Master's thesis

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When Work Comes Home: Understanding Changes in Work Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Master's thesis in Media, Communication and Information Technology
Supervisor: Hendrik Storstein Spilker

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Abstract

Seeking to identify important aspects of pandemic work life, this thesis revolves around the following research question: *How has work life changed during the pandemic?* Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with employees from four different workplaces, important changes during the pandemic are analyzed, discussed, and conceptualized. The thesis is structured around four sub-questions: (1) How has the role and attitudes towards working from home changed? (2) How have work habits changed? (3) How has the relationship between work time, leisure, and expectations of availability changed? And (4) is there a difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces dealt with the pandemic?

The theoretical framework for the thesis is built on two main theoretical perspectives: Castells' theories on the network society, and domestication theory. In addition, the thesis builds on a broad range of existing research, including studies on work—life boundaries, organizational norms, and trust and control in the workplace. The result is a discussion of important changes, as well as a conceptualization of these that gives a broader understanding of work life during this extraordinary situation.

Important findings that will be addressed include changing attitudes towards working from home; how some work habits have changed while others have remained the same; and how trust is maintained when workplaces are distributed across time and space. Further, I propose the concept of *separators* and *mixers* to understand how new opportunities for mixing work time and leisure are handled by employees. While some employees still work to maintain a strong work—life boundary, others use these opportunities to mix different parts of life, thus blurring this boundary.

Acknowledgements

As the work with my master's thesis nears its end, so does my time in university. During my five years at NTNU, I have not only gained in-depth knowledge in very interesting academic fields, but I have also made many new friends and experienced the beautiful city of Trondheim, which now feels like home. It is with a tinge of regret, then, that the master's degree is finished, but it also brings feelings of relief. Now that countless exams are over and done, and the master's thesis completed, I look forward to moving to Oslo and starting a new chapter in life. However, I could not have completed this thesis alone, and there are some people that deserve a special thanks.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Hendrik Storstein Spilker, for providing invaluable feedback and support during this past semester. All the way from the first drafts of the project to the finishing touches on the text, his guidance has helped me keep the project on track, even when things have felt a bit overwhelming. I really appreciate all the feedback I have received, as well as the discussions we have had during our many meetings during this semester. A supervisor who is a good discussion partner, is something I wish for everyone embarking on the journey of writing a master's thesis.

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1 Introduction

After the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world on its head in 2020, work life changed dramatically. Many employees lost their jobs, and many of those that did not, were sent home to work from their private homes. Suddenly, meetings were held through screens, the desk was no longer surrounded by co-workers, and work, family, and leisure, existed within the same four walls. A new "normal" was beginning to take form, and the old one soon seemed like a distant dream. Even though themes like digitalization of work life and working from home has interested scholars for decades, the pandemic renewed their relevance considerably, and the need for knowledge on the situation is urgent. How have employees handled this situation? What have changed in their work life, and what has remained the same? In this thesis, I will explore and discuss how Norwegian employees' experiences with work has changed during the pandemic.

1.1 Relevance

Perhaps one of the most important changes that have occurred in work life during the last decades, is the transition from an industry-based society to a more service-oriented work life (Bell, 1976). Whereas the production of physical goods used to be the dominant form of value creation, what we see today is that an increasing amount of value is being generated through the creation and processing of information. This kind of work opens for new work practices, with the location and time of work becoming less important.

These changes have developed side by side with increased digitalization. With the information technology revolution, new forms of working and communicating has been made possible (Castells, 2000a). This has had important consequences for employees, as many of them can now work and communicate with their workplace from wherever they are, and at all hours of the day. Working from home has been an option for many employees for a long time, and it is not a foreign concept for most information workers. What *is* new, however, is that working from home has become the required work station for a large part of the workforce. It is something quite different to use one's home as an office optionally or occasionally, and every day.

The subject is also of high societal relevance. For work life to function properly, there exists extensive legal frameworks regulating it (see Arbeidsmiljøloven, 2005). The use of new technology can challenge these rules and conventions in many ways, and with the pandemic driving the use of technology even further, we find ourselves in a time with rapid changes in how work is done. These changes has not passed unnoticed by Norwegian authorities, as the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs recognizes the need to review legal frameworks for occupational safety and health when work is conducted from the private home (Arbeids- og sosialdepartementet, 2021). The findings in this thesis can contribute to improve the basis for future adjustments of these frameworks.

With work available remotely through both computers and phones, there is in theory (and often practice) no limit to when and where we can do our work. This blurs a line between work life and leisure that was previously to a large degree defined by entering or leaving

the office building. While it gives employees more flexibility to work the way they want, it also makes it possible for employers and colleagues to reach them whenever they want. It can also contribute to a blurring of boundaries between work and family, increasing the risk of stress and conflict in both family life and work life. Addressing these issues is important to keep the legal and cultural frameworks regulating work life up to date. It is also important for utilizing the possibilities that lie in the use of these technologies in the best possible way.

These processes have been accelerated during the pandemic, and new challenges has become apparent. Work life during the pandemic can be said to be uncharted territory, and it is therefore of major academic relevance to study these processes and changes. This master's thesis will attempt to make a contribution to the academic field by analyzing and discussing some important changes that employees have experienced through the pandemic.

1.2 Research questions, theory, and method

To address the issues laid out above, and bring to light important changes affecting employees' work life during the pandemic, the thesis will seek to answer the following research question:

How has work life changed during the pandemic?

The discussion of the research question has been operationalized into four sub-questions related to changes during the pandemic that emerge as especially important in my data:

1. How has the role and attitudes towards working from home changed?
2. How have work habits changed?
3. How has the relationship between work time, leisure, and expectations of availability changed?
4. Is there a difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces have dealt with the pandemic?

Throughout the thesis, I will analyze how employees' experiences with all these areas were before the pandemic, and how these have changed after the outbreak.

The data and analysis are based on in-depth interviews with eight employees from four different workplaces. Two of the workplaces are in the public sector, while the other two are in the private sector. All workplaces are relatively large, ranging from more than 500 to 20,000 employees. The interviews took place in January and February 2021. Methodologically, the thesis positions itself in the qualitative and explorative tradition.

The interview data will be analyzed through a theoretical framework comprised of Manuel Castells' network society (2000a) and domestication theory (Skjølsvold, 2015). These theories were chosen because they facilitate some fruitful discussions of the thesis' data. I will also argue that they have strengths and weaknesses that complement each other, and that an analysis using this combined perspective can contribute with some valuable academic insights. Castells' theories on the network society will be used as a macro perspective on the changes during the pandemic, situating the findings in the context of broader societal changes. However, these theories are not always suited for understanding why the individual employees act the way they do, something that becomes apparent when

Castells' visions of the future, according to my data, seem a bit ahead of the actual development in work life.

Domestication theory, on the other hand, provides a useful analytical perspective in acknowledging the agency of the individual technology user. When individuals are seen as active users, who interprets and negotiates with technology, even the most unexpected practices can be explained. This theory thus acts as a micro perspective on changes during the pandemic, with theories on the network society serving as the macro perspective that puts these changes in a broader context. Previous research in the field will also be used, and I will highlight important concepts and show how my data are consistent with or differ from previous studies.

1.3 Structure

In chapter 2 I will explain Castells' theories on the network society, as well as domestication theory. I will also review existing research on the subject. In chapter 3 I will go through the research design used in the thesis. Here, I will discuss why I have chosen a qualitative approach, how that data was collected, how they were analyzed, as well as a discussion of the quality of the research and research ethics.

The analysis is divided in two, with the outbreak of the pandemic serving as a separating line between them. In the first part, chapter 4, I will first present the companies that are represented in the project, before moving on to analyzing the employees' experiences and practices before the pandemic. Here, I will discuss the relationship between the traditional office and working from home, differences between trust-based and control-based workplaces, and lastly, work time, leisure, and expectations of availability. Towards the end, a short conclusion of the chapter will be presented.

In the second part of the analysis, chapter 5, I move on to employees' experiences and practices after the outbreak of the pandemic. Here, I will discuss working from home during the pandemic, new and old work habits, and what happens when work time and leisure collide in the private home. A short conclusion will conclude the chapter.

Chapter 6 will provide a conclusion to the thesis. Here, I will go through each of the four sub-questions and point to the most important changes in work life during the pandemic related to each of them. In section 6.2, I will answer the main research question and discuss the road ahead in light of the findings presented, as well as the participants' expectations for *the next normal*. I will also discuss how the theoretical approach chosen has contributed to answering my research question. Towards the end, limitations with this study will be discussed, and future research will be suggested on the basis of these.

2 Theory and concepts

In this chapter, I will start by presenting particularly relevant concepts from Castells' theories on the network society (2000a), and further discuss their relevance for this thesis. Then, an explanation of domestication theory (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1992; Sørensen, 2005) will follow. In the third section, I will review existing literature in the field, and clarify how these will be used in the analysis.

2.1 Changed societies and work life in the network society

One of the most prominent theorists accounting for changing societies through the past decades and their subsequent effects on work life, is Manuel Castells. Dissatisfied with contemporary theories for understanding the modern world, Castells proposed that we find ourselves in a new society; the network society (Bell, 2007). He argues that this new society originated in the 1960s and 70s as a result of three independent processes: "the information technology revolution; the economic crisis of both capitalism and statism, and their subsequent restructuring; and the blooming of cultural social movements, such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism" (Castells, 2000b, p. 367).

Although Castells indeed identified important changes, society has not changed as dramatically as he prophesized. This becomes apparent when looking at society in general, but also work life in particular. Even though the information technology revolution made it possible to work free of spaciotemporal limitations, even information-based labor is still strongly connected to the physical office (at least before the pandemic). This indicates that there are other factors at play that slow the transition down, making working from home, flexible work and mobile offices less widespread than Castells predicted. Identifying some of these factors, is an important part of this thesis.

The information technology revolution is an important prerequisite for the themes explored in this thesis. Although the processes identified by Castells originated in the 1960s and 70s, with the introduction of digital tools in the workplace, the information technology revolution has continued growing through a series of subsequent phases. The advent of the Internet in the 1990s was one of the processes that ushered this revolution further on. Importantly, the spread of Internet to private homes through personal computers made the Internet not only a technology for work, but also for the private sphere. Already, we see the contours of a technology that allowed for the blurring of work—home boundaries.

The emergence of smart phones in the late 2000s was another important step. Not only was the Internet available for most people at home, but with smart phones, the Internet became mobile. Gone were the need to connect to a local network to gain Internet access, a change that was also contingent on the development of faster mobile networks. With the arrival of big data, algorithms, and the "Internet of Things" that we have seen in recent years, the information technology revolution is still going strong.

