging, and the decrease in esteem follows because it could create a sense of feeling less than the person giving the commands.

However, when there is the freedom to speak, it can help maintain a sense of safety and belonging. Employees can freely express their opinions and form relationships with others. On top of that, it could help build or create esteem as there is a sense of mutual respect. The freedom to speak is also needed to be able to follow dreams, ambitions, and aspirations that are required for the self-actualization need.

6.6.2   Freedom to Act

The freedom to act entails an employee being able to do as they like or wish. Without the freedom to act, in a similar manner as the freedom to speak, it creates a feeling of disrespect. An employee is, again, downgraded to a robot if certain routines need to be repeated in the same mundane manner repeatedly, without the freedom to change them to suit preferences. Particularly, when being able to do better in terms of productivity or efficiency. They are hired to do a task and nothing more. While this may not threaten safety as such, it does lack a sense of belonging and esteem. There is no room for esteem because the abilities and characteristics of the individual are not valued. Instead, they are an employee doing a task someone else could do just as well as they can. This can be used as a threat to replace someone for someone else who, for example, does not have the esteem to need the freedom to act.

However, when there is the freedom to act, one can prove their self-worth by doing the tasks in their own way, increasing productivity or efficiency. Resulting is a sense of belonging that can be created as they are more likely to receive praise for their achievements, which also increases the esteem need. On top of that, they also can increase their esteem by the simple fact that their existence is acknowledged and appreciated. With regards to the self-actualization need, the freedom to act leads to personal development when they learn how they, as a person, work best and discover their preferences.

6.6.3   Freedom of Expression

In short, freedom of expression encompasses the freedom to act and the freedom to speak, as these are both ways to express themselves. Therefore, in the same way, the lack of freedom of expression leads to issues in the safety, love, and esteem need. On the other hand, it also leads to an increase in the love and esteem need, when it is present. This is as they are now able to express themselves, in a way that they prefer, which opens the possibility of forming bonds and receiving praise. On top of that, with the presence of freedom of expression, job fulfillment and, thus, self-actualization can be achieved.

6.6.4   Freedom to Investigate

Freedom to investigate entails an employee to see and figure things out as they encounter them along the way of their normal tasks. This includes investigating options and opportunities to perform certain tasks more efficiently or effectively. Without the freedom to investigate, an employee will be limited in their actions. Accordingly, this complies with the same basic needs as without the freedom to act. Therefore, there will be a sense of objectification and a lack of esteem and bonding.

If there is an opportunity to investigate, self-actualization will be enhanced even further. This is because an employee could follow their interests, curiosity, and feelings. This is validating in itself and helps them reach their personal goals.

6.6.5   Freedom to Defend

The freedom to defend, as the name implies, is the recognition that an employee can defend themselves, when necessary. This freedom to defend is based on a certain level of mutual respect. Without the freedom to defend, an employee can feel disrespected and could lack a sense of belonging. As a result, they have no way to express objections and defend themselves, causing a lack of safety. Furthermore, this will decrease esteem as they can feel like they are unworthy, and, thus, have no right to be heard.

Nonetheless, this freedom to defend may have positive effects, but the direct effects are more noticeable when it is lacking than when it is present. When it is present, it can eventually increase self-actualization as employees do not need to defend themselves or their desires. They are respected enough to be heard when needed and make their own decisions and choices by means of defending themselves.

6.6.6 Justice

Without justice, a sense of inequality is created among employees. The lack of safety, belonging, and esteem is felt because of this inequality. This stems from the feeling of not being safe as the organization is not protecting the values and needs of its employees. For example, an employee gets a cut in their paycheck because of not following orders from a supervisor. However, the best friend of the supervisor, another employee, gets away with the same incident. This will create a sense of fear in other employees to end up in the same kind of situation or even worse. On top of that, the sense of belonging will decrease, as other employees are valued higher and are getting better treatment, which excludes them from the group. This results in lower esteem as they are worth less than other employees.

However, justice creates a sense of equality when it is present. This can result in their needs being met as they feel like there is a sense of respect for them. This sense is needed for self-actualization but does not directly lead to it.

6.6.7 Fairness

Fairness and justice are very much alike, as also mentioned by Conforti (1972). They are both based on equality and mutual respect. Therefore, without fairness, the same decrease in safety, belonging, and esteem can be felt as in the justice condition. On top of that, when fairness is in play, the same sense of needs being met is achieved, and self-actualization could follow but is not evidently so.

6.6.8 Honesty

The same holds for honesty, as it also relates to justice. On top of that, when absent, honesty is the only condition that could create a lack of self-actualization. When one is not honest with themselves and creates a persona to be, for example, a stellar employee, one cannot strive for personal goals. This is because they are striving for the goals of this stellar employee. This can lead to a wrong sense of self, and a lack of personal needs, values, and desires. Resulting in being someone that they are not.

However, honesty lies at the foundation of all the five basic needs of Maslow. When honesty is present, several basic needs will be met naturally. This is because it is honesty that creates predictability and stability, which is needed for a sense of safety. Additionally, trustworthy information can help make the right choices, for example, regarding health, making healthy food choices, and exercising. On top of that, honesty can contribute to a sense of belonging as there is no secrecy, which assists in building relationships and forming bonds. It can also create esteem as employees can be praised as it becomes obvious where praise is earned. The self-actualization need can also be met by being honest with themselves and with their manager, telling them how they intend to develop and attain their personal goals.

6.6.9 Orderliness

Orderliness has to do with the way things are handled and approached. For an employee, this implies that certain policies or agreements are in place to ensure this orderliness. From the perspective of a manager, this means that there is a need for orderliness to ensure that everything runs smoothly and that employees know what is expected of them. Without a sense of orderliness, employees are left to their own devices, which results in a lack of safety and esteem. Not knowing what to do and when to do it can create a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity, which in turn could decrease the sense of belonging. The creation of guidelines and codes of conduct can help guide employees in the right direction.

However, when there is a sense of orderliness, employees can see the tasks they should do clearly and can adjust wherever they deem necessary to their preferences. This will, again, create a sense of self-actualization as they can follow their personal goals and can see the path to achieve them.

Summarizing the preconditions and their connection to the five basic needs of Maslow in their presence and absence, are depicted in the table below, Table 1.

The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Absence	Presence
Physiological		Honesty
Safety	Freedom: - To Speak - Of Expression - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom to Speak Honesty
Love	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression Honesty
Esteem	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression Honesty
Self-Actualization	Honesty	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate Honesty Orderliness

Table 1 – Categorizing the Preconditions of Conforti

Employees will work best when they are in the last two of the five basic needs of Maslow, namely, esteem, and self-actualization. However, when they fall down the hierarchy to the first two basic needs, physiological and safety, it is sometimes difficult to recover from, which will be further explained in the next section, Section 6.7 Categorizing the Five Basic Needs. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the manager steps in before this happens. (Conforti, 1972)

To stay at the high end of the five basic needs, some practices are proposed by Conforti (1972). These practices all come down to communication and openness. By keeping communications clear and open, employees know what is expected of them and which changes are occurring. On top of that, they can feel heard, like they belong, praised for their achievements, and this will increase all of the levels of the five basic needs of Maslow.

6.7 Categorizing the Five Basic Needs

The factors that affect productivity in employees will be discussed in the following chapter, Chapter 6 Productivity. It is critical to relate these factors to the five basic needs of Maslow. On the basis of the literature research, the definitions posed, and the information gained, connections will be established. With this connection and the hierarchical structure of those five basic needs, a ranking can be made. After analyzing and assessing the factors that affect the well-being of employees, which will be done in Chapter 8 Well-Being, these can also be connected to the five basic needs. These connections will make it possible to see where and how certain problems arise and can be solved. On top of that, these five basic needs of Maslow will allow for the connection of productivity to well-being in employees as they will indirectly influence each other.

For this purpose, using the same gained knowledge and information, the five basic needs of Maslow should be categorized based on their properties and characteristics. This can be done by dividing them into three categories, physiological and safety, love and esteem, and self-actualization. These three categories are better defined when named properly. All the categories proposed, are taken from the perspective of an employee, as they are the ones whose five basic needs of Maslow need to be fulfilled.

6.7.1   Neutral

The first category represents a neutral position from the perspective of an employee. This is, because, for example, when working in a place where they feel safe and can eat healthily, work can feel like something that must be done. The main reason for an employee to work, when they are exclusively in the first category, is to earn money to sustain their life.

One could argue that these employees are in a more negative position than neutral. However, a negative position would be one where the first two needs of Maslow are also not met. This would be, for example, a situation where an employee does not have the option to take care of their physical health and their job is physically and emotionally challenging or exhausting. Or a workplace environment that is not safe or up to safety standards posing dangers to their employees.

6.7.2   Positive

When entering the second category, a sense of belonging and esteem is felt, and an employee enters a positive position. This is because, for example, this is an employee who makes friends at work and enjoys being with them while working. There is also the opportunity to learn on the job and see an improvement in esteem. Resulting in recognition from colleagues and the manager for the work accomplished. Even so, working is still primarily for money.

6.7.3 Happy

In the third category, a happy position is achieved by meeting the need for self-actualization. This is when, for example, an employee is happy with the work they are doing and the value it has for them. Additionally, there are opportunities to grow and expand on abilities and skills available. As a result of the work and its opportunities, they feel better about themselves. Furthermore, they are not only in it to make money, but they are doing something they prefer and like to do. On top of that, there is the feeling of being part of something much larger than themselves, for example, working in coherence with one of the values of the organization, like sustainability.

To summarize, the categories connected to the five basic needs of Maslow are displayed in the following table, Table 2.

The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Category
Physiological	Neutral
Safety	
Love	Positive
Esteem	
Self-Actualization	Happy

Table 2 – Categorizing The Five Basic Needs of Maslow

Looking at these three categories, neutral, positive, and happy, it can be seen that the most basic category is neutral. It is in exactly that first category, neutral, where managers bear the most responsibility. They should ensure that employees feel safe and healthy when doing their job. The second category, positive, should be encouraged by the manager for bonds to form and work to be more than merely labor in exchange for money. The third category, happy, gives fulfillment to employees. This can be promoted by managers so that personal goals and growth can be achieved. This distinction between categories allows for responsibility to be divided among the proper people.

6.7.4 The Manager

The main responsibility, for the first category, neutral, lies with the manager. This is because, while the organization can provide different amenities to promote physiological and safety needs, the manager is responsible for the implementation and encouragement to make use of these amenities. They need to make sure that their employees can stay healthy during work hours and feel safe in the workplace environment. As mentioned before, there are many ways to accomplish this, and many more to take into a specific situation. The manager also bears responsibility in terms of keeping an eye on the individual employees to see whether they could use some extra support in those two needs. This can be achieved by regularly checking in with them on a one-to-one basis, with the notion that these conversations are confidential.

6.7.5 Colleagues

In the second category, positive, the main responsibility lies with the employees, while the manager plays a smaller role. This is because the social relationships that are built and formed are mostly between colleagues in a team. The manager can support this by organizing team-building and social events. However, the employee-manager relationship is only one of the many relationships an employee can form, and will not be sufficient to feel a sense of belonging when colleagues are excluding them. Therefore, this category cannot be fulfilled solely by the manager and needs the help of other employees to be improved. Nonetheless, the need for esteem can be increased relatively more than the sense of belonging by the manager. This can be done by giving compliments and acknowledging achievements.

When considering the colleagues of employees and the influence they can have on each other, love and esteem are intertwined with one another. This becomes more clear with a small example, when employees receive praise from their colleagues, they feel an increase in esteem, but also an increase in belonging as there is more acknowledgement and acceptance of their excistence. However, the inverse is also true, when there is a decrease in esteem in an employee, there will most likely follow a decrease in their sense of belonging as well, as their existence and place to be is questioned.

6.7.6   Self

The third category, happy, is mostly the responsibility of the employee themselves, with an even smaller part attributed to the manager. While managers can provide opportunities to reflect and consider the ambitions and aspirations of employees, they cannot force employees to have or act on them. Employees need to have prospects for the future themselves, or they will not be open to improving their abilities and changing their ways.

Summarizing the responsibilities with the previous table, Table 2, the following table was constructed, Table 3.

The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Category	Responsibility
Physiological	Neutral	Manager
Safety		
Love	Positive	Colleagues
Esteem		
Self-Actualization	Happy	Self

Table 3 – Categories and Responsibilities of The Five Basic Needs

7. Productivity

Productivity in the workplace environment is one of the most researched terms as higher productivity of employees means more money for an organization. Therefore, many researchers have investigated all the factors that could possibly influence productivity and ways to increase it. However, while this is a studied extensively, the findings on remote work are substantially less and even more so when considering the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, and the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to take previous findings and apply them on the post-pandemic situation.

Before delving into the productivity of employees, it is critical to state two definitions, for a key performance indicator and a factor, respectively. These definitions will be used for the purpose of this thesis. Using the definitions of Bortoluzzi, et al. (2018, page 282) "A key performance indicator (KPI) is a metric representing an actual or perceived level of work completion or lack thereof. KPIs are dependent variables and may change in response to a change in one or more contributing factors" and "A contribution factor (factor) is any psychical, organizational, environmental or social element that affects a worker's ability to perform their tasks. While these often depend on other factors, they are independent of KPIs".

When looking at the different KPIs influencing the productivity of employees, it becomes apparent that a lot of different KPIs and factors play a role in the workplace environment. A choice must be made, rather than considering all those KPIs and factors. This thesis is focused on how to manage the ideal workplace environment, therefore it is of the essential to dive deep into the perspective of the employees. As mentioned before, the employees are the heart of the organization. Considering their needs and desires will give insight into the advice to give to managers. This is because satisfied employees are less influenced by mistakes from managers, which gives room to grow as a manager. On top of that, satisfied employees will work harder and increase overall productivity and efficiency, reducing costs. This is essential from the perspective of an organization, as employees are the most expensive assets it has.

7.1 Key Performance Indicators

The key performance indicators are chosen based on their applicability to remote work and the number of times they were mentioned in other relevant research on the topic of remote work. To this end, five KPIs were chosen: absenteeism, presenteeism, engagement, perceived work ability, and employee performance self-assessment.

These KPIs will be analyzed based on their properties and characteristics to relate them to the five basic needs of Maslow. On top of that, this connection will automatically link them to one of the three proposed categories and gives them someone responsible for their level or degree of fulfillment. These connections, including both KPIs and factors, will build up a productivity framework. This framework summarizes the findings from the literature review and is then put to the test through a survey. Resulting in a picture of the ideal workplace environment, and some advice to give to managers on how to create it.

7.1.1 Absenteeism

The level of absenteeism is determined based on the time an employee is staying away from work. This can involve being sick, for example, due to a chronic illness, an injury, or something less visible, for example, underlying mental health problems. Nonetheless, the effect of absenteeism on the employees themselves is rather negative. For example, when an employee stays home from work, they are not connected with what is going on. In the event of not attending work for one day, the impacts will be relatively small. However, the more an employee stays away from work, the greater the impact becomes, and the more challenging it will be to get back in the running.