I will argue that what is happening with digitalization under the global pandemic, is a new important phase in this revolution. As with the three processes originally proposed by Castells, and its succeeding developments described above, the COVID-19 pandemic acts

as a new accelerator of the spread of information technology in society. However, unlike many of the previous phases, the pandemic is not a force of disruptive innovation where a revolutionary technology is presented to the world. Rather, it is a biological disease that does not provide any new technology in itself. However, it has had an undeniable impact on the way we use our *existing* technology. While teleconferencing is not especially new, the way we have had to use it during the pandemic certainly is. The same can be said for cloud computing allowing access to work-related files from home. It has indeed been used to work from home before, but the prevalence of use that we see today, is unprecedented. In short, the global pandemic may be seen as a force that propels the development of work-related technology use forward, giving renewed importance to Castells' theories on the network society.

His theories, then, will be an important tool when answering this thesis' research question. However, as his authorship comprises an impressive range of concepts, a selection is necessary. To better understand the changing work lives expressed by this study's participants, his concepts of *space of flows* and *timeless time* will be important parts of this thesis' theoretical framework.

Castells argues that the network society consist of many nodes, points or hubs (Bell, 2007). The flows that connect them, be it information, money, materials, or people, thus connects these nodes to form a network. The space of flows, then, is the nodes as well as the flows that connect them. The information technology revolution has been an essential component of the transition from the space of (physical) places to the space of flows, as data and knowledge is increasingly constituting many of the local and global flows.

Previously seeing the space of flows as a techno-elite phenomenon, Castells has later revised this view, now seeing the space of flows as something that concerns everyone (Castells & Ince, 2003). His view on the boundaries between space of places and space of flows has also changed, arguing that these are more folded together in hybrid cites, where flows and places are intertwined (Castells, 2005).

The concept space of flows will be important to address when analyzing how employees do work outside their offices. Mobile working clearly highlights how the space of flows can shape work life by transitioning it from the space of places (i.e. the traditional office) to the space of flows, where the physical location of the workstation is rendered irrelevant. At the same time, the traditional office is still considered the "normal" place of work, posing the question of why it still retains this position. This will be an important theme in the analysis chapters, particularly section 4.2.

The flows that allows for instantaneous communication are shrinking space, morphing time into what Castells calls timeless time (Castells, 2000a). There are three important components of timeless time: instantaneity, desequencing, and the breaking down of rhythmicity (Bell, 2007). The first two components are especially relevant in this thesis.

Instantaneity denotes how the information technology revolution has sped up different aspects of society (Bell, 2007). For example, the emergence of commercial air travel has dramatically reduced travel time, thus speeding up travelling. Another example, and particularly important here, is the speeding up of communication. Whereas a letter might take days to reach its receiver, e-mail and instant messaging reduces this time to a fraction of a second.

This has had enormous implications for work life. Communication is sped up not only because its reduced "travel time", but also because the means for this communication is available everywhere through computers and smart phones. It is an important prerequisite for remote working, as it eliminates the time needed for documents and communications to reach the employees' location. In this way, instantaneity opens up for a whole set of practices that will be explored in the analysis.

Desequencing refers to how the limitless access to multimedia's archived material and live-streams (Bell, 2007) allows us to "reorder them in a composite created by our fantasy or our interests" (Castells, 1997, p. 12). An illustrative example is how we no longer need to watch television linearly as was (and still is for many) the common practice, where everyone saw the same images at the same time. Today, a range of streaming platforms allows us to select what we want to watch, without a central actor deciding the sequence of the material. "(…) we are exposed to a montage of instants wrenched from temporal context: past, present and future are disassembled and reassembled for us and by us" (Bell, 2007, p. 75). Desequencing obviously goes beyond non-linear consumption of television, but I will argue that it is a good metaphor for how timeless time operates in society in general.

Differences in work situations matter for how desequencing affects work life. Whereas a hairdresser cannot desequence time by working in the middle of the night instead of during the day, the office workers participating in this study do have this opportunity. As long as they are available for meetings or other events that require their physical or digital presence, it often does not matter when they do their work, as long as they deliver what is expected. Consequentially, desequencing can be argued to be an important characteristic of modern work life, as it allows for mixing different parts of one's life throughout the day.

In a more recent publication on the mobile network society, the "relentless connectivity" of mobile communication is underlined (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, & Sey, 2009, p. 248). While mobile phones were initially seen as a fixed-line phone substitute when on the move, it has become a way to connect to the local/global communication network wherever and whenever. Castells et al. also point out that mobile communication is increasingly taking place from work, school or home, what they call "stable locations" (2009, p. 248). "With the diffusion of wireless access to the Internet, and to computer networks and information systems everywhere, mobile communication is better defined by its capacity for ubiquitous and permanent connectivity rather than by its potential mobility" (Castells et al., 2009, p. 248).

Castells has been criticized for taking a fatalistic position on the development of global informational capitalism (Bell, 2007), in that this system has "won", leaving no other alternatives (Webster & Robins, 1998). He has also been criticized for being a technological determinist. Van Dijk (1999) argues Castells is making a determinist argument when he says that informationalism has rejuvenated capitalism, and brought statism to its end.

Bell (2007) argues that although Castells does not take a social construction of technology-standpoint, he cannot be seen as a technological determinist either, as he does acknowledge that technology may be used in unexpected ways: "The wonderful thing about technology is that people end up doing with it something different from what was originally intended" (Castells, 2001, p. 195).

Castells' analysis of the network society will serve as an important theoretical framework for this thesis. When it comes to work life in the 21st century, and especially during the pandemic, the effects of the information technology revolution become clear. With

domestication theory (2.2) as another important theory in the thesis' theoretical framework, I aim to make use of Castells' extensive analysis and theories on the network society, while at the same time safeguarding against venturing into determinist territory. Domestication theory used as a micro theory serves as an important corrective to macro theories, in that it can be used to understand how people use technology in different ways, and sometimes in other ways than was originally intended. This theory will be further explained below.

2.2 Domesticating work-related technology

Castells envisioned dramatic changes in society with the information technology revolution. The space of flows and timeless time indeed make these changes possible, but how has the transition from the space of places to the space of flows manifested among the employees interviewed in this study? Is the space of places rendered irrelevant? And what about time? Has the instantaneity and desequencing of time fostered an experience of time as timeless among this thesis' participants?

To investigate this, domestication theory provides some helpful analytical tools. Domestication theory positions itself in stark contrast to technological determinism by focusing on how users "domesticate" the technology. The term domestication has been used to describe the process where humans turn wild animals into livestock and pets, and Skjølsvold (2015) argues that this term quite accurately describes the processes of technology-use as well.

An important assumption in domestication theory is that technology is not finished when it reaches the user. Rather than being a finished product that is diffused among a passive user base, it is to a large extent formed by the users (Skjølsvold, 2015). The developers of the technology will design it with a specific use in mind, but users may use it completely differently. As is the case with domestication of animals, neither human nor technology are unaffected by this process. When used, the technology will take on meaning, and what the technology "is" will be further established. At the same time, the affordances of the technology change the conditions of the user's life. In this way, domestication theory sees technology-use as a two-way process, were "society and technology are co-produced" (Skjølsvold, 2015, p. 160, my translation).

There are two important frameworks in domestication theory, each highlighting the domestication process in different ways. Roger Silverstone and his colleagues (Silverstone et al., 1992) introduced the domestication term itself, as well as the first framework, in the early 1990s (Skjølsvold, 2015). The framework was oriented towards how new technologies got domesticated in households but can be applied to a range of other domestication processes. They saw the domestication process as four *phases*; (1) appropriation, (2) objectification, (3) incorporation, and (4) conversion (Silverstone et al., 1992). In the appropriation phase, the technology is transferred to the user from the market. Then, in the objectification phase, the technology is physically placed in the household. Here, the technology becomes part of the mental reality of its users, and it becomes a visible part of the household. Esthetic choices are also important in this phase. In the third phase, incorporation, the technology is no longer just a product; it becomes a meaningful object. It is incorporated in daily practices and becomes integrated in the users' lives. In the last phase, conversion, the technology is made something that can be presented for the outside world by the user.

Domestication theory has since been developed further, one of the most important variations being Sørensen's (2005) framework. Here, domestication is not viewed as a four-phase process but as a process that has three important *dimensions*. The first is how the technology is used, and the practices that get constructed around it. This can be routines, but also what norms, institutions or rules that regulate the use of the technology. The second dimension pertains to how meaning is constructed around both the technology and the user. How is the technology understood? Another important aspect is the technology's role in self-representation and identity. The last dimension focuses on cognitive learning processes. Important questions here are how a user gets to know a technology, and how they may learn from other users.

I have now presented the two main theories comprising the theoretical framework in this thesis: Castells' theories on the network society (the macro theory), and domestication theory (the micro theory). An important advantage of including domestication theory as a micro theory, is that it contributes to avoiding technological determinism in the analysis of changes in society, and that it can be used to criticize macro theories.

Together with Castells' theories on the network society presented above, domestication theory will be an important perspective for understanding the findings in the analysis. Perhaps most importantly, it considers the users as active when they use new technology, not just passive receivers. Through a domestication perspective, the thesis will be more theoretically equipped to understand the way employees use the technologies in their workplace, and how they accept, reject, and negotiate with it, and the rules surrounding it. At the same time, employees are part of a larger system, where the individual may have less power over work-related technology-use than they would over strictly private technology-use. Castells' theories on the network society thus serves as an important tool to account for these aspects as well. The goal is that the theoretical framework presented in this chapter will bring a new understanding to the employees' experiences, where the employees are viewed as neither powerless nor completely free to shape the technology as they wish.

2.3 Review of research on work life

As shown in the research questions, changes in work life during the pandemic touches upon many different topics. Consequentially, relevant literature for the thesis is extensive and scattered across disciplines, including media and communication (e.g. Golden, 2013; Ladner, 2008; Middleton, 2007), organizational studies (e.g. Barley, Meyerson, & Grodal, 2011; Lanaj, Johnson, & Barnes, 2014; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013), and psychology (e.g. Ohly & Latour, 2014; Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011; Voydanoff, 2005). To fully understand the state of research on the subject, then, I will argue that it is important to include literature from a diverse set of disciplines.

The section is comprised of six concepts or focus-areas that are especially relevant for the thesis:

1. The empowerment/enslavement paradox
2. Boundaries
3. Work—life conflict
4. Work-related ICT use and health
5. Organizational norms

6. Trust and control in organizations

The literature reviewed in this section will be important for situating the thesis in the existing literature, and for developing fruitful discussions and conceptualizations in the analysis chapters.

(1) The empowerment/enslavement paradox denotes how mobile technology in the workplace affords new opportunities for employees to shape their workday as they like, but also have negative consequences like increasing expectations of availability (Schlachter, McDowall, Cropley, & Inceoglu, 2018). Discussions of the phenomenon is heavily featured in existing literature, and Towers, Duxbury, Higgins and Thomas' (2006) show how mobile technology can be a "dual-edged sword". They argue that this technology allows for "work extension", in that the employee is free to work in other places than the office, as well as outside regular office hours. While this opens up for greater control for the employee, they argue that the downsides are increased expectations from both colleagues and managers, and that it can also increase the workload. Using a mixed methods approach, they make clear how mobile technologies in the workplace are indeed important to handle critically, as they can have restraining effects despite their many liberating qualities.

Their findings resonate with Stoner, Stephens and McGowan's (2009). Studying the use of work-connecting technologies among professionals and young managers, they found that the same technologies that give them more freedom to work when and where want, also increased expectations towards them and made work constantly available. Especially worth noting in their study, is how they conclude that technology for making the workday more flexible can make longer work hours more probable, and, in fact, result in a diminished sense of flexibility.

Experiences with the empowerment/enslavement paradox has also been studied at a law firm in Brazil (Cavazotte, Lemos, & Villadsen, 2014), academics with young children in Australia (Currie & Eveline, 2011), university employees in the United States (Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman, & Boswell, 2012), employees in government organizations (Duxbury, Higgins, & Thomas, 1996), and Canadian BlackBerry users (Middleton, 2007). What becomes evident, is that technologies that allow for remote working and working outside traditional working hours are experienced as a dual-edged sword in different parts of the world, as well as in different workplaces.

How do the employees interviewed in my thesis experience these mechanisms? Do they feel empowered by the opportunities these technologies afford them? Or are they experienced as tools of enslavement? This will be a central theme in the analysis, and especially in section 5.4 where changes to the work—life boundary during the pandemic will be discussed.

(2) Part of what makes mobile technologies in the workplace a dual-edged sword, is how they make the employees constantly available, thus blurring the work—life boundary. These boundaries have been the focus of many studies (e.g. Funtasz, 2012; Golden & Geisler, 2007; Middleton & Cukier, 2006; Park & Jex, 2011), and studies especially relevant for the thesis will be elaborated here. In a study on knowledge professionals' use of mobile devices with email, Mazmanian et al. found that the use of such devices "intensified collective expectations of their [the employees'] availability, escalating their engagement and thus reducing their ability to disconnect from work" (2013, p. 1337). Expectations of availability is one of the key challenges with remote work technology and has consequences

for the boundaries in employees' lives. However, it is important to point out that increased expectations of availability may not just come from organizations, but also from other sources, like friends, family and "society in general" (Matusik & Mickel, 2011).

As Golden (2013) importantly points out, the consequences of increased availability does not only have effects in the work-to-home direction, but also home-to-work. She argues that existing literature tend to *either* take the perspective of the workplace or the domestic sphere. As the very notion of boundaries between the workplace and the home are challenged by the rise of ICTs in the workplace, this can render studies one-sided. Workplace-oriented studies "tend to foreground work-to-home influence, rather than also considering home-based practices that extend into the workplace" (Golden, 2013, p. 105). I will argue that this thesis is well equipped to contribute to the lack of research that takes both perspectives. As the pandemic situation has brought the office into the private home full time, the data provides an excellent opportunity to accommodate Golden's concerns.

With boundaries between different roles becoming less distinct, and with high expectations of availability, the need to self-regulate has become clear (Schlosser, 2002). In their qualitative study on smartphone use among professional women, Crowe and Middleton (2012) found that they used the smartphone as a tool for balancing different parts of their lives. On the one hand, they wanted to convey professionalism, responsiveness, and accessibility to clients and colleagues. In this way, the smartphone was an important tool for maintaining professional identities. On the other hand, they did not want this technology to negatively affect their personal relationships, and therefore set boundaries that allowed them to engage with work only when they chose to do this. It has also been suggested that how these boundaries are maintained may differ when an employee enters a more senior position (Prasopoulou, Pouloudi, & Panteli, 2006). These findings are significant in that they illustrate the agency employees have to define boundaries.

These findings will be important when discussing the management of boundaries among the employees interviewed here. Especially Golden's (2013) encouragement to consider both the work-to-home and home-to-work directions will be important when discussing work and family life during the pandemic.

(3) Closely related to boundaries, and often overlapping, are work—life or work—family conflicts. As mobile work technologies make boundaries more permeable, conflicts between otherwise separated roles in employees' lives may arise. Fenner and Renn's (2010) study is one of several that point to a positive relation between doing supplemental work at home after hours, and work-to-family conflict. They also revealed that perceived usefulness and expectations in the organization were positively related to such practices. What is particularly worth noting in their study, is the vital point that time management have a moderating effect on supplemental work's negative impact on employees' home lives. These findings are significant in that they highlight that employees can limit the negative effects by setting goals and priorities. This implies a perspective that sees the employee as having the agency to negotiate the terms of the technology, a standpoint the data in this thesis also supports.

Predictors of the use of communication technology after work hours have also been studied, showing that employees with higher job involvement and ambition are more likely use this (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). The same study found that such use was associated with work-to-life conflict, based on reports from both the employee and the employee's "significant other". In a study on work-to-family conflict, Voydanoff (2005)

found several "demands" that were positively associated with such conflict: bringing work home, commuting time, work—family multitasking, and job contacts at home.

An important point to make based on the literature reviewed on conflicts, is that there are several factors that affect these. It is not just the mobile work technology, but different aspects of it that can be negotiated with in varying degrees, as well as differences in the employees' motivations. This shows that these processes are highly complex. By applying a domestication perspective, I will analyze how these aspects manifest among the participants in this thesis.

(4) A substantial part of the literature on work-related ICT-use outside working hours, is oriented towards how it affects employees' health. These publications are mostly from the field of psychology and are important to highlight to get an understanding of how work-related ICT-use can have serious negative impacts on employees' health. Important keywords in the literature include effects on sleep (Barber & Jenkins, 2014; Lanaj et al., 2014), stress (Barley et al., 2011), recovery (Derks, ten Brummelhuis, Zecic, & Bakker, 2014), detachment (Derks, van Mierlo, & Schmitz, 2014; Park et al., 2011), and well-being (Ohly & Latour, 2014).

A quantitative study on European employees showed that the practice of employers making contact with employees outside regular working hours on work-related matters, are associated with higher risk of sickness absence and health impairments (Arlinghaus & Nachreiner, 2013). Recuperation from work might be interrupted by even occasional contact, and the authors argue that such interruptions should be kept at a minimum.

Echoing these findings, a Canadian study found that work-contact outside work hours was related to higher levels of distress, work-to-family conflict, and sleep problems (Schieman & Young, 2013). An important nuance in their findings, is that negative effects on distress or sleep was lower for those with more job autonomy, and challenging work. Also, the negative effect on sleep problems was higher for employees with more job pressure. This illustrates the crucial point that contact outside work hours does not affect all employees equally, but is dependent on a range of factors, some of which are identified in Schieman and Young's study.

A more technology-specific study on smartphone users by Derks and Bakker (2014) shows that the use of smartphones are positively related to work—home interference (WHI). Also worth noting, is that especially for intensive smartphone users, engaging in activities fostering relaxation and psychological detachment is important for reducing the risk of WHI. When discussing implications for practice, the authors conclude that "since most organizations aspire to healthy and productive employees we would recommend that they set up a clear policy including their expectations regarding the availability of their employees during after-work hours" (Derks & Bakker, 2014, p. 434).

While this thesis is not in the field of psychology, some studies from this field have nevertheless been presented here to highlight health issues that employers should be aware of. When discussing expectations of availability among the employees, the health context presented here makes it clear that this is also a question of occupational safety and health, not "just" employees' right to off-time.

(5) This point calls attention to how expectations and norms in the workplace contribute to shaping ICT-use outside work hours, another important focus in existing literature (e.g. Derks, van Mierlo, et al., 2014; Mazmanian, 2013). Although the individual technology

user plays an active role in how they use the technology, employees are nevertheless affected by workplace culture when it comes to work—life boundaries.

Park et al. (2011) call this the "perceived segmentation norm". This concept describes a workplace's culture for separating work from one's home life. A high norm for segmentation means that the employees at the workplace have a culture for leaving work-related matters at the office. In short, it has to do with what practices are encouraged and discouraged when it comes to work—life boundaries. In their study, Park et al. (2011) found a positive association between segmentation norm, as well as segmentation preference, and psychological detachment. They also found that separating work and non-work roles could contribute to employees recovering and detaching from work demands.

Limitations on user agency as a result of workplace culture, is also evident in a study on employees in interactive advertising agencies (Ladner, 2008). Through a social construction of technology perspective, Ladner argues that while mobile technologies make the work—life boundary more permeable, this effect is not fully explained by their use. "Rather, it is the underlying social relations of workplaces that affect how individuals negotiate the use of these technologies in non-work time and space" (Ladner, 2008, p. 466). This point is crucial, as it views the employee as an active user of the technology, while at the same time acknowledging that underlying social relations can have a great effect on user agency.

There is also empirical data to support that the distribution of these technologies in the workplace have an impact on after-hours work behavior, and that handheld devices have a stronger effect than laptops (Richardson & Benbunan-Fich, 2011). The same study also found a relation between organizational norms and such behavior. This is not to say that the practice of distributing mobile work-technologies *itself* increases after-hours work activity, a point the authors also recognize when considering organizational norms. It nevertheless calls attention to the point that employers should be aware of this when they distribute these technologies to their employees.

What becomes clear when considering the significance of organizational norms for work-related ICT-use outside regular working hours, is that organizations need to be aware of the challenges related to this. Especially when considering possible health consequences of constant connectivity, employees and employers alike will benefit from some established guidelines. "The ability of workers to restrict access is (…) compromised greatly by the use of mobile technologies in the absence of official company policy concerning what warrants work-related contact during private time" (Ladner, 2008, p. 484).

What level of segmentation are expected in the workplaces studied in this thesis? Are employees expected to leave work after regular hours, or are they expected to be constantly available? This will be an important point of discussion in section 4.4. The significance of organizational norms will also become apparent in the analysis of attitudes towards working from home, both before (4.2) and after the pandemic (5.1).

(6) The last focus area in this literature review is how trust and control are managed in the workplace. Many aspects of this theme are covered in the literature, like trust in organizations (Cunha, Kamoche, Marziliano, & Cunha, 2003; Grey & Garsten, 2001), managers' trust building activities (Long, 2018), and trust between managers and employees (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009). Some of the studies on this topic are highly relevant for this thesis and will be further elaborated on below.

The question of trust and control is especially important to consider when employees are working from home, without immediate oversight by a manager. How can trust be maintained when there are significant physical distances between employees and managers in an organization? And what options for control do managers have when they cannot see their employees? In short, how is the workplace held together when it is spread across time and space?