Take an employee that, for example, has been sick for two weeks. Coming back to work will have several consequences. For instance, colleagues and perhaps more people will be curious about the reasons for the absence. This can be a daunting conversation to have on its own and can escalate if this employee feels ashamed or not in a position to share this information. On top of that, these two weeks of absence also meant two weeks of missing out on office talk, keeping up with colleagues, and gossip. This could disrupt relationships, which can decrease the sense of belonging, and maybe even the need for esteem. Even during this absence, and when coming back to work, this employee can become the focal point of gossip, which can decrease the sense of belonging even more. This can become a vicious circle, which could result in an employee no longer being able to work.

The effects of absenteeism can be connected to the love and esteem needs, which results in the second category, positive. On top of that, the issues underlying absenteeism come from the physiological need, which connects absenteeism to the first category, neutral.

For an organization, an absent employee is less costly than an employee who is present, but is performing substandard because of, for example, mental health problems, or low well-being. (Lister, 2014) The latter, also called presenteeism, will be explained in the section below. When well-being is not taken care of properly, employees are likely to take days off to make up for this loss and recharge their bodies and minds. (Lister, 2018) This is further explained in Chapter 8 Well-Being.

Looking from the perspective of a manager, it is helpful to know why an employee was absent. This way, a manager can provide help, if necessary, and support them to resume work as before. When tackling absenteeism, openly and honestly, as mentioned in Section 6.6.8 Honesty, solutions can be created, and absenteeism can decrease. However, if the issue is not addressed in a safe conversation and is not resolved adequately, these problems can become more prevalent. In addition, employees can feel a more pressing need for time off, leading to a worsening disconnect. This is vicious circle can only be broken by communication and resolving the issues properly.

It has been found that, on a team level, justice, as mentioned in Section 6.6.6 Justice, was significantly related to absenteeism and performance. This is because when a team feels like they are being unfairly treated, they are more likely to resort to absenteeism. (Mathieu, et al., 2008)

7.1.2 Presenteeism

When looking at presenteeism, it is often correlated with the term focus. Presenteeism is similar to absenteeism, however, presenteeism refers to being present at work, but underperforming. This is expressed in terms of susceptibility to distractions. This often results in a lower level of engagement and, therefore, productivity.

Presenteeism can decrease the sense of belonging and esteem, because of the disconnect that can be felt between colleagues and work itself. This disconnect can occur when, for example, someone must repeat something twice before getting a response. Therefore, presenteeism falls into the second category, positive.

As a manager, it is essential to keep employees present, but also to give them the time to relax. This will ensure that they can keep their focus when they are working. For an organization, being present but underperforming can cost more than absenteeism. (Lister, 2014) While this might seem counterintuitive, it can lead to work that must be redone, and mistakes that need to be fixed afterward. This is counterproductive for the employees performing the tasks, but also for the people dependent on those tasks being well-done or the ones needed to fix the mistakes that were made. However, findings suggest that employees are more inclined to show up to work and underperform than stay home and take a sick day. (Lister, 2018)

7.1.3 Engagement

For managers, engagement is a meaningful way to assess the productivity of employees. When employees are engaged, they are often more efficient and perform better on the job. On top of that, they seem happier and are more willing to solve extra tasks. However, when employees are disengaged, they are often busy, in their minds, with other things than work, for example, family, home, friends, and so on. Engagement may be induced by a sense of belonging and fulfillment. This can be accomplished by, for example, organizing events in which goal clarity, which will be discussed in Section 7.2.4 Goal Clarity, is promoted.

The sense of belonging can improve engagement because it gives employees an incentive to participate in, for example, office talk, social events, and keeping up with colleagues. This, in turn, increases the sense of belonging, resulting in a positive feedback loop. On top of that, engagement is necessary for self-actualization, as an employee needs to be engaged with their development to fulfill this need. Therefore, engagement is connected to the need for love and self-actualization, and thus falls into the second and third categories.

Furthermore, the well-being of disengaged employees is far more likely to suffer from several conditions, such as obesity, depression, high blood pressure, and diabetes. (Lister, 2018) This would eventually result in more days staying at home or being unproductive at work, which correspond to respectively, absenteeism or presenteeism, as mentioned above.

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7.1.4 Perceived Work Ability

Perceived work ability entails, as the name implies, the ability of an employee to execute their work. This includes the skills, capabilities, experiences, and characteristics of an employee. This will help managers to understand their employees in-depth. (Bortoluzzi, et al., 2018)

The assessment of perceived work ability allows managers to praise and acknowledge employee achievements that they have yet to receive. This allows for a bonding experience between the manager and employee, which creates a better sense of belonging for the employee. Additionally, this can create the same opportunity for colleagues to give each other praise as well. On top of that, it also increases the sense of esteem, as the employee is praised for their achievements and rewarded accordingly. Therefore, perceived work ability falls into the second category, positive.

7.1.5 Employee Performance Self-Assessment

When an employee evaluates their own performance, they are actively thinking about themselves in a way that allows them to fulfill the self-actualization need. The reverse is also true, to fulfill the self-actualization need, an employee must first assess how they are doing in their current job and determine how to move forward and set personal goals. In this way, they are, essentially, assessing their performance within their work. Therefore, it falls into the third category, happy.

From the perspective of a manager, this kind of self-assessment will open the floor to an honest discussion between an employee and their manager. In this discussion, plans for the future can be made and agreements can be reached. This way, both the manager and employee can grow and help in creating the ideal workplace environment.

7.2 Factors

On top of the key performance indicators, there are factors that influence the productivity of employees. These factors are also chosen based on their applicability to remote work and the number of times they were mentioned in other literature. Resulting in seven different and influential factors: personal, building environment, social cohesion, perceived supervisory support, information sharing, goal clarity, and trust.

These factors will also be analyzed based on their properties and characteristics to connect them to the five basic needs of Maslow. In addition, their relation will automatically place them in one of the three proposed categories and assign them to someone responsible for their level or degree. Combined with the key performance indicators, this results in the productivity framework, which can be found at the end of this chapter.

7.2.1 Personal

Personal factors include primarily physical and mental health, but also a sense of well-being. (Bortoluzzi, et al., 2018) Therefore, they belong to the physiological need, which, in turn, connects them to the first category, neutral.

As already mentioned before is the fact that physical and mental health issues could be an underlying cause for the level of absenteeism and presenteeism. This would imply that these personal factors are intertwined with absenteeism as well as presenteeism, which results in the fourth tip.

> *T4: Personal factors are underlying causes for absenteeism and presenteeism.*

From the perspective of a manager, it is critical to keep an eye out for employees who have pre-existing conditions. Accompanied by an open and honest conversation, the manager and employee can determine support needs and see what can be done to help employees live up to their potential.

7.2.2 Building Environment

The building environment factors include factors that are focused on both the visual structure of the office, as well as the conditions, the employees work in. (Bortoluzzi, et al., 2018) This matches to the first basic need of Maslow, physiological. This is because of same conditions that were mentioned before, in Section 6.1 Physiological. As a result, the building environment factors are also related to the first category, neutral. This connection to the first basic need of Maslow results in the fifth tip.

T5: The building environment factors are the same factors that are needed to fulfill the first basic need of Maslow, the physiological need.

Following these two factors, personal and building environment respectively, it is clear that if any of those factors are disrupted, a decrease in job satisfaction will occur. Therefore, managers must pay close attention to these factors and their influence on employees. Especially, since both these factors fall in the first category, meaning that the main responsibility is with the manager.

Following the literature of both Mawson (2017) and Plum, et al. (2017), they proposed critical factors for analyzing the productivity of employees. Mawson (2017) called them the factors that change everything, and Plum, et al. (2017) assessed those factors on a team level rather than on an individual basis, as this would be more effective. The factors are trust, goal clarity, social cohesion, perceived supervisory support, and information sharing. Both also mention another factor, external communication, but in this thesis, this factor will join information sharing. This is because external communication is a form of information sharing in the sense that knowledge is transferred between an external source and the considered team. Therefore, especially in the light of this thesis, considering remote work, external sources of information are often brought into the organization as they can offer expertise on a certain subject.

7.2.3 Trust

This factor is beautifully encompassed by Mawson (2017, page 46) as "People need to feel that those around them will act in their best interest, that the knowledge they contribute will be used responsibly and that they can depend on the knowledge, advice, skills and abilities of their colleagues."

Nonetheless, it is difficult for trust to be connected to only one of the five basic needs of Maslow. This is because without trust, esteem, love, and safety will decrease, and self-actualization will become less apparent. However, when trust is present, it will meet the need for safety, but not necessarily the need for love and esteem. Considering this, trust is placed in all categories, as trust is necessary for all five basic needs, just like honesty was, which was mentioned in Section 3.7 Trust and Section 6.6.8 Honesty, respectively. Trust and honesty are closely related, as without honesty there can be no trust, resulting in the sixth tip.

T6: Honesty is a precondition for trust.

It has also been explained by Harvey, et al. (2005), that trust is a component that works with itself to reduce costs. Trust can be seen as a risk-reward relationship. By acting in accordance with the prediction of another employee, trust increases, and risk is reduced. This makes the relationship more effective and, thus, lowers the costs. On top of that, when one has gained trust, others are more willing to comply and associate, which can be a substantial benefit for managers.

Plum, et al. (2017) defined trust to be developed in two directions: horizontally and vertically. Horizontal trust is between employees and relates to collective interest as opposed to self-interest. Vertical trust is the trust that employees have in their manager. This results in the extent to which they consider the interests and values of their manager when making decisions. On top of that, another aspect of vertical trust is trust in the organization. Trust is built upon how the organization manages different situations, for example, by ensuring fairness, equality, respect, and consistency.

Trust is often also a matter of physical placements or barriers. With physical barriers like walls and doors, trust can decrease. This is because it can seem like there is something to hide. Without those barriers, such as installing glass walls, and reducing the number of closed spaces, trust can flourish. Nonetheless, it is wise to keep some of these areas private as this can improve confidentiality and, in turn, increases trust. (Plum, et al., 2017)

Taking this into the remote work setting, trust is more relevant than ever. Trust is the foundation of every relationship. Whether talking about colleague relationships, manager-employee relationships, or trust in the organization they work in, trust is necessary. Trust, however, is even more critical in a remote work setting. This is because working remotely creates invisible boundaries and barriers which must be bridged by existing trust. (Mamuji, et al., 2004) However, when trust is broken, it is often difficult to earn back, and hard to detect before it has happened. Nonetheless, when employees come forward with their trust issues, there is an opportunity to solve them. To grab and utilize these opportunities, a manager must be alert at all times, especially online. On top of that, it is the responsibility of a manager to keep an open communication style, be respectful and listen actively. This will ensure that these trust issues can be addressed more easily.

7.2.4   Goal Clarity

This goal clarity factor relates to purpose. An employee needs to feel useful in an organization and have the feeling that they are contributing to a shared goal. Managers can play a key role in this part by empowering their employees and creating meaning for each of them. When this sense of purpose is created, a sense of belonging will follow. Employees must have goal clarity to satisfy the self-actualization need as they must bring their ideas to the manager for consideration. On top of that, there is a more distant connection, the increase in esteem. This is because when an employee knows what their goal is and how to get there, the road and steps to take become more obvious, and therefore, more easy to be taken. This results in a more confident approach to accomplishing these tasks, which in turn increases their self-esteem. Thus, goal clarity is linked to love, esteem, and self-actualization needs, and therefore falls into the second and third categories.

Sometimes goal clarity is also related to the term associability. Associability, as mentioned by Harvey, et al. (2007), is the willingness to subordinate individual goals to collective goals. Employees are more likely to strive for collective goals, for example, in a team, when this would result in the employee having their goals met as well or partly. Additionally, Mathieu, et al. (2008) suggest that, at the team level, goal clarity is related to organizational performance.

7.2.5 Social Cohesion

The social cohesion factor is connected to the love and esteem needs. This is because social cohesion is in a way, love, or a sense of belonging. On top of that, this sense of belonging and the building and forming of relationships ensures a certain self-validity, which in turn, increases esteem. Therefore, social cohesion falls into the second category, positive.

According to Mathieu, et al. (2008) cohesion is thoroughly researched, and it has been discovered that cohesion has a positive correlation with performance behaviors and outcomes. Including findings that suggested that, on the team level, cohesion was significantly related to team performance. Which is the same as Plum, et al. (2017) concluded from their findings. As they found that social cohesion has the strongest correlation in a team to productivity. When there is a high level of social cohesion this results in a safe environment for the employees. This safe environment gives them the freedom to innovate, challenge, explore, take risks, cooperate, and interact.

7.2.6 Perceived Supervisory Support

This factor is related to the support that is received from the supervisor. This requires support from the manager or organization. The most direct influence on the employee for support will be the manager as they are in direct contact with them.

Employees need to feel like they have a manager that actively supports them in achieving their personal goals. However, it is also need for a manager to set a positive tone and help their employees when needed. Managers play a crucial role in establishing a supportive motivational climate for employees to make them feel that they are supported and can get help when necessary. They can do this by demonstrating integrity, proactive problem-solving, being available, encouraging team discussion, understanding the motivation of the team and individuals, managing conflict fairly, and following up on the resolution of issues. This can increase job satisfaction, performance, sense of belonging, and esteem of their employees, which, in turn, increases productivity and well-being. (Plum, et al., 2017)

The support that employees receive can make them feel like they belong, as their manager has their back. On top of that, this support should make employees feel safe in their workplace environment, which, in turn, also can be felt in a physiological sense. For example, if the manager helps in aiding special needs by taking over tasks that involve walking as an employee has difficulty walking. Additionally, support is necessary for an employee to fulfill the self-actualization need, as they need their manager to recognize their work to grow and accomplish their personal goals. Thus, this factor is connected to all the needs, and falls into all the categories.

On top of that is the importance of the relationship between an employee and the manager. It is a indication for the relationship between the employee and the organization. For example, when an employee feels unsupported by their manager, they are likely to think they are unsupported by the organization as well. (Plum, et al., 2017)

7.2.7 Information Sharing

The sharing of information plays an active role in how an organization is built. Not only looking at the infrastructural spaces to encourage information sharing but also looking at the internal level of software or programs used to share information, can contribute to this factor. This thesis will follow the definition for information sharing by Plum, et al. (2017, page 342), "the extent to which teams utilise each member's distinctive knowledge for the team's benefit — and members are willing and happy to make their knowledge available for others to share". This factor enhances innovation, creativity, and performance, and is especially needed when tasks and problems are too complex to solve individually.

Using information sharing can make the job easier, which in turn increases satisfaction. The ease with which information is shared between employees and managers will influence the sense of belonging. This is because there needs to be a level of trust for information to be exchanged. For example, when an employee is not willing to share information because they are under the assumption of providing an unfair benefit to the other employee. This can result in resentment between employees. Therefore, when information is exchanged, a certain sense of mutual trust and respect is displayed. On top of that, information sharing also includes a sense of esteem, as talking about collected information and knowledge can create original ideas and increase the level of esteem. Therefore, this factor connects to the love and esteem needs, and thus, falls into the second category, positive.

It has been found by Mathieu, et al. (2008) that within teams, this factor is positively related to performance and relationships. Information sharing can be improved by giving employees options to write on walls and movable boards and choose software to track their progress. (Plum, et al., 2017)

Summarizing the key performance indicators and factors and combining them with Table 1 and Table 3 to form a new table, Table 4. Resulting in the productivity framework connected to the five basic needs of Maslow, the preconditions of Conforti, and the three categories and their corresponding responsibility. This framework constructed in a table can be found on the following page.