While distributed work environments may provide advantages to teams (Mannix, Griffith, & Neale, 2002), they can also alter traditional control-mechanisms. Kassah (2007) provides an especially useful account of these mechanisms, and the challenges they pose. Her study explores geographically distributed groups, how leaders maintain control in these groups, and how trust is created between employees and leaders. She points out that when groups are distributed (i.e., not working in the same physical location), visually based control-mechanisms no longer work. New forms of digital control-mechanisms may be applied to maintain control, but Kassah found that this led to employees feeling they were under surveillance, and that their leaders did not trust them to do their jobs. However, technology-mediated control had positive outcomes when applied on the group level.

Further, she found that groups need more time to get to know each other when communicating through media with low communications complexity. Based on this, she calls attention to how these forms of communication can reduce the opportunities for group members to form trust-relationships. Rather than viewing trust and control as opposites, Kassah argues that relations built on trust foster a form of indirect control. This form of control is based on expectations to the other group members' future actions.

> By letting trust, control, and freedom walk hand in hand, the leader contributes to building relations that can steer the actors' behavior in the desired direction, without giving the impression of being a "control freak" that facilitates negative stress by mainly focusing on different measurement parameters (Kassah, 2007, p. 588, my translation).

In a recent quantitatively-based study by Bernstrøm and Svare (2017), the importance of employee control and monitoring for employees' felt trust was studied among a large sample of Norwegian employees. Much like Kassah's (2007) study, they found that the monitoring of employees was negatively related to the level of trust employees felt. They also found a positive association between employees' control over decisions and higher felt trust. Further, employees' felt trust was shown to be associated with their experience of mastery and intrinsic motivation. In their concluding remarks, the authors argue that monitoring-systems are seen as a sign indicating lack of trust, while a sign of the opposite is when employees are allowed greater control over decisions. These findings are worth noting, because they indicate that although managers may have the technological means for detailed monitoring of employees, these should be handled with care if one is to maintain trust in an organization. Martin, Wellen and Grimmer (2016) reaffirm these notions in their study, finding that attitudes towards surveillance in the workplace can have important effects on how surveillance impacts work behavior.

The findings in these studies will be important when analyzing and discussing how the workplaces in this study differ when it comes to trust and control (4.3), as well as how these mechanisms have changed during the pandemic (5.3). Especially notable is Kassah's (2007) argument that work relations built on trust foster a form of indirect control.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the theoretical framework for this thesis. Castells' concepts of the space of flows and timeless time (2000a) will be used as macro theory to understand how the changes explored in the analysis can be tied to broader societal changes. Domestication theory (Silverstone et al., 1992; Sørensen, 2005) serves as a micro theory that helps us understand technology-use at the individual level. It also provides important points of criticism towards macro theories like those of Castells, and the goal is that the combination of the two perspectives will provide a nuanced discussion that takes into account both societal changes on the macro level, and user agency on the micro level. The existing research reviewed in this section will contribute with fruitful concepts, and the studies' findings will be discussed where relevant.

3 Method

In this section, I will give an account of how this study has been conducted, and important research design decisions that have been made. Firstly, I will discuss why a qualitative approach was chosen, as well as the epistemological perspective applied in the thesis. Secondly, how the data was collected will be explained, including information about the sample, how the interviews were conducted, and the development of the interview guide. Thirdly, I will describe the steps I have taken when analyzing the data. Lastly, I will discuss the quality of the research, including how my role as a researcher might have affected the study. This section also highlights some ethical aspects of the study.

3.1 Choice of method and epistemological perspective

The data in this thesis is based on qualitative, explorative interviews. There are several reasons for choosing this method. Firstly, as the thesis aims to analyze employees' experiences, I see interviews as an excellent tool to get first-hand accounts of these. Secondly, I consider in-depth interviews as particularly useful, as the themes studied are of an explorative nature. In the absence of time pressure, interesting and unexpected conversations emerged during the interviews. Some of the themes were also quite personal, which made one-on-one interviews beneficial. Thirdly, while a survey could also have provided interesting findings, and maybe generated more generalizable data, the pandemic situation we currently face is, in many ways, new territory. I would argue that because of this, a qualitative approach is better suited for investigating the research questions. The new situations and challenges employees face during the pandemic has to be explored, without predefining the ways in which they can express them. Indeed, my experience during the interviews was that the participants pointed to aspects of work life during the pandemic I had not thought about beforehand.

When it comes to epistemological perspective, this thesis is positioned in the constructivist tradition. Taking this standpoint, the analysis of the interviews is based on an acknowledgement of *social facts* that are dependent on human agreement (Moses & Knutsen, 2019). As mentioned in chapter 2, I aim to avoid deterministic conclusions on the developments of technology-use, and I will argue that a constructivist approach is important to achieve this. Indeed, the notion found in domestication theory that technology is not finished when it reaches the user, is in many ways a constructivist assumption. As we will see in the analysis and discussion, there are many norms and traditions that greatly mediates communication technologies' disruptive capacities. From a naturalist or technology deterministic standpoint, these findings would be hard to explain.

3.2 Data collection

I have interviewed eight employees in total, half of them women and the other half men. Four of the employees were employed in the public sector, and the other four in the private sector. Two companies are represented from each sector, making four companies in total. They were between 28 and 57 years old, most of them were in their 50s, and the average

age was 47. A tabular overview of the participants is shown in Table 1 below. The participants were selected using targeted selection, with a set of selection criteria; they had to be employed in a company or public department, and it had to be possible for them to undertake their work tasks outside the office and regular work hours. These criteria were set to ensure the participants would have experiences with working from home both before and after the pandemic.

Table 1: Overview of the participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Workplace	Sector	Professional title
Helen	Female	50s	State health agency	Public	Adviser
Hector	Male	20s	State health agency	Public	System developer
Charlotte	Female	50s	Cultural department in county authority	Public	Adviser
Christopher	Male	50s	Cultural department in county authority	Public	Adviser
Eric	Male	50s	Energy company	Private	Consultant
Elizabeth	Female	50s	Energy company	Private	Procurer
Benjamin	Male	50s	Construction consulting firm	Private	Civil engineer
Barbara	Female	20s	Construction consulting firm	Private	Advising engineer

The pseudonyms used in the thesis give additional information, as the first letter in each pseudonym refers to the respective participant's workplace:

- **H** means that the participant works in the state **h**ealth agency.
- **C** refers to the **c**ultural department in the county authority.
- **E** refers to the **e**nergy company.
- **B** refers to the construction consulting firm because this company is related to **b**uildings.

Considering the thesis was to be completed in around five months, it was crucial to recruit and interview participants at an early stage. To ensure a high probability that the participants would want to participate in the study, I have recruited from both my supervisor's network and my own, extended network. E-mails were sent to five of the participants with information about the project and an invitation to participate (see Appendix A). Appended in the e-mail was a document containing information about the project, as well as a consent form (see Appendix B). Three of the employees were asked if they knew someone at their workplace that also wanted to participate in the project. Depending on the participant's gender, they were asked to invite someone not their own gender to ensure gender balance in the sample. In this way, two employees from four different workplaces were recruited. The period of investigation is in the strictest sense the employees' whole career, with a special focus on the transition from "traditional" work life to "pandemic" work life.

A draft of the interview guide was discussed with my supervisor prior to the interviews, and this resulted in some new questions being added to the interview guide. The interviews took place in January and February 2021 and were all conducted digitally using video calls. They lasted from 40 minutes to just over one hour, with most of them lasting about 50 minutes. With digital interviews there is a risk of technical difficulties, and some problems arose during data collection. Some interviews required an extra call-up at the start of the interview to get the sound working, and on one occasion the Internet failed on my end, requiring me to switch to a personal hotspot from my phone. However, the technical difficulties were few and limited to the instances described here. When it did happen, it was usually at the start of the interview, which meant the conversation carried on smoothly once this was fixed. I will argue that they did not impact the interviews in any significant way.

The interview guide was arranged using six key themes: (1) general; (2) work habits and prerequisites for mobile working before the pandemic; (3) work habits after the pandemic; (4) on being available; (5) free time; and (6) digital solutions in the workplace (see Appendix C for the complete interview guide). Prior to these themes there was an introductory segment, where the participant was told about how the interview would be structured. Towards the end, the participants were asked if there was anything they wanted to add that the interview did not cover, and they were thanked for participating in the project.

3.3 Analysis

After the interviews were finished and recorded, they were transcribed in their entirety in the qualitative analytics software NVivo. This resulted in about 78 pages of interview data. To reduce the amount of data that were irrelevant to the research questions, I wrote detailed summaries of these transcripts, which totaled 39 pages. Using NVivo, a coding process followed that resulted in about 500 different codes. The large number of codes indicate that this has been a detailed coding process, where I have strived to not lose any data relevant for answering the research questions. After categorizing the codes, I identified 19 categories in the interview material, which were further refined to five main themes: (1) the traditional office and working from home; (2) trust-based and control-based workplaces; (3) changing digital practices; (4) changing work habits during the pandemic; and (5) work time, leisure, and expectations of availability. These themes have been crucial in the structuring of the analysis in the thesis. Resulting from the analysis of the material described above, I will argue that these five themes represent the participants' main concerns about the changes in work life during the pandemic.

Using the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2, as well as previous research, chapters 4 and 5 aim to answer the research question proposed in the introduction. Based on the findings presented, I have developed figures that illustrate how these findings can be understood on a more abstract level. Consistent with Tjora's (2012) view on qualitative research, I argue that concept development provides an excellent way to bring out the potential that lies in theoretical insight and sound empirical work. These figures will serve as graphic representations of my findings, and also incorporate concepts and terminology I develop along the way. The goal is that these figures can prove useful not only for understanding the findings in this thesis, but that they can also be used as analytical tools in future research. In this way, future research can also test how these concepts hold up

in similar contexts. Thus, the concepts proposed in this thesis will hopefully make a contribution to the academic field.

3.4 Quality of the research and research ethics

To assess the quality of the research, I will use the terms (1) *reliability*, (2) *validity*, and (3) *generalizability*, as described for qualitative research by Tjora (2012).

(1) From a constructivist standpoint, the author of a study is not a neutral party; "observations and experience depend on the perspective of the investigator; they are not neutral and not necessarily consistent across investigators" (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p. 10). In order to assure reliability, it is important to reflect on how the author might have affected this study. An important aspect that I was aware of from the beginning of the project, was my own preferences for maintaining work—life boundaries. Especially when developing the interview guide, I worked to make sure the questions did not contain notions about what "good" or "bad" preferences were. This was important in order to not "steer" the participants towards any particular answer. The wide variety of ways to deal with these boundaries that are represented in the data, I see as an indication that the participants did not experience this.

The theoretical framework for the analysis was not set until after the first round of descriptive analysis. I had thought of some of the theory that ended up in the final framework prior to the interviews, but these did not structure the interview guide in any way. The goal was that the interview guide was to represent themes that were important to explore, and then theory would play a more significant part in the later stages of the analysis. This was to ensure that preconceived theoretical viewpoints did not shape data generation at the expense of what the participants actually considered the most important changes in work life during the pandemic.

(2) Some aspects important for the validity of the study have already been discussed in section 3.1 on choice of method. Here I discussed the advantages of using in-depth interviews for answering the research question. Another important aspect is that the participants were interviewed *during* the pandemic about their experiences *prior* to it. These data thus represent the participants' memories of this time period. This means that there is a risk of their memories not being completely accurate. As the study is not longitudinal, I have had to rely on these when describing their experiences prior to the pandemic. However, the outbreak of the pandemic happened less than a year prior to the interviews, and based on the participants' vivid and detailed descriptions of work life during this time, I will argue that this is not a big problem for the validity of the data.

(3) As previously discussed in this section, this thesis aspires to provide some concepts as well as graphic representations of these that can be used and tested in future research on related topics. Because of the sample size, the findings cannot be generalized to the population as a whole. However, I will argue that the findings in the thesis, and the concepts proposed with these findings as their basis, contribute to an increased understanding of this relatively uncharted territory of pandemic work life. As there is limited knowledge on work life under these conditions, I will also argue that the findings presented in this thesis has higher validity than what would be achievable through a quantitative research design. The situation that has emerged in work life during the

pandemic is extraordinary, and to understand the processes of change during this period, I think an explorative, qualitative study is fruitful for contributing to this emerging field.

3.5 Research ethics

Informed consent was acquired from all participants. They received a document with a detailed description of the purpose of the project, handling of personal data, and that the consent could be withdrawn at any time without negative consequences for the participant (see Appendix B). The project has also been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

The data has been anonymized using pseudonyms when referring to the participants. Descriptions of the employees and their workplaces have also been described in a way that keeps them anonymous, while at the same time providing necessary information to the reader. Anonymization has also been important when handling audio recordings of the interviews. Name and contact details have been replaced with a code in the recording filenames, and these files have been stored in separate locations. The recordings were kept at a secure university server, and the list of participants and the backups of the audio recordings were kept on two separate flash drives that were kept securely in the author's home.

When using one's own network when recruiting, there is a risk that the participants are too close to the researcher, thus affecting their responses in the interviews. However, I will argue that this has not been the case in this study. This is because I used an extension of my own network, rather than people I know personally. As a result, I did not know any of the participants prior to the interviews.

4 The old normal: the work situation before the pandemic

In order to know if work life has changed during the pandemic, it is necessary to establish an understanding of how the situation was before the outbreak. Although the COVID-19 virus was in circulation well before this time, the 12 March 2020 can be considered as a date marking the start of the pandemic in Norway. This was the date workers were sent home from their offices, and the first lockdown measures were implemented (NRK, 2020, 1:06:50). As this study concerns itself with work life, this acts as a natural divider between before and after the start of the pandemic. It also separates the analysis chapters (chapters 4 and 5) in this thesis.

This chapter outlines how the work situation was before the pandemic. Here, the companies that participated in the study will be briefly described, as well as several aspects of the interviewed employees' work life pre-pandemic: (1) the relationship between the traditional office and working from home, (2) trust-based and control-based workplaces, and lastly (3) work time, leisure, and expectations of availability.

4.1 Companies in the project

Employees from four different companies have participated in this project, with two employees interviewed from each company. Two of the companies belong to the public sector, while the other two belong to the private sector. All companies are relatively large, with the number of employees ranging from more than 500 to 20,000. In this section, I will give an overview of the participating companies and the employees interviewed from each company.

The first company is one of Norway's most prominent state entities working with public health. It belongs to the public sector and has offices in two Norwegian cities. From this company, I have interviewed Helen and Hector. Helen is in her fifties working as an adviser. She is educated in social economics and works with analysis and statistics. Helen has been working in the company for 10 years. Hector is in his late twenties and works with data science. He has a bachelor's degree in data science and works with development and managing of the company's IT-systems. He has been employed there for 1 year.

The second company is the culture department of a Norwegian county council. Also in the public sector, they have offices in two of the county's largest cities. Charlotte is in her fifties, has worked for the company for 20 years, and has education in culture and art. She is employed as an adviser and works with both administrative tasks and out of office with cultural activities. Christopher, also in his fifties, works as an adviser in the field of sports and outdoors activities. He has been working there for 13 years, and has previously studied sports, administration, outdoor activity, and history.

The third company is an energy company in the private sector. Most of their employees work in Norway, and they have several offices spread across the nation. Eric is in his fifties and works as a consultant in the firm and has an educational background in law. His main responsibilities are negotiating and assisting internal clients with contracts. He has worked in the company for 13 years. The other employee interviewed, Elizabeth, also in her fifties, is employed as a procurer. She works with the procuring of laboratory equipment for the company's research labs. Elizabeth studied at a business school and has been working for the firm for 37 years.

The fourth and final company is a consulting company working in the construction business. This is also a private sector company, and they have employees in several countries, with offices spread across Norway. Benjamin is in his fifties and has a degree in civil engineering. Employed as a civil engineer, he works on the planning of hospital buildings. He has worked in the company for 19 years. Barbara is employed as an advising engineer and has a degree in machine engineering. She works with heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, and has been working in the firm for 1 year.

Now that the companies represented in the study have been introduced, as well as the employees interviewed from each, we are ready to explore how the working situation was prior to the pandemic.

4.2 Relationship between the traditional office and working from home

> "(…) you could [work from home before the pandemic], but the threshold for doing so was higher. Because you had to ask your manager, and in addition, you felt like you had to have a good reason" (Elizabeth).[1]

One of the consequences of new information technology, is that many employees can do their work from wherever they want. This is an important manifestation of the space of flows (Castells, 2000a), where instant communication renders the physical location of work less important than before. However, what has become apparent in the interviews for this thesis, is that working from home was by no means seen as an equal to working in the office. Why is this? To answer this, domestication theory is useful to understand how the technology is *actually* used by the employees. The practical dimension in Sørensen's (2005) framework becomes particularly important, as it pertains to the formation of routines around the technology.

What characterized the routines around remote-working technology in the companies? How big an impact had the space of flows actually made on the employees' work situation? These are important questions to answer to understand practices concerning remote working. Departing from the theoretical standpoint described above, three important factors emerge as affecting the employees' decision to work from home or not: (1) the technical infrastructure; (2) the different social cultures in workplaces that encouraged or discouraged working from home, and (3) the type of work planned for the day.

(1) Access to work-files from home is one important part of the technical infrastructure. When considering the space of flows, the private home and a company's servers are

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[1] All quotes in the thesis have been translated from Norwegian.

important nodes in this respect. To establish a flow between them, there are some technical prerequisites that need to be in place.

The employees generally had good facilities when it came to remote access and did not experience much trouble with this. The exception is Hector, who could not access all files required to do his tasks from home. He recalls how there were some "zones" of the computer systems that was not reachable outside the office. This poses a clear obstacle for remote working, and file and resource access must be in place if remote working is to be a realistic alternative to working in the office.

The reason why some zones were not reachable for Hector, was because of security concerns. Some data are more sensitive than others, making proper security facilities vital for remote working. Helen in the same company did not experience such difficulties, highlighting that different types of work requires different degrees of security. As an informatics employee working with sensitive health data, Hector experienced more difficulties with access than other employees in this study. Technical infrastructure, then, has to be supplemented by adequate security solutions to be fully operational. The degree of security will nevertheless vary greatly between different work tasks, which means that it does not necessarily pose a great challenge for everyone.

Another aspect of technical infrastructure that can discourage employees from working remotely, is lack of a proper Internet connection. Barbara prefers working in the office because she depends on heavy software, good IT-facilities, and a good Internet connection. On days when she depends less on these facilities, working from home is fine. Charlotte and Christopher do not experience limitations when it comes to technical infrastructure, and this may be because writing constitute an important part of their work tasks. As writing in itself does not require much computing power, this points to another nuance in the need for technical infrastructure; different work tasks require different levels of connections and speed.

When it comes to technical infrastructure, then, the access to files and resources constitutes a vital prerequisite for remote working to be feasible. Further, we see that security is important to ensure a safe flow of information between the company servers and the employee's location. The level of security needed depends on the work tasks at hand. Lastly, Internet speed is important in varying degrees, again depending on work tasks.

(2) The second important factor is workplace culture, or the social attitudes towards working from home. With the exception of Hector and Barbara, we have seen that the technical infrastructure for working from home is in place for all the participants. The nature of their work is also highly informational — in the strictest sense, none of the participants interviewed *had* to be at work before the pandemic in order to do their work tasks. What is it then, that made working from home relatively rarely used? Following the argumentation of Park et al. (2011) on employees mimicking the behavior of co-workers, an important part of the explanation may be found in workplace culture and organizational norms.

The most prominent reason reported for not using the option to work from home, was that it simply was not a tradition for this, and the feeling that you needed a good reason for doing this. This statement from Helen sums up parts of the sentiments on remote working: "(…) [we] had the option [to work from home], but this was not encouraged, so, we were in all essence encouraged to be present in the workplace (…) [it was] primarily not desirable

from the employer's side that we worked from home (…) it should be a good reason for that". She says that her employer was more positive towards working from home when there was overtime involved.

In the construction consulting firm, working from home was not seen as very problematic. While Christopher in the culture department says that working from home was not considered traditional, it nevertheless was unproblematic in terms of social expectations. The companies thus seem to be split down the middle on this issue, with two of them not having markable social opposition, while the other two are clearly discouraged from working from home.

Eric gave an account of how working from home was viewed in his workplace. He describes a culture that was more turbulent than the other companies or departments. "[The opportunity to work from home] has created conflicts and a kind of sour atmosphere in our department" (Eric). In his experience, some of the other employees made themselves a bit too comfortable with this arrangement, working from home during the summer when their manager was away. Especially one colleague "exploited" the opportunity, and was too sick to come into the office, but well enough to work from home.

Although the culture in Eric's workplace is not representative for the experiences reported from the other workplaces in this study, it clearly highlights an important question: why was working from home frowned upon, or at least seen as inferior to working at the office?

A possible answer to this has to do with what Kassah (2007) identified as the disappearance of visually based control-mechanisms in distributed groups. As this has an effect on how employees establish trust, it might be that, in some workplaces, there is a suspicion towards those working from home, based on an assumption that they are slacking off. If the opposite was the case, that employees and employers had full trust in each other, doing what they were supposed to, it is hard to imagine why working from home had to be problematic. Charlotte and Christopher did not experience these kinds of sentiments in the cultural department, and also report having a very trust-based workplace. This indicates that trust is an important component of the social attitudes towards working from home. As we will see later in section 5.1, working from home during the pandemic has changed these attitudes dramatically. Trust-based and control-based workplaces will be further explored in sections 4.3 and 5.3.

What we see, is that organizational norms are important when it comes to the choice of working from home or in the office. However, several of the participants had both the technical infrastructure and social support needed to spend more time working from home, but still preferred working in the office. Why is this the case?