The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Preconditions of Conforti		Category	Responsibility	Productivity	
	Absence	Presence			Key Performance Indicator	Factor
Physiological		Honesty	Neutral	Manager	Absenteeism	Personal Building Environment Trust Perceived Supervisory Support
Safety	Freedom: - To Speak - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak Honesty				
Love	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression Honesty	Positive	Colleagues	Absenteeism Presenteeism Engagement Perceived Work Ability	Trust Goal Clarity Social Cohesion Perceived Supervisory Support Information Sharing
Esteem						
Self-Actualization	Honesty	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate Honesty Orderliness	Happy	Self	Engagement Employee Performance Self-Assessment	Trust Goal Clairty Perceived Supervisory Support

Table 4 – Framework Thesis – Productivity in Employees

8. Well-Being

The well-being of employees in the workplace environment is less researched than productivity. Nonetheless, multiple studies have proven the importance of well-being in the workplace environment and its links to productivity. (Charalampous, et al., 2019) This is because well-being influences the state of an employee which translates itself to, for example, exhaustion, commitment, concentration, physical aches and issues. (van Horn, et al., 2004) This, in turn, will have an effect on the productivity of an employee. Therefore, well-being is an important aspect of the ideal workplace environment and should be investigated.

Following van Horn, et al. (2004), who have created a revised framework for evaluating the well-being of employees. They have used old models and insights to create their own conceptual framework. To this end, they have used two different models of well-being. On the one hand, the model of Ryff, who has proposed a model for the general well-being of people, includes six dimensions: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations, personal growth, and purpose in life. On the other hand, the model of Warr, who has proposed a model of mental health at work, includes four dimensions: affective well-being, aspiration, autonomy, and competence, and a secondary fifth dimension that is called integrated functioning.

The following framework, based upon these two other and older models, has five dimensions. This framework was also used by Charalampous, et al. (2019) to evaluate the well-being of employees who worked remotely. The five dimensions are affective well-being, professional well-being, social well-being, cognitive well-being, and psychosomatic well-being. Respectively, considering affect, motivation, and behavior for the first three dimensions. These first three dimensions and their characteristics are being evaluated in this thesis to construct a framework for evaluating the well-being of employees. This is done because, the latter two, respectively cognitive and psychosomatic well-being was understudied, and Charalampous, et al. (2019) did find very few results to draw solid conclusions. On top of that, both the cognitive and psychosomatic well-being aspects seem to be related with earlier mentioned factors and were completed covered. The addition of characteristics to the affective well-being dimension, covered the same ground as the cognitive well-being dimension and were, thus, absolute. The psychosomatic well-being dimension consist of the same characteristics of the physiological need of Maslow and is also covered by the building environments factor of productivity, and additionally by the environmental mastery factor of the social well-being dimension. The framework is constructed to help and advise managers on how to construct the ideal workplace environment, for themselves, their employees, and their organization.

To make a comprehensive framework, the dimensions and their characteristics are related and connected to the five basic needs of Maslow, physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization, which were explained in-depth in Chapter 6 The Five Basic Needs of Maslow. This in turn resulted in the proposal of the three categories, neutral, positive, and happy, which were explained in-depth in Section 6.7 Categorizing the Five Basic Needs. In this way, a comprehensive framework can be established in which not only productivity but also the well-being of employees can be estimated and improved.

8.1 Affective Well-Being

Affective well-being is a long and heavily researched term that is measured by graded antonyms. Therefore, there are many graded antonyms on which well-being can be measured. Take, for example, the ones that van Horn, et al. (2004) proposed, anxiety-comfort, depression-pleasure, boredom-enthusiasm, tiredness-vigor, and anger-placidity. This is already an extension of the ones Warr (1990) has considered, who only used the anxiety-contentment and depression-enthusiasm antonyms.

Consequently, affective well-being is a huge part of the well-being of employees. According to Van Horn, et al. (2004), emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are the three characteristics, next to affect itself, that contribute to this affective well-being. While Charalampous, et al. (2019), found that social support may be harmful to these affective states of employees who specifically work remotely. Low social support was found to be a cause of emotional exhaustion, which was more prevalent when working extensively remote. However, when support systems were in place, employees felt more satisfied with their job than their face-to-face counterpart. This implies that social support is negatively connected to emotional exhaustion and positively connected to job satisfaction.

8.1.1 Affect

To investigate the characteristics that influence the affect dimension some characteristics were proposed. Van Horn, et al. (2004) mentioned fatigue and tension at work, next to the six dimensions Warr (1990) also mentioned, being motivation, skill use, job complexity, attentional control, task repetition, and work overload. On top of those six dimensions, was another dimension, mentioned by Ryff and Keyes (1995), self-acceptance. These dimensions and characteristics will be used to compose the well-being framework.

Combining, fatigue and work overload together, as they both fall into the physiological need and therefore in the first category, neutral. Both fatigue as well as work overload will influence physical and mental health, for example, both can lead to absenteeism or presenteeism if they are not solved in an appropriate manner.

The characteristics that would fall into the second category, positive, are attentional control, tension at work, skill use, and self-acceptance. Only, attentional control connects to both the love and the esteem need, as attentional control is very similar to presenteeism, see also Section 7.1.2 Presenteeism. Tension at work is connected to the love need, as tension at work between employees or with the manager or organization can lead to a decrease in the sense of belonging. The other two characteristics, skill use, and self-acceptance, are connected to the esteem need. Making use of skills will likely receive praise and acknowledgement, which will increase esteem. Self-acceptance is explained by Ryff and Keyes (1995, page 720) as "positive evaluations of oneself and one's past life" and discovered that it includes the opinion of employees on their own good and bad qualities and how they perceive them. Thus, self-acceptance will influence esteem as well.

Lastly there are three characteristics, job complexity, task repetition, and motivation, who are all connected to the self-actualization need, which falls into the third category, happy. To fulfill the self-actualization need, an employee must think about their job in terms of complexity and repetition and needs to find the extremely fine line on which both are perfect. For example, when a job is too complex, an employee feels threatened and will feel a decrease in esteem, however when a job is too simple or easy, they can feel undervalued as they are not living up to their potential. The same goes for repetition, when there is a lot of repetition, one can have the feeling of being a robot. However, when there is too little repetition, an employee can feel like insecure about their job description and goals, and this can create a feeling of being lost in the chaos. When both these characteristics are satisfied, it will give the employee the motivation, the last dimension, to fulfill this self-actualization need.

According to Charalampous, et al. (2019) there is a noticeable difference over the years, between affect, and the following emotions. While first, remote working, was associated with negative emotions, it now has become clear that there is a shift to more positive emotions. Some causes have been suggested, for example, an improvement in technology that could lead to colleagues being more approachable that led to a decrease in frustration. Therefore, it is important for a manager to know where these emotions lie so they can know how to approach and do with these emotions.

8.1.2 Emotional Exhaustion

Following the findings of van Horn, et al. (2004), emotional exhaustion represents one of the graded antonyms of Warr, namely, enthusiasm-depression. Emotional exhaustion is the extensive use and overuse of the emotional resources of an employee, which can cause depletion.

According to the findings of Charalampous, et al. (2019), there was a positive link between remote working and emotional exhaustion. Employees felt more freedom to interchange resources with, for example, no need for commuting, being able to respond to the needs of friends and family, and reducing the emotional drain associated with face-to-face interactions and work activities.

The most common cause of emotional exhaustion is a lack of safety. One may exhaust themselves if they do not feel safe expressing their emotions. In the same way, as with the "Freedom" preconditions of Conforti, mentioned in Section 6.6 Preconditions of Conforti, emotional exhaustion is based on the difference between the needs of an employee and the manager or organization. When this difference increases, so does emotional exhaustion. Therefore, emotional exhaustion is connected to the safety need and hence to the first category, neutral.

8.1.3 Job Satisfaction

Following the findings of van Horn, et al. (2004), job satisfaction represents the pleasure-displeasure axis of Warr. Therefore, it was placed in the affective well-being dimension. On top of that, Warr (1990) mentioned the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction.

Intrinsic job satisfaction is the job satisfaction an employee has with the contents of their job, for example, the amount of responsibility they get, the use of skills, and the variety, which closely correlates with skill use, job complexity, and task repetition as mentioned above. (Wall, et al., 1987)

Extrinsic job satisfaction relates closely to the workplace environment, for example, colleagues, the manager, earned salary, and the design of the workplace itself. Therefore, extrinsic job satisfaction connects directly to the physiological need.

According to the findings of Charalampous, et al. (2019) job satisfaction increased with the amount of remote work. However, they also found that there was increasing evidence to suggest that when remote working was increased, the job satisfaction flattened, suggesting that a more flexible approach to remote working could be beneficial. This implies that part-time remote work, such as a hybrid form of remote and physical work, might be a feasible approach for the future of organizations, managers, and employees.

Job satisfaction is an all-encompassing characteristic, as this will seep into every need of Maslow. However, job satisfaction is the most prominent in the self-actualization need. This is because self-actualization is the most influenced by and influences job satisfaction the most. When self-actualization is met, job satisfaction will increase, and when job satisfaction increases, so will the level of self-actualization. Therefore, job satisfaction is connected to the need for self-actualization and hence to the third category, happy.

8.1.4 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the identification and involvement of an employee within an organization. Following the findings of van Horn, et al. (2004), organizational commitment represents the pleasure-displeasure axis, which places it in the affective well-being dimension.

According to Charalampous, et al. (2019) organizational commitment increases with remote working. Employees appreciated the fact that the organization trusted them and accommodated their needs by allowing them to work remotely. Even with the increased work pressure due to remote working, they considered themselves more committed than their office-based counterparts. On top of that, the characters of employees, along with work-family conflicts, contributed extensively to the job satisfaction of remote working. This implies that it is critical for a manager to assess individual preferences and discuss the options available with their employees and choosing the right people for the right job.

Organizational commitment is highly related to self-actualization, as the organization or manager decides on the opportunity to work remotely. This gives an indication that the organization puts the needs of an employee high and makes them a priority. Giving these options to employees means that employees are given the freedom to choose for themselves on what and how they want to execute their job. This is exactly what self-actualization stands for. Therefore, organizational commitment is connected to the need for self-actualization and hence to the third category, happy.

8.2 Social Well-Being

The social well-being dimension is the level of social relationships in the workplace environment. This includes two concepts: depersonalization, and the quality of social functioning.
(van Horn, et al., 2004) This was based on the model of Ryff and Keyes (1995) and two of their dimensions, namely, positive relations and environmental mastery. Positive relations are expressed as concern about the welfare of other employees, and the possession of those relationships. Consequently, positive relations can be assessed in the same way as the quality of social functioning, so they will be combined in this thesis. Additionally, to social functioning, environmental mastery is the ability to change and influence the surrounding world. Therefore, three aspects will be investigated, social functioning, depersonalization, and environmental mastery.

8.2.1   Social Functioning

Social functioning relates to the perceived level of function and quality in the relationships an employee has. (van Horn, et al., 2004) This is closely connected to the positive relations dimension of Ryff and Keyes (1995), since an employee with close relationships is better able to show empathy and understand the balance in those relationships.

It is frequently mentioned that remote workers are prone to feelings of social isolation, as previously mentioned in Section 3.5 Fear of Exile. On top of that, Charalampous, et al. (2019) also found that remote workers are more likely to form strong bonds with each other, as opposed to remote-office colleagues. On top of that, they discovered that there was a positive relationship between the manager-employee relationship when considering remote workers.

This social functioning closely relates to the love need as this includes the sense of belonging. Social relationships often influence the sense of belonging heavily as these relationships form bonds with the employee and their workplace environment, which in turn attaches them to the organization. Therefore, social functioning connects to the love need and hence falls into the second category, positive.

8.2.2   Depersonalization

Depersonalization is a form of dissociation from the surrounding world and involves a sense of detachment. When the level of depersonalization of an employee increases, they become indifferent and have a negative attitude toward other employees, the manager, or even the organization.
(van Horn, et al., 2004)

Therefore, when depersonalization increases, a sense of belonging decreases as they have no interest in relationships with others. Thus, depersonalization connects to the love need and hence falls into the second category, positive.

8.2.3   Environmental Mastery

Environmental mastery includes the ability or skills to change the workplace environment to the personal preferences, needs, and wishes of an employee. This capability is expressed in terms of making effective use of opportunities that arise or creating them. (Lang & Preece, 2016) However, when there is no or only limited environmental mastery, an employee can feel lost as they feel like they have no control whatsoever over their surroundings or what they can or want to do. (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) Therefore, environmental mastery is connected to the physiological and safety need and hence falls into the first category, neutral.

8.3 Professional Well-Being

The professional well-being dimension is evaluated on several characteristics, competence, autonomy, aspiration, and career prospects. However, more characteristics were used by Van Horn, et al. (2004), including self-efficacy. Nonetheless, when considering remote employees, these three were the most comprehensive and applicable. These characteristics used by Van Horn et al. (2004) were resulting from the model of Warr (1990), who mentioned aspiration, autonomy, and competence, combined with the model of Ryff and Keyes (1995), who mentioned autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life. These three characteristics were chosen because the others were contained by them, as competence included self-efficacy and purpose in life, aspiration included personal growth, and career prospects included ambition, motivation, and achievements.

8.3.1 Competence

Competence is mentioned in the model of Warr (1990) as the ability of an employee to cope with and transcend various problems.

According to Van Horn, et al. (2004), competence is related to the purpose in life dimension of Ryff and Keyes (1995). The purpose in life dimension relates to the belief that there is a purpose and a meaning that is worth living for. An employee with a higher purpose in life has goals set, and beliefs in the fact that their present and past lives have meaning. While an employee with a lower purpose in life lacks goals, and a sense of direction, and does not see a purpose or has an outlook for the future.

Competence is connected to two different needs, esteem and self-actualization. The amount of esteem in an ideal workplace environment would exactly match the competence level of an employee. This, in turn, would allow the employee to fulfill the need for self-actualization as well. Some factors can impact esteem and competence in both directions. For example, working together in a team to increase competence or feeling isolated to decrease esteem. As a competent employee has enough physiological resources to deal with the upcoming problems and challenges. Therefore, competence is connected to both the esteem and self-actualization need, and hence falls into the second and third categories, positive and happy.

8.3.2 Autonomy

Ryff and Keyes (1995) defined autonomy as a sense of self-determination and independence from other employees and the manager. An autonomous employee will resist the urge to think and act in predetermined ways, just because it is common or generally done. This sense of self and behavior comes from within the employee and is not dependent or influenced by others. However, when an employee is less autonomous, they depend on the expectations and evaluations of others, like their manager and colleagues. Such employees are also more likely to conform to social pressure and to wait for advice from others on significant decision-making. This conforms to the autonomy dimension of Warr (1990) who refers to autonomy as the degree to which employees resist others and follow their own opinions.

According to Charalampous, et al. (2019) autonomy is one of the most critical factors in the professional dimension of job satisfaction. Due to a reduction in the invasion of privacy, autonomy decreases strain. However, their stress levels can increase due to the intensified work. This is because remote workers can have the feeling that they need to be constantly online and respond almost instantly to prove their activity, as previously mentioned in Section 3.3 Technostress.

Thus, there are two sides to autonomy. On the one hand, it gives employees more freedom to do things their own way, regardless of what others think. On the other hand, the increased level of stress that autonomy can bring along with it.