(3) While the technical and social aspects are important factors deciding if working from home is a realistic option, the type of work planned for the day is important for *when* the participants decide to choose this option. A very clear finding is that the employees like to work from home when doing work that requires deep concentration, and this is expressed by most of the participants.

Helen, working in an open-plan office, says that working from home gives her the opportunity to work completely shielded from noise. Especially when she has to focus and write intensively, working from home is the best solution for her. Hector points this out as well, saying that to do work that requires concentration "in peace", is an important and positive aspect of working from home, and he hopes that this will be a more accepted

practice in the future. Charlotte is also positive to working from home when doing this type of work, so that she can avoid interruptions and "time thieves" at the office. Christopher and Elizabeth express the same opinion. Benjamin also has to do intensive writing and prefers to work from home when he does this. In addition, he stays at home when he has a lot of digital meetings, as he does not like to attend these at his desk in the company's open-plan office.

In addition to the three main factors discussed above, the employees also have some other reasons for working from home. Firstly, when having a private appointment, like a doctor's appointment, it may be more practical to work from home. Secondly, when going away for the weekend, it could also be better to not go into the office. Thirdly, Charlotte says that she avoided working from home because she wanted to keep work and home life clearly separated. Fourthly, all employees express a need or appreciation for seeing their co-workers. Both the third and fourth factor mentioned here are very important, and will be further discussed in sections 4.4 and 5.4, and section 5.2, respectively.

In this section we have seen how the relationship between the traditional office and working from home can be understood using three important factors: (1) the technical infrastructure; (2) the different social cultures in workplaces that encouraged or discouraged working from home; and (3) the type of work planned for the day. I will argue that the first two constitute the fundamentals to making working from home possible. The third factor, as well as the other aspects mentioned above, act as *motivations* for choosing to use the option to work from home or not. Using the concept of the space of flows as a point of departure (Castells, 2000a), technical requirements and organizational norms can be seen as the key fundamentals constituting what I call the *space of flows in practice* (see Figure 1).
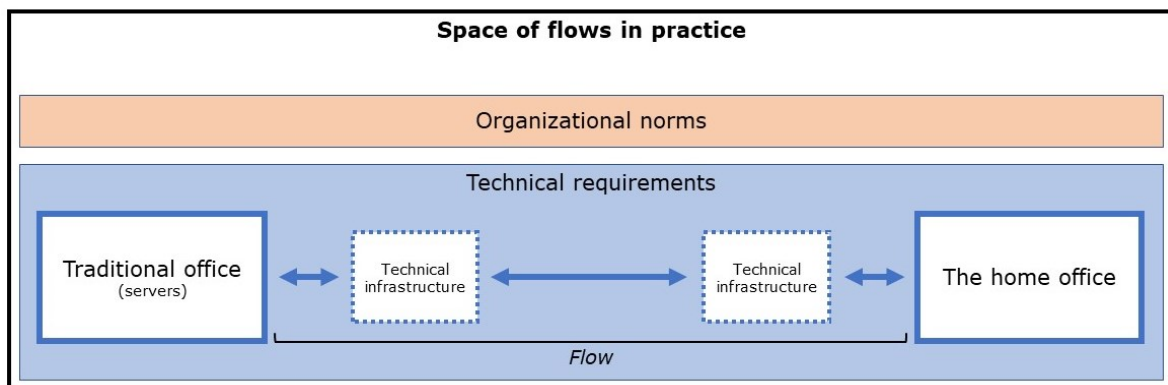
Figure 1: The space of flows in practice.

An important finding in this study that gets highlighted through this graphic representation, is that technical requirements was not enough for the employees to experience the new possibilities in the space of flows. Indeed, although the technical requirements were in place for most employees, working from home was often viewed as something out of the ordinary, and even as something to be suspicious of. The space of flows in practice must thus be viewed as based upon technical requirements *and* organizational norms.

In this regard, micro theories like domestication theory may provide some useful perspectives that can help explain these nuances in macro theories like the space of flows. When looking at society as a whole, the information technology revolution has clearly ushered society from being based on the space of places towards being based on the space of flows. But these changes affected companies in different ways, with organizational norms as a key mediating factor. While some companies could be considered explorative, in that they were open to allow remote working, others were restrictive. The practical dimension of domestication (Sørensen, 2005) is a helpful analytical tool in this respect, in that it highlights the user patterns and routines that are constructed around the new technology.

For the restrictive companies, it seems that the user patterns and routines were to a large extent "conservative", in that they fitted the technology in with what was considered "normal" work life. The revolutionary changes promised with new communication technologies have thus been negotiated by these workplaces in a very restrictive way, allowing the new possibilities to be realized only to a small extent.

The explorative companies were more open to new ways of working, giving their employees more freedom to explore and choose for themselves. In this way, these user patterns are more compatible with how Castells' imagined work life would become. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the employees in the explorative companies nevertheless used this option only occasionally.

There were several reasons for this, where one of the most important ones were what type of work the employees had planned for the day. On the occasions that the private home was used as an office, it was often because the work tasks required deep concentration. To sum up, then, technical infrastructure and organizational norms are crucial for working from home to be possible, and then there are a number of motivations for why employees may or may not make use of this option.

As we have seen in this section, trust is a fundamental component in the workplace. When employees are working in different locations, the way trust is constructed, changes. In the next section, I will identify some important differences between trust-based and control-based workplaces when it comes to requirements for documenting work, as they were before the pandemic.

4.3 Differences between trust-based and control-based workplaces

Workplaces differ when it comes to the balance between trust and control, and how this affects their management style. In this thesis, I will use a spectrum with trust and control as opposite ends to analyze trust and control in the employees' workplaces. If we consider a spectrum with completely trust-based and completely control-based as its extremes, the companies in this study are not likely to represent the full range of this spectrum. They can all be said to be quite trust-based, but it is nevertheless important to highlight which of these that are closer to trust-based and which are *more* control-based than the rest of the companies.

In chapter 4.2, the importance of trust between employees was highlighted. But trust between employee and manager is also important. With the information technology

revolution, technical means of monitoring employees' work has become available. However, the use of these is not unproblematic. Kassah (2007) found that they could give employees a feeling of being under surveillance, and that their manager did not trust them to do their job. These findings resonated with those of Bernstrøm and Svare (2017), who in addition found a positive association between employees' control over decisions and higher felt trust. While control-measures may give managers increased insight into the performance of their workforce, the potential downsides are important to consider.

How does this manifest in the workplaces examined in this study? Do some feel more "surveilled" than others, and do requirements for documenting work affect them negatively? In this section, important aspects affecting the level of trust will be identified, as well as which workplaces are more trust or control based. To conclude, a figure (Figure 2) will be presented that shows the workplaces positioned on a trust-control-spectrum.

The first aspect is strongly connected to the discussion in the previous section, as it pertains to how free employees are to work remotely. As previously discussed, the cultural department and the construction consulting firm were the workplaces with the most freedom to work where they wanted. The participants employed in these organizations did not experience any significant social opposition to working from home. This has to be interpreted as a sign of trust from the management's side. The state health agency and the energy company, however, experienced more opposition to working from home, and Helen explicitly said that her employer did not encourage doing this. The freedom to choose were to work, then, is one aspect indicating a higher level of trust.

Another aspect is the use of timesheets. The workplaces are very different when it comes to this, some using detailed versions, while others only use general timesheets. I will argue that the level of detail required from timesheets can say something about the level of trust in a workplace. Again, the cultural department seems to be the most trust-based, not writing detailed timesheets. The health department uses a more formalized timesheet system, as does the energy company. Eric reports that they have a "massive" software that keeps track of work hours, as well as other documents in their company. The construction consulting company has the most detailed timesheets. This has to do with the way they work, as they always work with clients that are to be billed for each hour the company's consultants work for them.

A final aspect, and an important nuance to the discussion on timesheets, is the visibility of deliveries. If a workplace does not have formal control-mechanisms in the form of detailed timesheets, this does not mean that there are no such mechanisms at play.

> Before the pandemic as well, there has been a culture in my workplace where no one is going around controlling [what you do], but it is expected that you deliver. We work in a political system, so things have to be delivered continuously (Charlotte).

Thus, in the cultural department where Charlotte works, there are more informal control mechanisms in the absence of a detailed timesheet-system. The same mechanism is seen in the state health department: "We have quite visible deliveries (…) it is quite obvious if you (…) do not deliver what you are supposed to" (Helen). Elizabeth in the energy company as well, says that missing deliveries will be detected by those that were supposed to receive them. This stresses the point that control may also be maintained by assuring traceability of work, and thus accountability of employees.

In this section, I have operationalized the concepts trust-based and control-based workplaces on the basis of some important aspects discussed by the employees. The first

was the level of freedom to work where one wanted, in other words the level of mobility. Second was the level of detail required in timesheets. The third aspect was the visibility of deliveries, and this served as an important nuance to the second aspect on timesheets. In the graphic representation of the levels of trust and control in the different workplaces as shown below (Figure 2), requirements for timesheets is the most important indicator of trust, followed by the degree of mobility.
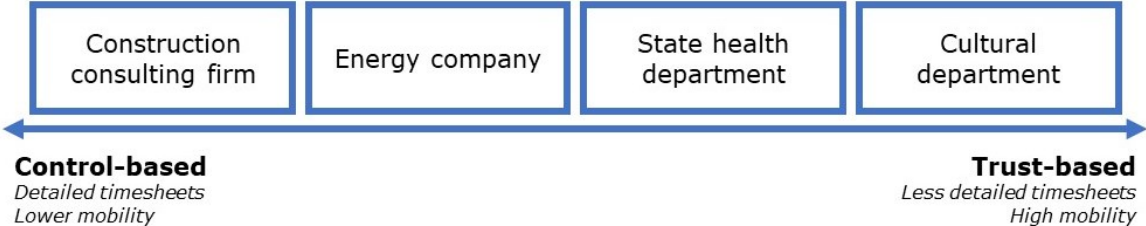

Figure 2: The trust-control-spectrum.

In general, the employees interviewed did not seem to feel that they were under surveillance by their employer before the pandemic, nor that that they were not trusted. While it would seem obvious that this was the case for the most trust-based workplace, the culture department, this was not evident in the more control-based workplaces either. Indeed, Benjamin, who works in the construction consulting firm positioned at the control-end of the spectrum, says that there has always been a trust-based approach to timekeeping in his company. This calls attention to that detailed timesheets are not necessarily experienced as a signal of distrust among employees in this study. This contradicts the findings of Bernstrøm and Svare (2017), who found a negative association between monitoring and felt trust.

However, this does not mean that the conclusion drawn in Figure 2 is amiss. Rather, it points out that all these companies can be positioned towards the trust-end of the spectrum. Nevertheless, when comparing them, the types of timesheets can be a fruitful way of distinguishing them. In this way, the construction consulting firm can be the most control-based in *this* context, without employees experiencing it as such.

In conclusion, the workplaces of the employees in this study seem to have avoided the use of extensive monitoring systems. When approached from a domestication theory perspective, this illustrates an important point. Although monitoring systems offer ways of increasing control, and in some contexts are a source of conflict (see e.g. Davidson, 2021), the data in this study does not indicate such conflicts. Rather, it seems that, regardless of the workplaces' managements having access to this technology or not, they have simply not seen the need to use these capabilities. This point may seem obvious, but it is important to highlight that, in the end, humans are the ones that decide whether this is a technology they want to use. The employees, then, seem generally satisfied with the way documentation requirements are, regardless of where their workplace is positioned on the spectrum in Figure 2.

Now that we have established important aspects of the traditional office and working from home before the pandemic in the previous section, as well as differences between trust-based and control-based workplaces in this one, it is time to address another aspect of work life; the relationships between work time, leisure, and expectations of availability.

4.4 Work time, leisure, and expectations of availability

The use of communication technologies in work life has challenged the work—life boundary, and with the pandemic bringing the office into many employees' homes, this line has become increasingly blurred. In order to understand the changes in work—life balance during the pandemic, however, it is necessary to provide an account of how this was prior to it. This will be the focus of this section.

As discussed in section 4.2, the option to work from home is a clear manifestation of the space of flows. However, it is also a manifestation of timeless time (Castells, 2000a). Employees are often at liberty to desequence a normal day, making it possible to reassemble the sequence of work—life—sleep. For example, one might work until lunch, then go skiing for three hours, eat dinner, and work some more in the evening. This is closely related to the empowerment/enslavement paradox (Schlachter et al., 2018), as it gives the employees freedom to rearrange their workday, but can have the downside of less time to disconnect entirely from work. This has also made clear the need to self-regulate (Schlosser, 2002).

Also relevant in this section is the perceived segmentation norm (Park et al., 2011), which denotes the culture for segmenting work and personal life in the workplace. A high norm for segmentation, means that work-related matters are left at the office. In addition to self-regulation and being conscious about how one wishes to segment different parts of one's life, the workplace culture can both encouraged and discourage these choices. How this boundary becomes, is largely dependent on these two factors: self-regulating and the segmentation norm in the workplace.

What are the attitudes towards segmentation among the employees' interviewed? How is the segmentation norm in their workplaces, and what is expected of them when it comes to being available outside work hours? These are important questions that will be addressed in this section. First, however, it is necessary to clarify what constitutes "work time" and "free time".

Most of the participants defined their normal work time as 8 AM to 4 PM, and all of them considered the workday done at 4 PM or 5 PM. This shows that their definition of work time was consistent with what is considered normal in Norway, and their definition is also within the legal frameworks (Arbeidsmiljøloven, 2005, § 10-4). As we will see, while this is what the employees say are their normal work hours, these are not representative for some of the employees' *actual* work hours. An important point of clarifying this definition as the employees themselves see it, rather than only drawing on legal frameworks, is that it shows how these are viewed *in practice*, as opposed to how this "ought" to be.

Free time is the time after the work hours are done. The employees mention a range of things they associate with free time: being with family, spending time on hobbies, everything not work-related, and being "logged out" (of work). Charlotte refers to it as her "primary life".

While some can be strict about maintaining a strong work—life boundary, others may welcome the opportunity to mix them. I propose that the categorization of these employees as *separators* and *mixers*, respectively, can provide a helpful analytical tool. It is important to note that some might fall in between these categories. Further, there are sometimes discrepancies between employees' view on how the boundary should be, and how it actually is. The categorization used in this thesis is based on what the employees actually do, but differences between attitude and practice will be pointed out where applicable.

Before the pandemic, almost all the employees could be categorized as separators. For these, a clear work—life boundary was very important. Prior to the interviews, the expectation was that the employees had a set of techniques that they used to maintain this boundary, actively counteracting demands of being available outside work hours. As it turns out, this was not the case. Rather, separating work from home life came quite "naturally" to this group. When asked if she does anything to maintain a firm boundary, Elizabeth puts it this way: "No, it is not something I do. It is just the way I am".

Nevertheless, work-related notifications on the employees' phones seem to play a part in separating work and home life:

> (…) I have made a conscious choice of not having notifications, that my phone is [not] beeping when I receive an e-mail. (…) I have to actively open my e-mail [client] to check for new e-mails (Christopher).

This is echoed by Charlotte, saying that she does not keep notifications on, as she knows she gets "triggered" by seeing them, and then opens them.

But the aspect of notifications is complicated by the fact that two of the separators have them turned on. Elizabeth, who practiced a strict separation of work and home life, sometimes checked her e-mail when the workday was done, without getting stressed or feeling the need to work. She says this was a way for her to be mentally prepared for the next day. The conclusion that must be drawn from this, is that work-related notifications on the employees' cell phones can function as a tool for managing the work—life boundary, but that this is done in different ways. Among the work life-technologies, notifications is a crucial component when it comes to reminding employees of work outside regular hours, but the way employees experience these may differ.

The only one not clearly a separator before the pandemic, is Benjamin. This is mainly because he works a lot, more than regular hours. However, to categorize him as a mixer before the pandemic, that is, one who welcomed the mixing of work time and leisure, would not be quite right. That is because there is a difference between working overtime and mixing work and home life. As we will see in section 5.4 though, he has clearly become a mixer after the pandemic. An important finding, then, is that none of the employees could be categorized as mixers prior to the pandemic.

The other important aspect to consider when examining work—life boundaries, is the segmentation norm in the workplace, i.e. the expectations of availability outside work hours. Similar to the classification of employees as either *separators* or *mixers*, I will argue that there is a similar analytical tool to be constructed with regard to the workplaces: *separating* workplaces, and *non-separating* workplaces. *Separating* workplaces denote workplaces with a high segmentation norm, which means that work is not brought home, but kept at the office or inside regular work hours. This also means low expectations of availability outside these hours. *Non-separating* workplaces are workplaces with a low segmentation norm and high expectations of availability outside work hours. Just to be

clear, these categories come in addition to the trust-based and control-based-categories proposed earlier.

The state health agency stands out as the most non-separating workplace in this study. Helen says there is a lot of work activity going on outside work hours. There are informal conversations, email exchanges, things that are being discussed and maybe also some delegation of work tasks. She has been very clear that she will not participate in work activities in the evenings, and she says that people respect this and in no way punish her for it. In her workplace it is important to be visible and contribute. She "solves" not participating in the evenings by being "proper" on the work she does during work hours. Not participating in the evenings can also be easier for her, as she has an established role and visibly contribute to the company, she says.

> So, there is a sort of unspoken expectation, when it comes to delivering and being available, I think. That in a way is (…) applauded too, but more informally (Helen).

Her employer has not explicitly said that she should be available outside work hours. The official guidelines in her workplace are very clear on rules for overtime, and what is in accordance with the laws for occupational safety and health. Still, she says that even in the public sector, an office culture which does not operate in accordance with these laws exists, and that many overtime work hours are not formally registered. Being available all the time is something she sees especially in the middle and top management positions.

Hector describes similar experiences. He receives messages and emails at all hours of the day and says that while it is not a formal requirement, being available outside work hours has become a "de facto trend". He feels that he should be available after 4 PM when he works on "prioritized projects". If he receives an important message at 9 in the evening, he does not ignore it. Sometimes he also receives calls in the evenings, and he recalls one time when he was sick and got contacted about something only he could fix. "Even though my computer was off, my phone was on, you know? So, they will reach you" (Hector). This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Stoner et al. (2009), who found that constant availability increased the expectations towards employees.

Even though the employees in the cultural department experience expectations for being available outside work hours, I will argue that the workplace is of the *separating* kind. This has to do with the nature of their work tasks. Both Charlotte and Christopher define ordinary work time as the hours between 8 AM to 4 PM, but they are open to working outside the regular working hours.

Charlotte says that when working in the culture industry, not all work tasks can be done during the regular workday. Because of this, she is flexible when it comes to work hours and is used to working both in the evenings and on weekends. "That is just the way it is", she says. She points out that when she does work like this, she takes these hours out as compensatory time. Christopher too considers working outside regular hours a natural part of his job because of his work tasks. Much of his work is in collaboration with volunteer organizations, and he understands that they cannot work within his work hours. "But then I take it out as compensatory time when it suits me some other time, so that is fine" (Christopher).

Another aspect that puts their workplace closer to the separating-category, is how the managers approached contacting employees outside work hours. Charlotte describes the way her managers contacted her outside work hours as "respectful". If one of them wanted to call her after work, she always got a text message beforehand where they asked if she

could receive a call. She says that they knew she would answer the call, but they sent a message first anyway. Christopher would also get these kinds of messages, asking if he was available before a phone call was placed.

The employees in the private sector companies (the energy company and the construction consulting firm) did not experience any expectations to being available outside work hours.

In this section, I started by describing how the employees define the terms "work time" and "free time". Further, I have analyzed how the employees think about and maintain their work—life boundaries. Two categories were proposed to describe two different types of employees: the *separators*, and the *mixers*. Almost all employees could be categorized as separators, while Benjamin, who worked a lot of overtime, fell somewhere between the two. Although the mixers-category was not used in this section, it was nevertheless important to introduce the term here. As we will see in the next chapter, some employees have switched categories during the pandemic, becoming mixers that blur the work—life boundary.

After this, the segmentation norm in the workplaces were analyzed, as well as the expectations of availability the employees experienced. Here, the workplaces were categorized as either *separating* workplaces, or *non-separating* workplaces. The first category describes workplaces with a high segmentation norm, whereas the latter describes those with a low segmentation norm. The state health agency was the only clearly non-separating workplace, as much work activity took place outside regular work hours. Despite much work activity, the cultural department was categorized as a separating workplace. This was because some employees' work tasks *had* to be done outside regular work hours, and because of the way the managers contacted their employees outside work hours. Lastly, both the energy company and the construction consulting firm was categorized as separating workplaces, as none of the employees interviewed from these companies experienced any expectations of being available outside work hours.