The increased freedom can be connected to the safety and self-actualization need. This is because of the "Freedom" preconditions of Conforti, as mentioned in Section 6.6 Preconditions of Conforti, and the autonomy that is needed to be able to strive for personal ambitions and goals. On top of that, autonomy is also connected to esteem, as gaining autonomy can feel like a sense of recognition. For example, as an employee gets more responsibilities from the manager to handle, this can feel like praise for the work they have done.

Therefore, autonomy is connected to the safety, esteem, and self-actualization needs, and hence falls into all categories. This, in turn, proves the importance as mentioned by Charalampous, et al. (2019).

8.3.3 Aspiration

According to the model of Warr (1990), the aspiration of an employee is interest in and engagement with their environment, the setting of goals and assertively acting to accomplish them, alertness to new opportunities, and the extension of themselves on a personal level. This extension is mentioned in the model of Ryff and Keyes (1995) as personal growth and constitutes the sense of growth and development as a person and their openness to new experiences.

When an employee has a sense of personal growth, they can feel like they are living up to their potential. To this end, they are changing their behavior and actions in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness to achieve their potential. However, when an employee feels a lack of personal growth, they can become bored, uninterested, and unable to develop.

Following the findings of Warr (1990), low aspiration is reflected by a decrease in involvement and engagement, and by apathy and acceptance no matter how unfavorable the outcomes. While high aspiration is reflected in the pursuit of challenging goals or complex tasks.

Additionally, Warr (1990) explicitly states the self-actualization need of Maslow from a similar perspective. Therefore, it is obvious that aspiration is a big part of the self-actualization need and hence falls into the third category, happy.

8.3.4 Career Prospects

Career prospects encompasses the future of an employee. It involves ambition, motivation, and achievements as these are needed to feel confident enough to aim for personal goals and take advantage of career opportunities. Therefore, career prospects are heavily related to self-actualization as employees should figure out for themselves what they want to do with their job and where they want to end up. Hence, career prospects are connected to the self-actualization need and thus, fall into the third category, happy.

Professional well-being problems often involve perceptions, but it has become obvious that the organization can play a big role as well. An organization that supports remote working also gives the impression that they understand the benefits it can give them and their employees. This leads to more autonomy and job satisfaction, resulting in increased performance, and thus productivity and well-being. However, relationships can be challenged as remote workers are more prone to be micromanaged to ensure control of them by their manager or the organization itself.

All in all, these well-being dimensions lead to one clear conclusion: each employee is different. Thus, it is critical to establish what each employee wants, expects, and can do to conform to their job. When this is established, job satisfaction, performance, engagement, and many more will naturally flow from it. However, when there is a definite mismatch between expectations and demands, job satisfaction will decrease and an employee will fall down the five basic needs of Maslow, resulting in more absenteeism, presenteeism, a lack of performance, engagement, and maybe even health problems.

Summarizing the well-being dimensions and their characteristics the following framework for well-being is created in Table 5. Resulting in the well-being framework connected to the five basic needs of Maslow, the preconditions of Conforti, and the three categories and their corresponding responsibility. This framework constructed in a table can be found on the following page.

The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Preconditions of Conforti		Category	Responsibility	Well-Being	
	Absence	Presence			Affective	Social & Professional
Physiological		Honesty	Neutral	Manager	Affect – Fatigue Affect – Work Overload	Environmental Mastery
Safety	Freedom: - To Speak - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom to Speak Honesty	Neutral	Manager	Emotional Exhaustion	Environmental Mastery Autonomy
Love	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression	Positive	Colleagues	Affect – Attentional Control Affect – Tension at Work	Social Functioning Depersonalization
Esteem		Honesty	Positive	Colleagues	Affect – Attentional Control Affect – Skill Use Affect – Self-Acceptance	Competence Autonomy
Self-Actualization	Honesty	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate Honesty Orderliness	Happy	Self	Affect – Job Complexity Affect – Task Repetition Affect – Motivation Job Satisfaction Organizational Commitment	Competence Autonomy Aspiration Career Prospects

Table 5 – Framework Thesis – Well-Being in Employees

8.4 Break Even Analysis

Lister (2018) conducted research and discovered that most chronic conditions can be prevented or reversed with lifestyle changes. This would mean that well-being in the workplace would enable employees to be more present, less absent, and more engaged. However, most CFOs are reluctant to engage in these wellness initiatives because they cost big money. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the investments are the reason that employees are more productive, or if it is just a result of a better economy, redeployment, or a bonus that employees received.

Following the quick breakeven analysis to calculate the reduction in chronic illnesses needed to break even on the investment, the case was made. Resulting in CFOs that are able to argue why these investments are worth the time and the money.

This concluded in different possibilities to make the investment pay for itself.
Only one of the following was necessary to make the investment break even:

- 1 employee to not become obese
- 1.2 employees to not become inactive
- 0.3 employees not leaving the organization due to health problems

On top of that, as the wellness investment is likely to affect more employees, the investment will make money for the organization.

This should give organizations enough incentive to invest in wellness initiatives and help CFOs make these significant decisions.

9. Results Literature Research

This chapter is used to summarize all the results up until now following from the literature review and the resulting conclusions. This includes the productivity and the well-being framework which are combined in this chapter as well. Additionally, a summary of the constructed pieces of advice and tips are mentioned. With this short overview of the literature research, a start is made with drawing the picture of the ideal workplace, including some valuable information that can be transformed into advice for managers.

Combining the productivity and the well-being framework, constructed the following combined framework, which can be seen in Table 6.

Productivity	Preconditions of Conforti		The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Category	Responsibility	Well-Being
	Absence	Presence				
Absenteeism Personal Factors Building Environment Trust Perceived Supervisory Support		Honesty	Physiological	Neutral	Manager	Affect – Fatigue Affect – Work Overload Environmental Mastery
	Freedom: - To Speak - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak Honesty	Safety			Emotional Exhaustion Environmental Mastery Autonomy
Absenteeism Presenteeism Engagement Perceived Work Ability Trust Goal Clarity Social Cohesion Perceived Supervisory Support Information Sharing	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate - To Defend Justice Fairness Honesty Orderliness	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression Honesty	Love	Positive	Colleagues	Affect – Attentional Control Affect – Tension at Work Social Functioning Depersonalization
			Esteem			Affect – Attentional Control Affect – Skill Use Affect – Self-Acceptance Competence Autonomy
Engagement Employee Performance Self-Assessment Trust Goal Clarity Perceived Supervisory Support	Honesty	Freedom: - To Speak - To Act - Of Expression - To Investigate Honesty Orderliness	Self-Actualization	Happy	Self	Affect – Job Complexity Affect – Task Repetition Affect – Motivation Job Satisfaction Organizational Commitment Competence Autonomy Aspiration Career Prospects

Table 6 – Combined Framework – Productivity and Well-Being in Employees

To summarize this framework even more, a summarized version is displayed in the table below, Table 7.

The Five Basic Needs of Maslow	Productivity	Well-Being	Responsibility
Physiological	Absenteeism Personal Factors Building Environment Trust Perceived Supervisory Support	Affect – Fatigue Affect – Work Overload Environmental Mastery	Manager
Safety		Emotional Exhaustion Environmental Mastery Autonomy	
Love	Absenteeism Presenteeism Engagement Perceived Work Ability Trust Goal Clarity Social Cohesion Perceived Supervisory Support Information Sharing	Affect – Attentional Control Affect – Tension at Work Social Functioning Depersonalization	Colleagues
Esteem		Affect – Attentional Control Affect – Skill Use Affect – Self Acceptance Competence Autonomy	
Self-Actualization	Engagement Employee Performance Self-Assessment Trust Goal Clarity Perceived Supervisory Support	Affect – Job Complexity Affect – Task Repetition Affect – Motivation Job Satisfaction Organizational Commitment Competence Autonomy Aspiration Career Prospects	Self

Table 7: Summarized Combined Frameworks – Productivity and Well-Being in Employees

When investigating Table 7, the summarized version of the combined frameworks, certain connects can be made between productivity and well-being characteristics. It becomes clear that these characteristics are intertwined with each other when looking at their definitions and their influence on either productivity or well-being. Nonetheless, while these connections would be obvious at first sight, it is still needed to validate and verify them by statistical evidence. This can be done by, for example, a survey or interviews.

Looking at fatigue and work overload it becomes clear that when these would increase, absenteeism would increase as well. This is because when fatigue and work overload become too high, employees often resort to sick days, increasing absenteeism.

Additionally, social cohesion and social functioning seem linked because of their definitions. Both social cohesion and functioning are related to the social relationships an employee has and maintains with their colleagues and others. On top of that, tension at work can influence these relationships as more tension will worsen these relationships and less tension can improve them.

Attentional control is connected to presenteeism, as attentional control is part of the aspects presenteeism has, namely, the concentration and focus for performing tasks.

Perceived work ability is influences by things like skill use and competence. This is because when an employee is not able to make use of its skills, competence is not challenged, but also not exhausted, which leads this employee to believe that they are doing a worse job than they could. Therefore, their perceived work ability will decrease.

Engagement is connected to depersonalization, as both will directly influence or be a result of a change in the other. This is because when depersonalization goes up, an employee becomes less involved in matters of other employees and will care less about them, resulting in less engagement with their job and the people involved.

When looking into the self-actualization need of Maslow and the connections that can be made between the productivity and well-being characteristics, it becomes clear that they are more intertwined with, and therefore, dependent on, each other. Employee performance self-assessment is influenced by job complexity and task repetition, but it is connected to motivation and organizational commitment. The latter is because motivation and organizational commitment will influence their self-assessment, but their self-assessment will also influence their motivation and organizational commitment. On top of that, the employee performance self-assessment will influence their aspiration and career prospects. This is because when their self-assessment is high, they start to look further and reflect on their own needs and wishes, which creates aspiration and the need for career prospects.

These connections still need to be verified and validated by research but proves evidence to suggest their relevance in the workplace environment.

Next, all the pieces of advice and tips drawn from the literature research are summarized. They form an essential understanding of what influences the workplace environment and how to create the ideal one post-pandemic as a manager.

Advice

➢ Make use of the office as it can be used to reduce the fear of exile
➢ To successfully lead, first, focus on the dynamics before tackling projects or tasks
➢ Managers should give more autonomy to their employees to create more time to keep up to date with new innovations and software developments
➢ To prevent or reduce technostress, expectations and boundaries must be set and agreed upon

Tips

➢ Trust is the building block of relationships, and is therefore, essential for the ideal workplace environment
➢ Remote employees must be considered as individuals and cared for in the same manner
➢ To be a successful manager for remote employees, a manager needs to have emotional intelligence, a keen perception, an open communication style, and an individualistic approach. On top of that, they need to be highly flexible and give autonomy and clear goals to employees. Lastly, they need to inspire and stimulate employees to live up to their potential.
➢ Personal factors are underlying causes for absenteeism and presenteeism
➢ The building environment factors are the same factors that are needed to fulfill the first need of Maslow, the physiological need
➢ Honesty is a precondition for trust

10.   Survey

Following the extensive literature review, two frameworks have been created, the productivity and the well-being framework, respectively. These two frameworks will form the basis of the following survey that will investigate the needs and wishes of employees. Specifically, this thesis is looking for the ideal workplace environment post-pandemic and what a manager can mean for employees in terms of productivity and well-being. By conducting this survey employees are given the opportunity to share their opinion on their workplace environment concerning remote work and how to improve it in terms of productivity and well-being factors. These improvements can be given in the form of advice to current managers and organizations on how to help their employees live up to their potential and get the very most out of them.

10.1   Methodology

Knowing which questions to ask and how to ask them is always a big question when taking surveys. A lot of bias can slip into question-and-answer formats. Therefore, it is important to look at surveys in the past around the same kind of questions and subjects, for example, remote work surveys before the pandemic.

This survey is based on self-assessment as this will provide the most feedback to construct advice for managers on how to improve their workplace environment. On top of that, all the questions concerning a rating were asked based on a 5-point Likert scale. Most of these questions were ranging from 1, with Strongly Disagree as the answer, to 5, with Strongly Agree as the answer. A few questions were concerning frequency or time, rather than the compliance to a statement and, therefore, ranging from Never to Always. To ensure that the order of questions did not cause any bias, most of the questions were randomly ordered by means of the software used, in this case Qualtrics.

10.1.1 The Conceptual Model

To ensure that the survey would not take too long, in order to protect the validity of the survey, a selection of factors from both frameworks was selected. This was because including all the factors mentioned in the thesis would result in a very extensive and dreadfully long survey. This could impose a risk of participants finding the survey too long and quitting somewhere random, or it could risk losing concentration which could lead to inaccurate answers.

The factors in the neutral category, such as those in the physiological and the safety needs of Maslow, are the factors that can primarily be solved by the manager itself. Therefore, most of the factors chosen to be included in the survey are from the neutral category. These included physical and mental health factors, as well as absenteeism, trust, fatigue, and work overload.

Presenteeism and absenteeism were selected as they are often missed by managers but are a very significant part of possible improvements in the workplace environment. As a manager, trust and perceived supervisory support are detrimental to being a successful manager and therefore were also included in the survey.

The choice of social relationships was made because both frameworks and the manager are influenced by this factor. This resulted in a factor that has the most impact on the different sides of the workplace environment.

Five well-being factors were selected to evaluate the level of well-being in employees and were almost all from the affective well-being dimension as they can be most effectively solved with the help of a manager. On top of that, these well-being factors also covered most the five needs of Maslow, except for the safety need, but still represented all three proposed categories.

The conceptual model created is based on the well-being and productivity framework, as well as the other factors mentioned, that play an important role. The conceptual model can be seen in Figure 1.
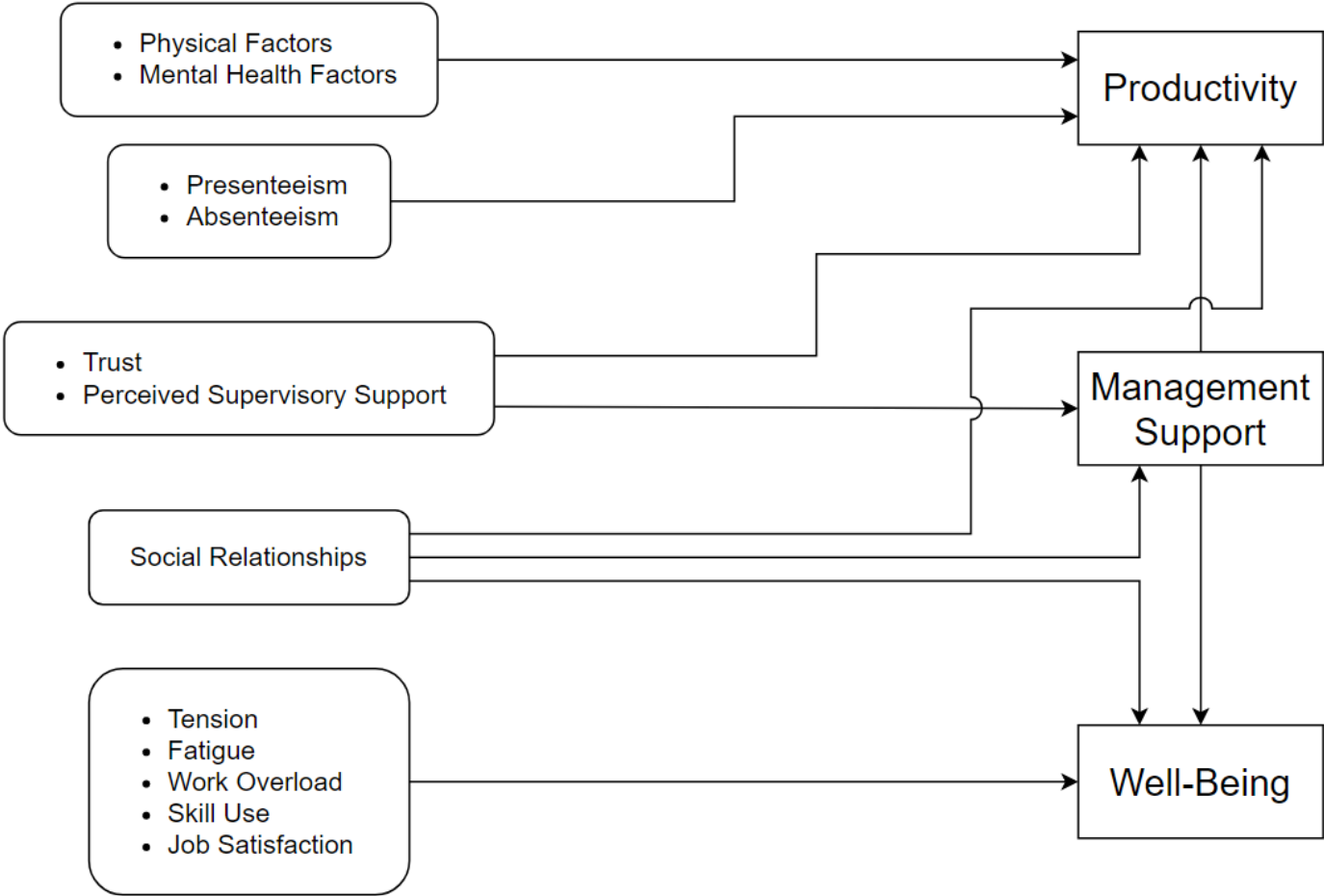

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

The frameworks indicate that the factors relate to one of the five Maslow needs and a category, as also explained more in-depth by the corresponding factors in Chapter 7 Productivity and Chapter 8 Well-Being. When a problem or issue arises, these links will indicate where the responsibility lies and where to begin addressing it.

As can be seen, the survey has been created to provide a wide range of measures relating to the perception of an employee of their manager, their productivity, and their own well-being. When certain measures and scales were available from previous studies, these were chosen. Nevertheless, not all the factors have been studied previously, especially not in the post-pandemic remote work context. Therefore, some questions were guided by similar questions and previous scales.

## 10.2	Measures

10.2.1 Acceptance Requirements

The survey used in this thesis will be conducted and spread via the internet using the Qualtrics platform. To ensure the anonymity and consent of the participants, a small section was added to the beginning of the survey itself. This section included the option to give or withhold consent.

Besides that, there were some general questions in place. These were intended to get the right demographic group for this survey and the most representative results for this thesis. For this survey, people needed to work full-time, which is the same as 36+ hours per week, minimally work 1 day per week remotely, work in a team, and have a manager. There were several reasons for choosing this demographic, which are roughly explained in the previous sections, but will be summarized here as well.

As proposed by Charalampous, et al. (2019), it would be beneficial to include a part in the survey to see if any differences will occur when comparing results of different groups of remote working days. They concluded that when the number of days working remote went up, the job satisfaction stagnated. This implied that some hybrid form would be most appropriate for the ideal workplace environment in terms of productivity and well-being of employees. To this end, it would be relevant to include this in the survey and draw some conclusions.

To make a meaningful comparison of the working days in the office versus working remotely, full-time employees were chosen as they work 5 days a week, with a minimum of 1 day remotely. This will give a ratio that can be used to indicate when certain problems occur and if there is a relationship between these problems and the number of days worked remotely.

Working within a team was chosen, as mentioned in Section 3.6 Teams, as productivity is best assessed at the team level and concerning other employees as opposed to working individually. Nonetheless, for future research, it could be beneficial to investigate those individuals specifically. As these individuals are a different group of people, with, for example, different characters than the employees who do work in a team, and different needs and wishes. They could even work without a manager in their organization but just work individually on certain tasks. Or they are self-employed and work for their own business or company. In addition, there are the managers themselves, which is an important group of people to consider.

This brings up the last requirement, the participants needed to have a manager. These employees know what they are missing from a manager. However, a manager themselves can overlook these problems, for example, because they have been doing this for a very long time, and they have become accustomed to their ways and execution.

10.2.2 Well-Being and Productivity Assessment

When looking at well-being factors, self-assessment is best used, as also stated by Plum, et al. (2017). The use of Likert scales was also recommended by them, as the questions about well-being are personal and self-experienced.

Productivity is long-existing and well-researched, however, there does not seem to be one conclusive method to measure it in an organization, team, or individual. To determine the most appropriate method to measure productivity, it is critical to consider the purpose of the survey and the factors that are being evaluated. Since this thesis is focused on advice for managers it would be best to let employees self-assess their situations and options for improvement focused on the contribution of the manager.

10.2.3 The Participants

Participants were voluntarily asked to participate in this survey study. To this end, using Amazon Web Services (AWS), and the Mechanical Turk application, the survey was spread. On this platform, people are paid to do surveys to help and conduct research.

At first, a quota of 50 participants was set, but somehow the survey was still open when this quota was reached, so more participants took the survey. Some responses had to be deleted, because some participants had entered the survey multiple times with different answers or were flagged as bots by the Qualtrics system.

11.   Results Survey

See Appendix A for the extended overview of the results of the survey. This chapter will only provide a comprehensive review of the results that can be used to answer the proposed research question. A total of 56 participants were selected based on meeting the acceptance requirements.

Of these participants, the average age was around 35 years, and roughly 60 percent was female, and 40 percent was male. Around half of the participants worked fully remote, with five days a week, and a quarter worked two days a week of five remotely.

11.1.1 Closed Questions

None of the participants liked to work exclusively in the office. On top of that, a small majority, being 57.14% of the participants, wants to work five days a week, full-time, remotely. This implies that these participants are in favor of remote work and have found their way to balance this in such a way that they prefer it over working in the office. It can also imply that these participants find the benefits involved with remote working preferable to those involved with working in the office.

The amount of technostress was also considerable, with an average of 3.35, as this level is higher than their level of workload, with an average of 2.73, out of a total of 5. Indicating that stress is mostly coming from the need or expectation to respond immediately and always appearing to be online. This can imply that there is a need for clarity and talking about expectations around this. Hopefully, resulting in reciprocal agreements that take some of this stress away.

According to the participants, organizations have shifted to be more accepting of remote work since the pandemic. Which implies that there now is a culture that can or will accept remote workers in better ways than before. Or it could imply, that there is a possibility to talk about remote work with the organization or their manager to set expectations and discuss their needs and wishes.

When investigating the answers to the physical and mental health factors, the results are interesting to look at. Most participants have factors that play a big role in their day-to-day life. However, they do not limit them in the same way, respectively, as they play a big role, to do their job. Furthermore, the participants are thinking that their manager can help them with these factors, relatively more than these are limiting their abilities.

Looking at social relationships, participants indicated that they feel confident, with an average of 4.01, about their social relationships with their colleagues and their manager. This implies that even when working remotely, they are still satisfied with their level or depth of their relationships. On top of that, these results seem to indicate that there is no need for significant changes or improvement on what is already done by their manager to promote their sense of belonging.

11.1.2 Open Questions

The open questions gave the opportunity to elaborate on how managers could help or improve different aspects of their workplace environment. Most of these questions were follow-up question to elaborate on the factors assessed before. By quantifying the questions based on certain terms that were mentioned in the answers of the participants, some results and conclusions were drawn. An important remark is the fact that the open questions were open to whatever a participant wanted to write. This could mean that a participant did not have to answer the question if they did not want to enclose that information. However, when leaving all open questions unanswered, or the majority, they were disqualified due to the lack of accurate results and answers.

When looking into how productivity could be improved or helped, a lot of the same answers were prompted among the participants. The biggest part of the participants, 44.64% mention the amount of communication as a point for improvement. Another large part, 25%, mention the support the manager can give. For example: "My manager can also log in remotely and help me with any problems I may be experiencing.". This implies that when problems occurred the manager could step in, remotely from wherever they were at that moment in time. This could also help to increase the perceived supervisory support factor. Answers in respect to goal clarity are mentioned by 17.86%, and autonomy and the necessary equipment is mentioned by 10.71% of the participants. These results all imply in some way or another the need for improvement. When considering to create the ideal workplace environment, it is critical to take all options for improving into consideration and make choices according to the specific situation at hand.

This implies that for a manager to help their employees with their productivity, clear communication is needed. On top of that, with clear communication comes a big part of the support mentioned, as well as the setting of expectations for goal clarity, and the provision of equipment. Last but not least, is the fact that some employees prefer to work autonomously when remote. This was mainly because they are not interrupted and distracted that way, and they will reach out whenever they deem necessary.

When looking at workload there are a few things that stand out. First, communication is the most important factor mentioned. This communication is further divided in terms of tasks and in terms of ways to communicate and response time of the communication. In terms of tasks, it comes forward in 41.07% of the responses, with support at 25% at the second place, and delegation and goal clarity also being mentioned frequently, respectively with 19.64% and 12.5%. This implies that there is a need for more frequent and appropriate communication when tasks are divided or allocated. On top of that, there is also a need for more goal clarity about those tasks and the opportunity to delegate tasks when workload becomes too much.

In terms of ways to communicate, a lot of different platforms are mentioned. However, the most frequently mentioned methods to communicate were phone calls, video calls, e-mails, texts, or chat functions. On top of that, only two participants named face-to-face meetings. This implies that there is a large range of options to choose from when considering the best ways to communicate and that face-to-face meetings seem obsolete.

The time to respond was mentioned in 23.21% of the answers. However, these answers varied from expectations of time, to extending and shortening of the time to respond. One of the answers was "Be clear about the expectations of being online for 8 entire hours a day and to clearly identify how much time it should take for you to respond to an email etc …" This clearly indicates the need for the determination of expectations as to what guidelines to follow on communication matters. Next to that was another answer: "… her mode of communication helps me priorities. For instance, text is more urgent than email." This implies that it can be beneficial to prioritize some communication ways over others.

When talking about the needs and wishes of those participants around remote work, a new factor was presented in 16.07% of the answers, and that was flexibility. They suggested that there should be flexibility in terms of how to act, carry out tasks, and dividing time. The most frequently mentioned factor was respect, with 37.5% of the answers containing some sort of respect between the manager and the participant, most often lacking in some sort of way by means of communication.

Looking into the results of relationships, most of the participants, 37.5% believe in meetings to ensure and maintain these relationships. Sometimes, specifically, mentioning face to face meetings, with 8,93% of the participants, and sometimes mentioning virtual meetings, with 3.57% of the participants, but most of them do not specify a form of meetings. On top of that, 21.43% of the participants are vouching for more events like team building, workshops, and paid lunches.

When looking at the most important two questions of the survey for the purpose of this thesis, namely "How would the ideal workplace environment look like for you?" and "What can your manager do to create this ideal work environment for you?", some great suggestions were made that really give insight into employees are looking at their manager and the ideal workplace environment.

One of the participants even made an extensive list on the latter question that shows the importance of certain aspects for employees and could be a great example for the advice that could be given to managers. This list, as it is quite extensive, can be found in Appendix A, Quotes. It included aspects like communication, amenities, and support, which also came forward in the other open questions, as can be seen above. Another example of great advice that promotes continuous improvements is "Discuss your needs and try to accommodate them and regularly check in to see if things are working or what could be improved." In both questions, career prospects, autonomy, and team interactions and relationships are mentioned as important factors for creating the ideal workplace environment.

A beautiful example for the first question is "The ideal workplace environment is largely what I am experiencing now. I feel trusted and appreciated. Because I am trusted and appreciated, I am allowed to work remotely which removes many of the day-to-day stressors - commuting through traffic, longer hours due to the commute, unproductive interruptions, too much separation of work life and home life, etc. It is important to trust employees who have proven themselves trustworthy. To not show trust is very demoralizing for good employees. It is important to show appreciation. When working remotely it is easy to forget to show appreciation for good work, but it remains very important and motivating to know you are appreciated." This answer shows how the different factors are intertwined and connect to each other and are rarely seen apart from each other.

Another example to the first question shows the link already drawn in the thesis between the relationships with colleagues and the aspiration one gets from a social workplace environment. "The ideal workplace environment would include having separate spaces assigned to employees that are large enough to have desk space to be organized and can be personalized (to make it our own). Given my field, it is necessary to have one-on-one meetings, so it would be ideal to have these spaces be enclosed, but access to closed meeting spaces would be greatly helpful. Apart from that, having access to team members and supportive managers would create the best possibly workplace that makes you feel that you can grow and enjoy your work would be good."

Nonetheless, not everyone is up to socialization as another example shows: "… do not need to communicate with other people …" However, this answer seems to be unique in this perspective, and a lot of the participants are wanting to have some sort of social interaction with their colleagues and their manager.

Another beautiful example for some manager advice is: "The manager can be supportive, empathetic, but also firm and clear about their objectives for each person and the team as a whole. They should also provide a space to have open and honest discussions about general performance and dealing with any obstacles that might come up." This shows exactly how a manager can support their employees in a balanced way that works for everyone and leaves room for flexibility and honesty.

Looking at the number of participants and their mentioned answers for the first question, 46.43% mentioned that they need or would like equipment to create their ideal workplace environment. Additionally, 23.21% of the participants, mentioned, specifically, that they would like to exclusively work remote, and 16.07% mentioned that they would like to work in a hybrid form. On top of that, 14.29% of the participants considered flexibility to be an important factor.

The second question holds similar results but focuses more on the support a manager can give by listening, respecting, and communicating, given by 30.36% of the participants. However, still on top, with 33.93% of the participants is the provision of equipment for the remote office. Next to that, some participants think that their manager should advocate for them to their supervisors, to higher management, or the organization itself.

Last, but definitely, not least is one final answer of a manager that understood that their employees all have different needs and how they could support them by accommodating and supporting these preferences. "My manager has allowed me to continue to work remotely, even though we have largely gone back to face-to-face operations. My manager has realized that not everyone's job requires being on campus in person. I am able to be equally effective working from home, and more efficient and productive not needing to worry about commuting, parking, meals, etc. I also feel I am more efficient because I can manage interruptions better. Rather than people walking in they email, text, or call, and I can return to them at a time that is not as disruptive. "

All in all, it seems that communication is needed in every aspect of the ideal workplace environment, and that the manager needs to provide this. On top of that, the manager or the organization should provide equipment for the remote workplace as this is the most mentioned throughout the survey. Nonetheless, it was helpful to see that most of the participants already were sufficiently happy in their workplace environment, and there was still room for improvement, but definitely not necessary. This leads to believe that most employees are content with their job and are able to talk about their needs. Which is critical in the workplace environment of tomorrow.

12.   Discussion

Looking deeper into the results of the literature research in combination with survey taken, some points need to be discussed in-depth.

One outstanding result from the survey was the fact that nobody would like to work in the office exclusively. This implies that employees at least see the benefits remote work can have over office work. However, this does not mean that everyone would or can see those same benefits as each employee is unique and so is their situation. Therefore, as already mentioned before, a manager bears the responsibility to seek the right person for the right job, including the right people for remote work.

Additionally, as expected by the literature research was the fact that the participants indeed were suffering from technostress. This implies the high and immediate need for the setting of boundaries and making agreements on the ways in which communication takes place and the underlying expectations are made explicit.

On top of that, was the fact that participants felt relatively good about their social relationships. Which indicates that they are content with what they have and do not feel the need to improve. Therefore, the fear of exile or social isolation, which was mentioned in the literature research as a danger for remote work, seems not that big as a problem as was insinuated. Nonetheless, from the perspective of a manager it could be wise to strive towards open communication in order to detect these problems before they arise and tackle them head-on.

A lot of factors were mentioned in the literature to improve on productivity and well-being. Taking the factors of the survey, in terms of productivity, only a few were mentioned that needed improvement. These were goal clarity and perceived supervisory support. However, other suggestions were made, the provision of equipment, autonomy, and more clear communication. These three can also improve the factors like goal clarity and perceived supervisory support. Including the results and suggestions made on communication it became clear that a certain order was preferred, and expectations needed to be made explicit. This could include the communication platforms and response time, for example. Nonetheless, as a manager it is necessary to look at what communication is needed, and which has become abundant. This gives them an overview of what really is necessary instead of using it all to make everyone happy. In terms of well-being autonomy was widely and frequently mentioned in both the literature research, as well as in the answers of the survey. Following the results of the survey, it also became clear that this autonomy was reflected in some part of the technostress employees experienced, as they felt that they were being controlled obsessively and were in need for more freedom.

13.   Future Research and Limitations

There are a lot of options to look into future research and their implications to look for the ideal workplace environment. The proposed combination of the productivity and well-being frameworks, which connected factors, looks promising based on the literature research, but still needs validation and verification. This can be done by a survey that specifically relates and connects those factors to each other. Resulting in more information about and insights into the dependent and independent variables and make sure that the connections made are statistically proven.

Additionally, not all the factors mentioned within the frameworks were investigated in the executed survey. Therefore, it could be useful to extend the survey into the other factors and gain more qualitative information on those specific subjects. These factors are still important to create the whole picture around the ideal workplace environment. While they could not be assessed in this thesis, due to the length of the survey, they are still valuable in the advice that is needed for managers to create the ideal workplace.

Next to that, due to the time constraints of this thesis, there was not enough time to analyze the results. One of the aspects that could be investigated further were the results based upon the number of days employees were working remotely. This can be a great source of information about the limit that was mentioned in Section 8.1.3 Job Satisfaction. On top of this, is the general assessment and analyzation of the quantitative part of the survey. For now, only some of the general implications are made based upon the results, but more in-depth analysis can be done on the validity and verification of the frameworks and their factors. This could help in the validity of the combined framework and the connections between the different productivity and well-being factors.

As already mentioned above in 10.1 Methodology, looking into different members of an organization could give further insights into the dynamics involving the workplace environment. For example, looking at teams as a whole, or managers individually, could give insights in different experiences and problems they occur or have. Another example was to look at some employees who are working autonomously, maybe even without a manager.

Next to that, there was, as mentioned in Section 3.8 Culture, an indication of cultural differences. This would mean, for example, that employees from different cultures could perceive and experience situations and encounters totally different from each other. The survey used for this thesis however did not provide the right components to dive into this culture difference, as it was focused more on a managerial advice in terms of productivity and well-being. Nonetheless, culture differences are an important factor to count for in remote workplace environments. This becomes increasingly important when remote working slowly becomes more normal and expertise can be brought in from the opposite side of the world.

It could also be useful to investigate remote work related to the size of the organization. Some smaller organizations could be inclined to treat their employees like a family-style business, and larger organizations could prefer to keep their distance to their employees. This would result in different styles of management and therefore also a difference in the workplace environment.

When looking for the right advice as a manager, it is important to find the advice that is most applicable to their situation. This is sometimes difficult, as with specificity, general advice gets traded in. Therefore, it is a tradeoff between the applicability of the advice and the number of managers it can help.

The use of various technologies and software, mentioned in Section 3.4 Digital Platforms and Section 4.1.3 Technology Use and Tools, is another important aspect of the ideal workplace environment. As concluded by the survey, communication was mentioned very often and is key to establishing trust, relationships and solving conflict. Therefore, it can be beneficial to look in-depth to which technologies and software can be used in a specific organization or team.

14.   Conclusions

Almost everyone has experienced remote work in some form during the past three years of the COVID-19 pandemic. During these chaotic times a lot has changed in the workplace environment and various practices have been tried out. Nowadays, almost all the restrictions are lifted, and it has become necessary to look at the post-pandemic workplace environment. Employees, as well as organizations, have become more accustomed to remote work and are more willing to see the benefits it has to offer. To the end of the purpose of this thesis, the conclusions are divided into two parts. On the one hand, the ideal workplace environment, which constructs a picture of what the ideal workplace environment should look like moving forward from the pandemic and what organizations can do to accomplish this. On the other hand, the advice to managers, which proposed an actionable plan for managers to create their own ideal workplace environment within their organization. Both will contribute to the actual ideal workplace environment that will give employees the opportunity to live up to their potential. This is done by combining the two most prominent characteristics to measure employees which are productivity and well-being through the five basic needs of Maslow. Resulting in a combined framework that connects productivity factors to well-being factors which can be measured and influenced to help these employees live up to their potential and get the most out of them as an organization.

The Ideal Workplace Environment

Taking all the information from the literature review, along with the results from the survey, the picture can be drawn upon the ideal workplace environment post-pandemic. Different factors and characteristics were analyzed to propose two different frameworks, respectively the productivity framework, and the well-being framework. This was done because both productivity and well-being proved to have important influences on the needs and wishes of employees. With the help of the five basic needs of Maslow both the productivity and the well-being framework were linked together. Resulting in a combined framework with connected factors that influenced each other. Along with the three proposed categories, neutral, positive, and happy, and their responsibility, the manager, colleagues, or self, the ideal workplace environment can be drawn. Since the five basic needs of Maslow are used to connect the different characteristics of both frameworks together, the ideal workplace environment will be drawn on their basis. Lastly, the importance of equipment will be emphasized as the survey concluded that this was greatest and most important problem of employees when working remotely.

Physiological

The physiological need is responsible for the overall health of an employee. There are some differences between the office and the remote workplace environment and what can be used to meet this need in these places. On the one hand, in the office, the layout and having a gym, can promote walking and being active, but on the other hand changing the layout or adding a gym to the remote workplace may not be that simple or easily done. On top of that, the office can provide healthy food in their cafeteria, but employees themselves are responsible for this when working remotely. Nonetheless, both the office and the remote workplace environment can help employees improve their health by providing compulsory breaks for fresh air and the addition of yoga sessions to re-center and relax. Additionally, it has been calculated that investing in the wellness of employees will pay for itself. These wellness investments will likely affect a lot of employees in the organization, leading to a decrease in the overall health conditions. This, in turn, provides less costs for the organization in terms of money, and a healthier and happier life for their employees.

Safety

The ideal workplace environment is a safe workplace environment. Employees should feel safe when working and organizations and managers are required to provide this safety. They can do this by, for example, having codes of conduct, setting guidelines and policies, including fair and equal treatment, providing safety training or courses, practicing for emergencies, and providing counseling. Nonetheless, it needs to be emphasized that this safety goes beyond regulations and the law. The need for safety must be met outside of these normal bounds for employees to create the ideal workplace environment.

Love

One of the most challenging needs to fulfill as an organization or manager is the love need. This need is mostly fulfilled by social interactions with colleagues and the associated feeling of belonging. This feeling of belonging can be promoted, by for example organizing team-building or social events. However, it is also largely determined by personal preferences. For example, organizations can promote health by installing an office gym, but when an employee does not like to or cannot exercise this will not increase their sense of belonging. In the worst-case scenario, it will even let them feel excluded as all their colleagues are bonding during exercising, but they are unable to participate. Nonetheless, when promoting various options and possibilities, an employee can choose for themselves what they like to and can do. Resulting in finding like-minded colleagues that they can bond and form relationships with.

Esteem

The need for esteem can be met by the organization when they allow an employee to choose for remote work, as this reaffirms their worth and displays the trust the organization has in them to work remotely. Especially, considering the past three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is urgent, when looking forward post-pandemic, to listen to employees and their needs and wishes when it comes to working remotely. They have had the experience, and the possibility to see if it personally fits them and their lifestyle, which allows them to make a deliberate choice on how to proceed. This choice and their argumentation should be respected by the organization and, if possible, executed.

Additionally, the organization could invest in their employees by offering them courses or training so they can develop themselves and their skillset, which, in turn, increases the esteem of an employee. On top of that, as an incentive and to increase the esteem of employees, an organization should have reward systems in place. These reward systems can vary heavily but could be, for example, the inclusion of employees in the decision-making processes, stock options, extra vacation days, or other rewards depending on some sort of excellence.

Self-Actualization

These reward systems can also provide room for self-actualization, as employees can get the opportunity to grow in their job, including more responsibilities and autonomy. Additionally, the organization could invest in their employees by paying for not work-related tuition or interest-based learning. This can be done, for example, in the form of after-work classes that can be held in groups with other coworkers that they do not encounter during work time. Resulting in more bonding opportunities, learning, and having fun. This, in turn, promotes the sense of belonging and fulfills the love need, but also attaches them more to the organization.

Equipment

One of the most prominent and frequently mentioned answers of the survey was the need for the proper equipment and tools in the remote workplace environment. Many participants mentioned that they did not have all the equipment needed, which made their job more challenging than it would have been in the office. Especially, when making the shift from the office to remote work, equipment and tools must be available to take home, or to buy and install them in the remote workplace. Otherwise, work can be delayed or not properly executed as employees can find themselves in a situation where they need equipment to do their job, but it is not at their disposal. Whether or not the employees work in the office or remotely, they should have access to ergonomic equipment. For example, an ergonomic chair, an adjustable height desk, and an ergonomic computer mouse. On top of that, the pandemic has shown the necessity of a designated office space in the remote workplace. An appropriate office space should be free from distractions and have all the necessary equipment

All in all, the ideal workplace environment is a place where employees feel at home, enjoy doing their job, and can express themselves. When the five basic needs of Maslow are met in the workplace, employees will be happy, which results in an increase in productivity and well-being. This, in turn, will help the organization to earn more money and reduce costs. Nonetheless, employees cannot have an ideal workplace environment without a supportive manager, and the manager cannot support their employees without the resources of the organization. Therefore, the organization, the manager, and their employees must work together to create the ideal workplace environment.

The ideal workplace environment is more than just investments from the organization in their employees, it includes managers and the support they give to and their social interactions with their employees to help them live up to their potential. On top of that, the past three years, which included the pandemic and the chaotic environment of many changes, have put both employees and their manager to the test. Therefore, moving on from the pandemic, it is necessary to re-evaluate and reconsider how things were done, and how to move forward. This can include, the incorporation of more remote work, and less managerial control, which leaves room for managers to expand their knowledge on new innovations and developments. To this end, an actionable and general advice is given to managers to come together with their employees and look for the best way forward toward the ideal workplace environment.

Advice to Managers

To create the ideal workplace environment as a manager, a lot of things come together and influence each other. The main goal for an organization is to have employees be productive, but for a manager this is not the only or main thing to consider. This is because productivity can be influenced by a lot of factors, and it is not the only important aspect to look at. On top of productivity is well-being, which is also needed for employees to live up to their potential.

It is the responsibility of a manager to find the right balance between keeping employees happy and to get them to be as productive as possible. This balance is dependent on the type of manager, organization, employees, and work department. Nonetheless, some general advice can be given and taken into consideration.

Currently, the pandemic is almost behind, and the workplace environment is looking for a new normal to find its balance. Most people now have had a taste of remote work and can make an assessment for themselves if they would like to continue remote work, go back to the office, or would prefer a hybrid form. Every employee is unique, but teams are supposed to work together in coherence. Therefore, it is necessary as a manager to consider all the needs and wishes of each employee individually, but also to come together as a team to come to agreements on how to reach goals and accomplish tasks.

To this end, several pieces of advice are proposed, following the advice and tips of the literature review, in combination with the results of the survey, to help these managers create their own ideal workplace environment. The first piece of advice is the most elaborate and the most general, but it is also the most actionable for moving forward post-pandemic and can help managers create their ideal workplace environment. The other pieces of advice are focused on one subject and kept short, by summarizing them, to ensure the emphasize on the first piece of advice and are focused on one subject. Resulting in one general advice that managers can take to heart and apply and additional tips to help them with encountering specific problems in one of the subject areas.

Creating the Ideal Workplace Environment Post-Pandemic

When considering what to do post-pandemic, as a manager, it is important to know what the experiences have been, during, but also before the pandemic, of all the parties involved. This includes both the organization itself and the employees. It would be advisable to meet up with higher management to gain information on what resources are available to change structures, systems, policies, and reward systems. This will be the first step for a manager to take, which is followed by focusing on the dynamics before tackling projects or tasks as a team.

With this acquired information, it would be wise to conduct a survey under the employees. In this survey each employee can state their needs and wishes. For example, asking what their personal preference is regarding working at the office or remotely, and on top of that if they are willing to consider a hybrid form of work. Looking into those results will give the manager an overview of what their team wants and needs to be successful. This will also form an opportunity to see whether certain equipment is needed or is most likely to increase job satisfaction when present, which in turn, can lead to an increase in productivity. On top of that, when aiming for the stars, this overview can be the excellent opportunity for the manager to give praise. For example, an employee that has worked the past three years remotely but hates doing so. Giving these employees some extra praise after these challenging times will be appreciated and is sometimes necessary to hear.

This praise can be a perfect starting point for the next step, one-on-one interviews. These interviews will open the conversation about the answers given in the survey. The manager can ask follow-up questions and can investigate whether and how they are willing to sacrifice certain preferences to do the job more effectively as part of the team. Once, these interviews are taken, the manager now has an overview on some non-negotiables, and what they can create or do to put the most productive team together.

This process of surveys and interviews will require a lot from the manager, as they need to consider the needs and wishes of everyone and make an estimation of how important these are to those employees. On top of that, some employees cannot or do not think that certain things are negotiable. This is often because they think that it is part of their job, and not something to talk or discuss openly and honestly about. Nonetheless, this is exactly what they should be talking about to live up to their potential. Therefore, it critical as a manager to keep in touch with their employees and build on their relationship as much as they can, so this feeling can be promoted.

Lastly, the manager and the whole team should have a meeting in which they will discuss all the options. In this meeting, they should come together as a team, and make agreements and policies. In this way, they are all actively participating in creating the necessary guidelines to achieve the most productive and happiest team. This will also result in an increase in the sense of belonging, as they are all making concessions and compromising on their own needs and wishes to benefit the team as a whole. To promote the mood and make the discussion flow more easily, food and drinks can be provided by the organization, and arranged by their manager. On top of that, do not forget to check personal food preferences or allergies as this will benefit inclusion.

When agreements are made, employees can start with their work and the division of tasks. When things are running correctly, the manager can spread its attention between the employees and check-in regularly on a one-on-one basis. Communication is key, however, some of the participants of the survey mentioned that they would rather be left alone when working. Therefore, it is important to make individual agreements on check-ins and ways of communicating. As a proposal, a text application can be used for quick and non-important messages, e-mail can be used for important, but non-urgent messages, and phone calls can be used for urgent communication.

This concludes the very first piece of advice that can be used to create the ideal workplace environment. The next pieces of advice will be more concrete and specific to certain situations. Therefore, they will not be applicable for all managers, but certainly can be adapted to fit the needs of them and their employees when encountering problems or keeping an eye out for posing ones.

Fear of Exile

To make sure, as a manager, that their employees are not feeling excluded, a day at the office can be hosted. This day at the office would be a day for remote workers to come in, meet, and catch-up with colleagues and the manager. The manager could bring in some delicacies to enjoy with a cup of tea or coffee and start the day with some catching-up with the team. After this, the remaining time of the meeting can be used to evaluate the previously made agreements and improve or reassess where necessary. Alternatively, this time can be used to make plans for the upcoming period or project.

Preconditions of Conforti

Before diving into the five basic needs of Maslow, the preconditions of Conforti are critical to keep in mind as a manager. These preconditions are essential to help employees meet the five basic needs. Without the preconditions it can become increasingly difficult to fulfil the basic needs and therefore to maintain the productivity and well-being of employees. Managers should attempt to communicate well by an open communication style, provide guidelines, have an individualistic approach, and follow policies and codes of conduct. This way, employees know the different expectations asked of them, and can act accordingly.

Physiological

When looking at the physiological need, health is the most relevant factor to look at. This is because improving the health of employees will improve productivity and well-being, and, in turn, their overall willingness. This willingness will translate to, for example, picking up extra tasks of colleagues, doing mundane or repetitive tasks. On top of that, following from the survey, employees believed that their manager could help them in improving their physical and mental health.

It is important, as a manager, to promote being and staying active. Managers could, for example, set compulsory breaks with room to take a walk outside, provide plants, promote and accommodate standing or walking meetings, discourage overwork, and conduct well-being training or other courses that include health. There are a lot of possibilities to improve the health of employees, and all will help in keeping them happy, engaged, and maintaining or improving productivity.

Technostress

It is critical for managers to consider stress as a health factor. This is because stress can transform itself into health conditions as, for example, backpain, stomachache, and migraines. The stress can have several origins and is thus hard to tackle when it becomes increasing complex. Therefore, it is essential that managers keep an eye out for stress factors and give employees enough time to relax. When considering remote work, technostress is one of the most prominent and frequently mentioned factors that makes remote work challenging. To ensure that employees do not suffer too much stress due to technostress, certain agreements and policies must be made before switching to remote work. When remote work is already an ongoing process it becomes important to look at expectations, make them explicit, re-evaluate them, and create guidelines and policies to move forward. As mentioned in the extensive advice, it can ben beneficial to choose certain platforms for differences in urgency.

On top of that, women are more likely to experience stress from home distractions as they take on more family tasks. Therefore, the levels of stress, home distractions, and environment are an essential part to discuss when discussing remote work and stress factors.

Absenteeism

Absenteeism is one of the most challenging factors to improve upon, when there is little to no communication. However, it is one of the easiest factors to quantify, for example, taking the average days per month an employee takes a sick day. Therefore, a manager must keep an extra eye out for employees with a preexisting condition. This way the manager can regularly check in and if necessary, provide ways to decrease the absenteeism. For example, they can offer the employee certain support structures, one example that was mentioned in the survey was the option for the manager to come and get the mail at regular times because the employee had a bad knee and was not able to walk the stairs multiple times a day. By offering substitutes to certain tasks or situations, an employee can feel heard, respected, and taken seriously. Resulting, in agreements on which support needs are necessary to help the employee live up to their potential. Which, in turn, will strengthen the relationship between the manager and the employee.

Safety

As a manager it is critical that their employees feel safe. To this end, managers should have an open communication style and have resources available at their dispense to use when needed. They should also have the knowledge on how to deal with reports of any kind in a confidential and appropriate manner. On top of that, to help these employees in getting counseling when needed. To meet the safety need, managers need to keep an eye out for the preconditions of Conforti, as most are needed to feel safe in the workplace environment.

Love

Establishing and deepening relationships is crucial to having and maintaining happy employees. To promote the forming and strengthening of bonds, managers can host team-building or social events. On top of that, managers could establish collaboration and communication tools, conduct diversity training, respect time zone differences, connect individual goals to team goals, display team achievements, encourage mutual trust and respect, and have regular performance reviews. All these examples could help in improving the engagement of employees, which, in turn, improves their productivity and well-being.

Perceived Supervisory Support

To create a working support system, it is important that managers have the option to sit with different team members each day and give them support and coaching. This way the manager can get to know the employees and foster personal values and goals. On top of that, it will also help in staying up to date as this becomes more difficult for managers to do without invading their privacy or increasing the technostress employees experience when working remotely.

Esteem

Manager can increase esteem by praising employees on a regular basis, for example, by writing daily reports. On top of that, managers can host skill training events or courses, which ensures employees of the fact that they are up to date with the latest technology and techniques. Additionally, managers should ensure that the right employee is assigned to the most appropriate task or job for them. Lastly, they should manage their employees with integrity and consistency.

Next to that, and very similar to absenteeism, is presenteeism. This can express itself in terms of employees who show up to work, but are not finishing or completing tasks, or even, for example, doing sloppy work, which needs to be redone. To prevent these employees from coming in, managers can promote taking the day off when employees are not feeling well. They could also put measures into place that, for example, promote the interchanging abilities of tasks. Which would in the possibility of taking on less demanding tasks on a day when an employee is not as productive as they normally would.

Employee Performance Self-Assessment

Self-assessment could be a useful tool for managers to gain insights into the performance, and thus, productivity, of employees. Additionally, it can be used to gain an understanding of the levels of well-being in employees. On top of that, because employees are self-assessing, they are essentially exploring their needs and desires for self-actualization. Managers can make use of this opportunity to help in fulfilling these needs and wishes for self-actualization, and on top of that, bond with their employees, by having open and honest conversations.

Self-Actualization

As a manager it can be difficult to see where and how to support employees in their self-actualization. However, when an employee opts for opportunities in career development, training, courses or the like, a manager should actively listen to them and respect their needs and wishes. To excel as a manager, the next step would be to investigate the options regarding the request and follow-up with them to make some decisions.

All in all, a manager needs to listen, keep up with individual employees and support them whenever and wherever they can. To do this, regular communication is necessary and certain agreements upon the matter. Managers also need to keep employees with special needs in mind and keep up to date with the resources available to help and support them. Nonetheless, when approaching their employees in a respectful, open, and supportive manner, the best achievable start is made.

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Appendix A – Survey Results

Likert Scale Questions

All of the questions that were based on a rating were based on the Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5. Most of these questions were based on a range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, as can be seen in the following figure, Figure A1.
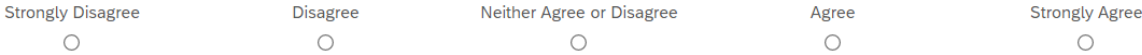
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○	○

Figure A1: Likert Scale Ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

However, for a few of the questions, time was a relevant factor, and therefore, ranged from Never to Always, as can be seen in the following figure, Figure A2.
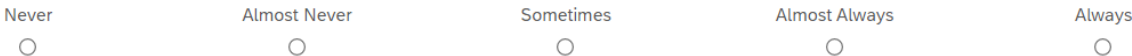
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
○	○	○	○	○

Figure A2: Likert Scale Ranging from Never to Always

Age

The mean age group was 35 - 44 years old, and the mean age was 35.36 years. The standard deviation was calculated with the assumption that 67 years is the retirement age and was 8.51 years. The variance resulted in 9.97 years. The results are displayed in the figure below, Figure A3.
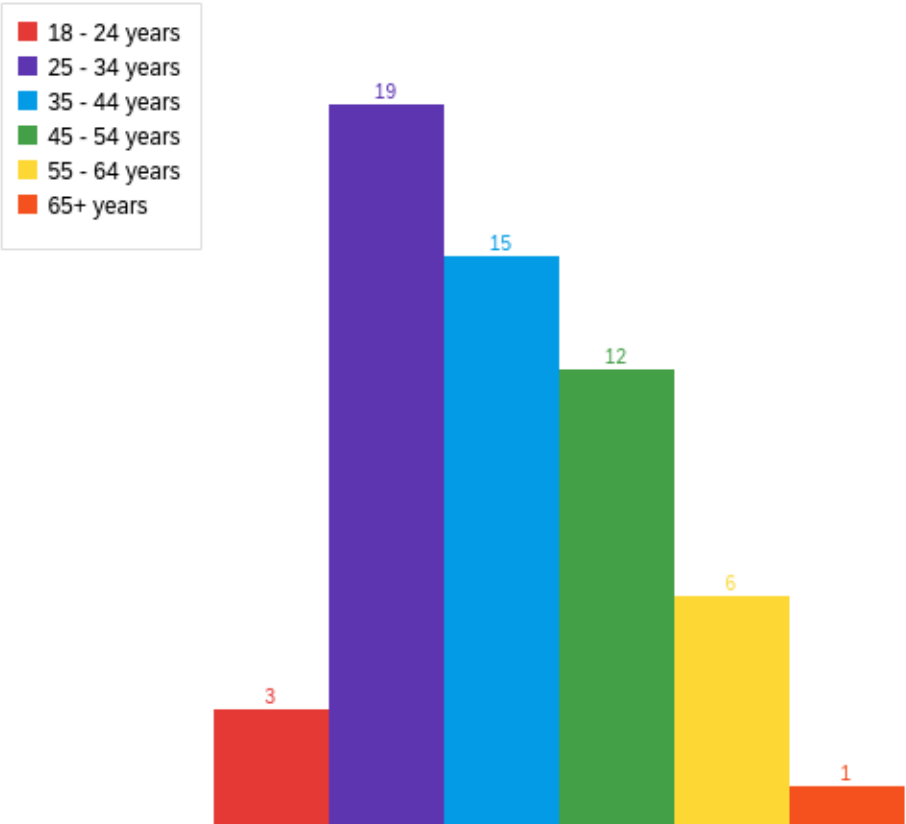

Figure A3: Age Group Results with 56 Participants

Gender

While asking for gender non-conforming responses, no participant choose them as an answer. Which resulted in 21 males, and 35 females to participate. The mean was calculated to be 1.63, the standard deviation was 0.48, and the variance was 0.23. The results are displayed in the figure below, Figure A4.
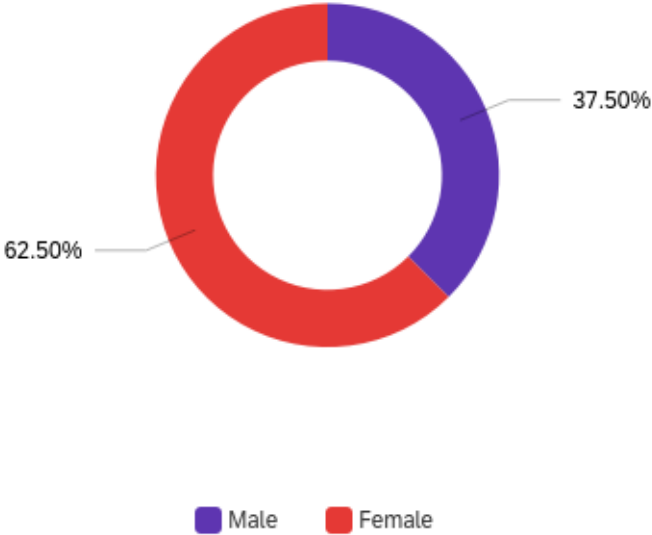

Figure A4: Gender Results with 56 Participants

Work Sector

The participants could work in five different work sectors, on which the survey was based. The results are displayed in the figure below, Figure A5.
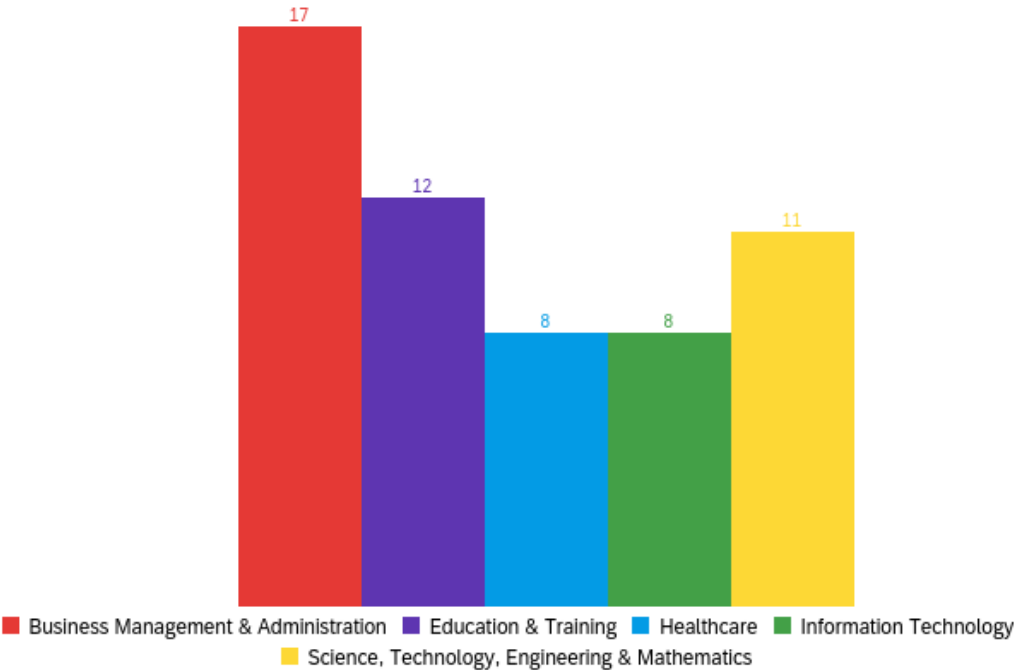

Figure A5: Work Sector Results with 56 Participants

Remote Days

Most of the participants, 25 of them, which equals to 44.64%, worked only remote. The results are displayed in the figure below, Figure A6.
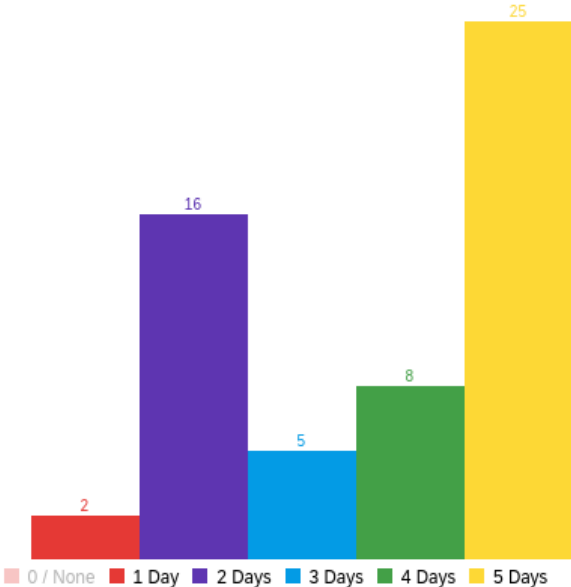

Figure A6: Total Days of Working Remotely when only considering Full-Time Employees with 56 Participants

Team Size

The total members in a team were evaluated, ranging from being a team with only one other employee to team sizes with over 10 team members. The results are displayed in the figure below, Figure A7.
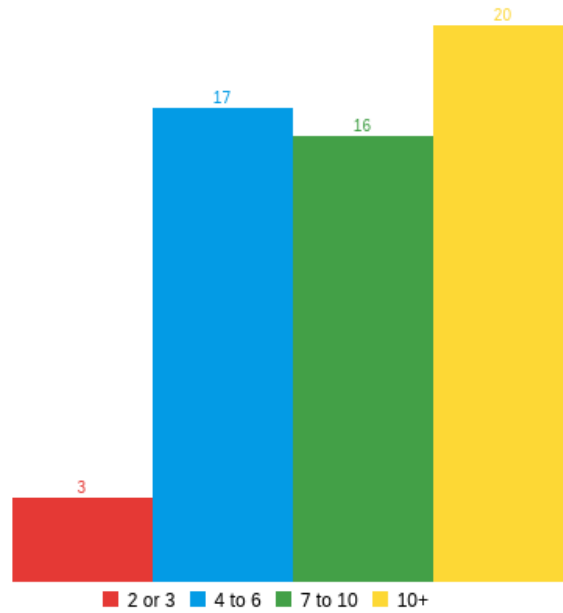
Figure A7: Team Size Results with 56 Participants

Job Duration

The job duration, asked in months, showed a very high variance, on top of the high standard deviation. This implies that a lot of variation is measured between the participants. With the mean being 45.54 months, this equals roughly to 3.8 years, but can be highly affected by the maximum of 200 months, which equals to almost 17 years. The results are displayed in the figure on the right, Figure A8.

Figure A8: Job Duration Results with 56 Participants

Sick Days

Most of the participants do not have a sick day in a month. The variance of their answers is also relatively high and is calculated to be 4.87. The mean is 1.36, and the standard deviation is 2.21. The results are displayed in the figure below, Figure A9.

Figure A9: The Number of Sick Days on Average in a Month with 56 Participants
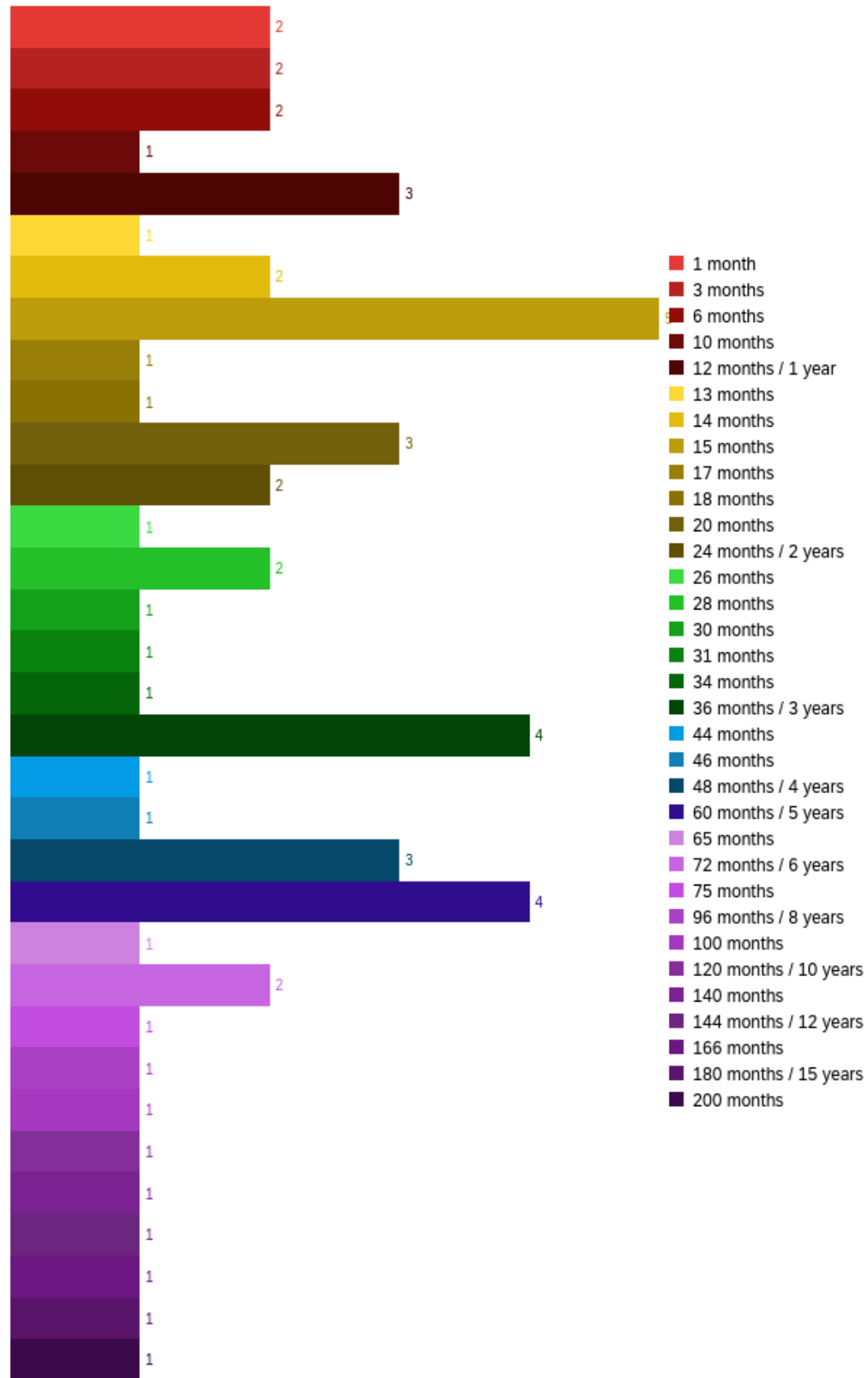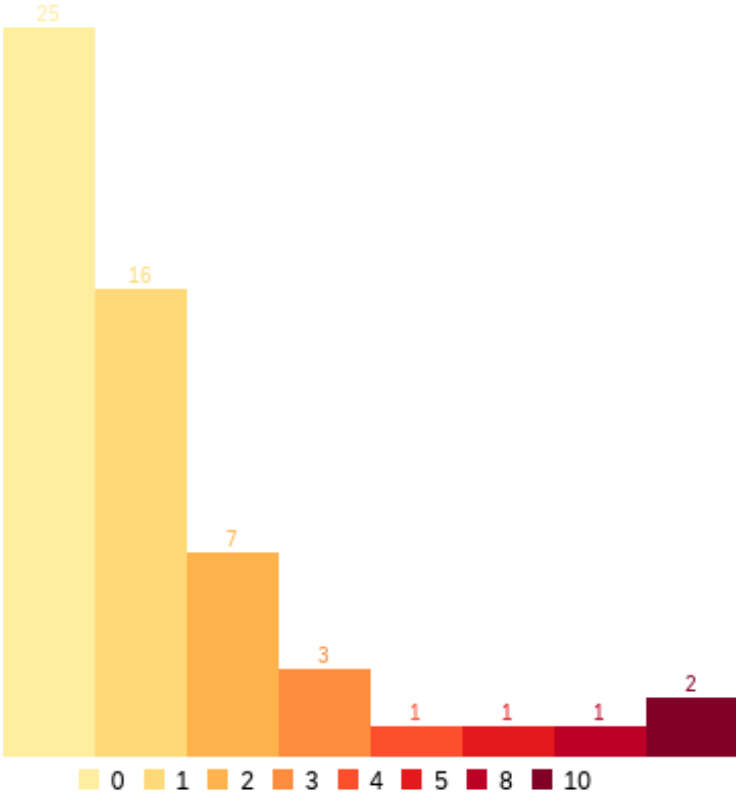
Closed Questions

To visualize the closed questions that included a Likert Scale rating from 1 to 5, the following table, Table A1, is provided. On top of that, all the questions got a code assigned, also listed in Table A1.

Question	Code
I like working remotely	RW1
How much do you like working remotely over working physical / at the office?	RW2
In an ideal world I would like to work ___ days in the week remotely.	RW3
I have many distractions around me in the remote workplace	Pr1
I have too many distractions to effectively do my work in the remote workplace	Pr2
I feel like I get too many tasks assigned to complete in the given time	WO1
I feel like I get too complex tasks assigned to complete in the given time	WO2
I feel like I have to be online even when not assigned to work, when working remotely or due to working remotely	WO3
I feel like I have to respond immediately when working remotely or due to working remotely	WO4
The organization I work in has been more open to remote work since the pandemic	S1
Since the pandemic, I can voice my needs and wishes around remote working	S2
I feel like my team and I support each other	R1
I feel like I have good relationships with my colleagues	R2
My manager can help or accommodate me with my productivity when working remotely	MP1
My manager can help or accommodate me with the workload, in terms of tasks, when working remotely	MWO1
My manager can help or accommodate me with the workload, in terms of communication, when working remotely	MWO2
My manager can help or accommodate me with the acceptance of my needs and wishes around remote work	MS1
My manager can help or accommodate me with the relationships at work	MR1
When working remotely, my manager and I communicate well with each other	MR2
I have a good relationship with my manager	MR3
I have trust in my manager that they can make the right decisions based on the communications we have	MT1
I feel like I can put my trust toward my manager	MT2
When working remotely, I feel like my manager supports me when needed	MS2
I feel like my manager helps me achieve my personal, work-related, goals	MS3
I feel like my manager is online and available	MS4
My manager checks-in with me regularly to make sure I have everything I need	MS5
I am satisfied with my manager	MSa1
My manager can improve our relationship	MR4
My manager can improve my trust in them	MT1
My manager can improve their trust in me	MT2
My manager can improve their support toward me	MS6
When considering taking a sick day, I would be more inclined to go to work when I have the option to work from home	A2
How often do you come to work when you are not feeling well?	A3
Do you feel like you are able to take the day off when needed?	A4
When working remotely, physical factors play a big role in my day-to-day life	PF1
These physical factors are limiting my ability to do my work	PF2
My manager could help me with solving or accommodating these physical factors	MPF1

When working remotely, mental health factors play a big role in my day-to-day-life	MHF1
These mental health factors are limiting my ability to do my work	MHF2
My manager could help me with solving or accommodating these mental health factors	MMHF1
I feel worried when working remotely	Te1
I find it difficult to relax when working remotely	Te2
I feel aware when working remotely	Fa1
I feel exhausted when working remotely	Fa2
I feel like I am living up to my potential	SU1
I feel like I get the opportunity to make use of my skills when working remotely	SU2
I am enthusiastic about my job	JS1
I enjoy my job	JS2
I feel satisfied with my job	JS3
I am enthusiastic about my remote work	RJS1
I enjoy working remotely	RJS2
I feel satisfied with my remote work	RJS3
My manager can help or accommodate me with the tension I experience when working remotely	MTe1
My manager can help or accommodate me with the fatigue I experience when working remotely	MFa1
My manager can help or accommodate me with my use of skills when working remotely	MSU1
My manager can help or improve my job satisfaction when working remotely	MJS1

Table A1: Closed Questions Ranging from 1 to 5

Results

The results in terms of the minimum and maximum value, the mean, the standard deviation, and the variance are presented in the table below, Table A2.

Question	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Age Group	1 18 – 24 years	6 65+ years	3.04 35.36 years	1.16 8.51 years	1.36 9.97 years
Gender	1	2	1.63	0.48	0.23
Remote Days					
Team Size					
Job Duration	1	200	45.54	46.12	2126.68
RW1	1	5	4.36	0.85	0.73
RW2	2	5	3.95	1.09	1.19
RW3	1	5	4.04	1.25	1.57
Pr1	1	5	2.30	1.22	1.50
Pr2	1	5	2.14	1.23	1.52
WO1	1	5	2.63	1.20	1.45
WO2	1	5	2.82	1.34	1.79
WO3	1	5	3.13	1.28	1.65
WO4	1	5	3.57	1.15	1.32
S1	1	5	4.11	1.08	1.17
S2	1	5	3.80	1.14	1.30
R1	1	5	3.98	1.03	1.05
R2	1	5	4.09	1.00	1.01
MP1	1	5	4.04	0.91	0.82
MWO1	2	5	4.07	0.78	0.60
MWO2	2	5	4.02	0.92	0.84
MS1	2	5	3.96	0.94	0.89
MR1	1	5	3.61	1.16	1.35
MR2	1	5	4.16	0.98	0.96
MR3	1	5	4.20	1.08	1.16
MT1	1	5	4.04	1.18	1.39
MT2	1	5	4.04	1.24	1.53
MS2	1	5	4.13	1.12	1.25
MS3	1	5	3.89	1.22	1.49
MS4	1	5	4.29	0.88	0.78
MS5	1	5	4.04	1.00	1.00
MSa1	1	5	4.05	1.19	1.41
MR4	1	5	3.46	1.03	1.07
MT1	1	5	3.25	1.06	1.12
MT2	1	5	3.39	1.11	1.24
MS6	1	5	3.27	1.11	1.23
Sick Days	1	10	1.36	2.21	4.87
A2	1	5	3.77	1.27	1.61
A3	1	5	3.14	1.03	1.05
A4	1	5	3.63	1.09	1.20
PF1	1	5	3.41	1.29	1.67
PF2	1	5	2.52	1.22	1.50
MPF1	1	5	2.75	1.23	1.51

MHF1	1	5	3.53	1.23	1.51
MHF2	1	5	2.47	1.26	1.58
MMHF1	1	5	2.86	1.22	1.50
Te1	1	5	2.12	1.20	1.45
Te2	1	5	2.36	1.31	1.71
Fa1	1	5	4.10	0.90	0.82
Fa2	1	5	2.40	1.31	1.72
SU1	1	5	3.66	1.21	1.47
SU2	1	5	3.81	1.02	1.05
JS1	1	5	3.93	1.10	1.20
JS2	1	5	4.10	1.03	1.06
JS3	1	5	3.98	1.03	1.05
RJS1	1	5	4.00	1.00	1.00
RJS2	1	5	4.16	1.13	1.27
RJS3	1	5	4.21	0.94	0.89
MTe1	1	5	3.19	1.21	1.46
MFa1	1	5	2.95	1.28	1.64
MSU1	1	5	3.48	1.05	1.11
MJS1	1	5	3.69	1.07	1.15

Table A2: Survey Questions Statistics

Question IWE2 – "What can your manager do to create this ideal workplace environment for you?"

"a. Communication between employers and employees
Employers need to let you know of any company goals or strategies so they can better abide by them.
b. Work-life balance
Employers should encourage a healthy work-life balance. This involves providing you with sufficient paid days off to enjoy activities outside of the workplace. This can contribute to your job satisfaction.
c. Training programs
Training programs can help you grow your talents and thrive in your career. They are also beneficial to the employer as they can improve your overall work performance.
d. Access to amenities
Every company has different amenities available. Some of these may include a break room, access to an on-site gym and private work areas.
e. Physical workspace and office building design
Companies have various building layouts and different workspace setups. For example, some may feature an open layout that encourages more collaboration, whereas other companies may have closed off cubicles that allow for more independent work.
f. Employee recognition
Positive reinforcement can provide you with a good morale boost. Employee recognition can include verbal recognition or daily interactions with your employer.
g. Management approach
Whereas you may prefer a more closely managed atmosphere where your employer regularly observes and gives feedback on your work, others prefer an autonomous environment where they can display their independence."

Answer 1