Figure 3 (below) is based on the findings and conceptualizations in this section. Here, the separators and mixers are placed along the vertical axis denoting *personal segmentation preference*. This corresponds to the concept *work-home segmentation preference* used by Park et al. (2011). Thus, the *separators* have a high value on the personal segmentation preference-axis, and the *mixers* have a low value. The horizontal axis shows the *workplace segmentation norm* (Park et al., 2011), with *non-separating* and *separating workplaces* at its ends.
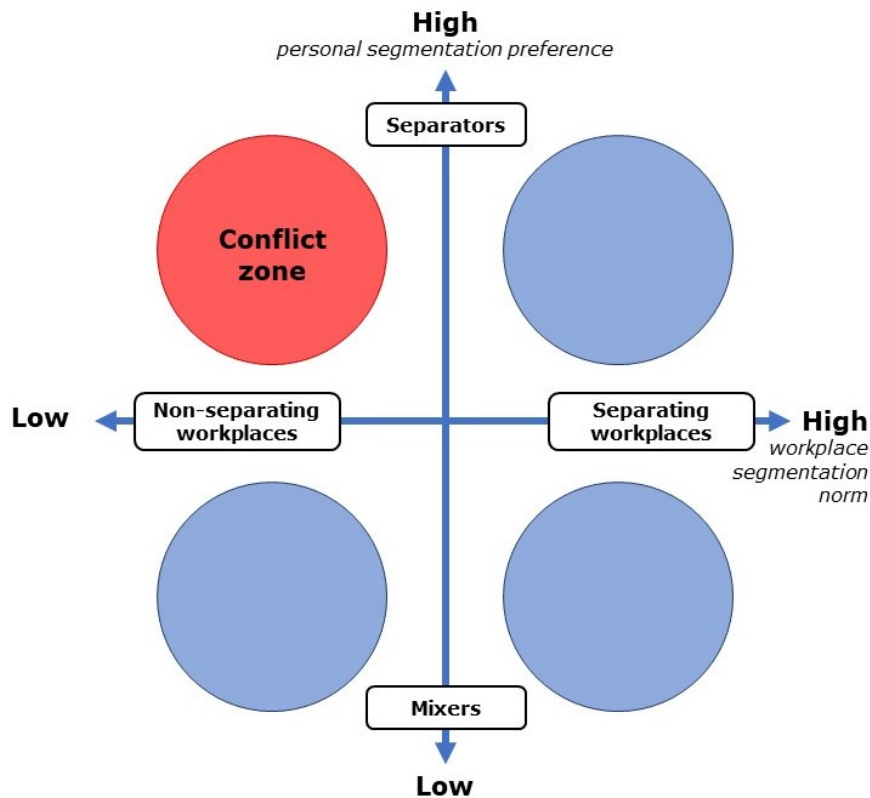
Figure 3: Combinations of personal segmentation preferences and workplace segmentation norms.

In addition to graphically systemizing the concepts proposed in this section, the figure illustrates one of the crucial findings in this thesis. This is highlighted by the red circle, which I have called the *conflict zone*. The conflict zone is where the personal segmentation preference is high, and the workplace segmentation norm is low. This phenomenon has been empirically demonstrated most clearly through the analysis of Helen's situation. Conflict arises when an employee is employed in a workplace with a culture for working outside work hours, while the employee wants a clear separation of work and home life. When placed in this area, extra strain is put on the employees to maintain their desired work—life boundaries, and to avoid becoming, in the words of Schlachter et al. (2018), enslaved.

The remaining three areas in the figure are marked with blue circles, symbolizing that these combinations of segmentation preferences and norms, do not pose immediate challenges. When the employee has a high personal segmentation preference, and the workplace has a high segmentation norm, the employee and workplace are on the same wavelength on the issue. Thus, there is no conflict between the two. For the mixers, the workplace segmentation norm can be argued to be less vital for employee satisfaction. A workplace with a low segmentation norm will have norms that correspond to the employee's preferences, and a workplace with a high segmentation norm is unlikely to punish an employee that wants to work in the evening.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Castells' concept of timeless time (2000a) becomes evident in these practices. With the desequencing afforded by communication technologies, employees can disassemble and reassemble different parts of everyday life

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to their liking. While this has created the potential for revolutionary changes in work lives (where some of them have indeed taken place), the employees interviewed in this study did not use them very much before the pandemic. Considering the separator/mixer-categories proposed, almost all of them were categorized as separators. This leads to an important connection between these terms and Castells' theories, which can explain some of the "slowness" seen in the actual impact of these technological affordances: while mixers will use these technological capabilities to desequence and reassemble their work and home lives, the separators make a point out of retaining the traditional work—life boundary. They are domesticating new work-related technologies in a way that is oppositional to what some highlight as the technologies' revolutionary potential.

Before exploring the work situation after the outbreak of the pandemic in chapter 5, a recapitulation of the most important findings in this chapter will be presented.

4.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed and discussed the employees' work situations prior to the pandemic. Several aspects where explored, and each of them pertain to the different sub-questions proposed to answer the main research question. The exception is section 4.1 that presented more information about the companies and the employees working there. The purpose of this was to provide a better understanding of which types of workplaces and employees that are represented in the study.

Section 4.2 contributes to answering the first and second sub-questions: (1) *How have the role and attitudes towards working from home changed*; and (2) *how have work habits changed?* Here, the situation before the pandemic was established. Three important factors were identified for understanding the relationship between the traditional office and working from home: (1) the technical infrastructure; (2) the different social cultures in workplaces that encouraged or discouraged working from home, and (3) the type of work planned for the day. The workplaces were categorized as *restrictive* or *explorative*, depending on how their social norms encouraged or discouraged working from home. The concept *space of flows in practice* (Figure 1) was proposed as an explanation of the importance of organizational norms for mediating Castells' promises of the space of flows.

Section 4.3 pertains to the fourth research question: *Is there a difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces dealt with the pandemic?* Three important aspects of trust emerged during this analysis: (1) mobility, or the level of freedom for employees to work where they wanted; (2) the level of detail required in timesheets; and (3) the visibility of the employees' deliveries. In general, the employees interviewed did not seem to feel that they were under surveillance by their employer before the pandemic, nor that that they were not trusted. In the discussion, this was seen as an indication that the workplaces studied in this thesis do not represent the full range of this spectrum. Rather, they were all placed towards the trust-end of the spectrum, but some workplaces were shown to be more trust-based than others. The section established how this was prior to the pandemic, laying the groundwork for an analysis and discussion of changes in chapter 5.

Section 4.4 is connected to the third research question: *How has the relationship between work time, leisure, and expectation of availability changed?* Two important concepts were proposed in this section. The first was the categorization of employees as either *separators* or *mixers*. Prior to the pandemic, almost all interviewed employees were separators. The

second terminology was *separating* and *non-separating workplaces*. The former denotes workplaces that have a high segmentation norm, with a culture for maintain a clear work—life boundary. The latter describes the opposite situation. The findings and the proposed concepts were then developed further, resulting in a graphic representation (Figure 3) showing different combinations of personal segmentation preferences and workplace segmentation norms. The *conflict zone* was proposed as a concept that describes the combination of high personal segmentation preference and low workplace segmentation norm. This phenomenon was empirically most clearly demonstrated in the discussion of Helen's situation.

Now that the situation prior the pandemic has been established, analyzed, and discussed, it is time to find out how these aspects of work life have changed. This will be the central theme in the next chapter, were we move on to the work situation during the pandemic.

5 A new normal: work life during the pandemic

After the first lockdown measures were implemented, many employees were required to work from home. This dramatically changed a range of aspects of work life, many of which connected to the areas discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will analyze how these aspects of work life have changed during the pandemic. I will discuss how the employees experienced these changes, and the ways in which their existing notions of work were both changed and continued in this "new normal".

There are four important areas of focus that make up this chapter: (1) working from home; (2) new and old work habits during the pandemic; (3) requirements for documenting work during the pandemic; and (4) what happens when work time and leisure collide in the private home. A chapter conclusion will be provided towards the end of the chapter.

5.1 Working from home

With the pandemic, the role of working from home has undergone dramatic changes. As we saw in section 4.2, the employees worked mainly at the office, only working from home on specific work tasks or under special circumstances. There was also varying technical infrastructure, where some employees were hindered from working from home on certain work tasks. Another vital component of working from home was that organizational norms to a large degree discouraged doing this. With the outbreak of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures, the private home went from being an optional place of work, to being the required and only option. Not only did it become required, but it did so abruptly, more or less overnight.

The space of flows and domestication theory were important analytical tools in section 4.2, which analyzed the relationship between the traditional office and working from home before the pandemic. The main argument was that although the space of flows is illustrated clearly by new ways of working remotely, afforded by communication technology, the way these technologies were domesticated often hindered the new possibilities from becoming a reality. The user patterns that emerged kept remote working as an option that could not be freely used, and it was seen as something inferior to working in the traditional office. How these organizational norms have developed during the pandemic, will be important to discuss here.

With the abrupt change of office situation, new situations and challenges has come to light. The employees interviewed recount a range of aspects that are important to consider. These can be grouped in four important themes, which will be the focus of analysis and discussion in this section: (1) technical infrastructure; (2) physical infrastructure; (3) family situation; and (4) changes in organizational norms.

(1) With working from home becoming the new normal, it is important that the technical infrastructure does not hinder employees from doing their work tasks. This has worked out quite well for most of the employees, with Barbara as a notable exception. As previously

mentioned, she is dependent on heavy software and a good Internet connection. She does not get the same speed at home as she does in the office and says that it has not always worked so well. Some of the deliveries she works with are urgent, and because the technical infrastructure at home is an obstacle, she has worked at the office sometimes in order to get them done. The restrictions at her workplace are flexible, which means that this is possible despite working from home being the default location of work.

For Hector, an important reason for not using the option to work from home before the pandemic, was that he could not access all the "zones" he needed to outside the office. This was because of security restrictions. During the pandemic, however, these zones have become available for him in his home as well. This is a good example of how the pandemic has contributed to forcing the technological solutions in the workplaces forward, as some of these *have* to work in the employees' private homes as well when working from home is the standard. An important finding, then, is that although technical infrastructure was mostly in place to allow a much higher degree of remote working prior to the pandemic, the pandemic has functioned as a sort of catalyzer, "forcing" the workplaces to overcome the technological barriers that still existed.

(2) The second theme is physical infrastructure. While the traditional office is built for its purpose, the private home is not necessarily built for functioning as an office. Elizabeth finds this particularly noticeable when it comes to ergonomics. She has furnished her home office with a "proper" chair and two computer monitors. Still, she thinks that her regular office is ergonomically better. This is both because it is more ergonomically designed, but also because she gets more "natural" breaks when she is working there. This is echoed by Christopher, who also highlights the absence of these natural breaks, and that he is less physically active when working from home. In the traditional office, he has to walk between floors to get to photocopiers and coffee machines. When he is at home, everything is within reach.

Another aspect, and overlapping with the technical infrastructure, is the access to proper office equipment at home. The most important equipment for the employees seems to be good computer monitors. Having a large screen can make a big difference on many work tasks, but this is not something that is to be found in all homes. In the cultural department, the employees have been able to "just order and pick up whatever [they] may need" (Christopher). Charlotte says the ICT-department has been very "generous" when it comes to making working from home work, offering monitors and whatever is necessary. Benjamin and Barbara in the construction consulting firm also get the equipment they need from their employer. From a domestication perspective, the managers in these workplace ease the appropriation phase (Silverstone et al., 1992) for their employees by taking the economic burden of procuring the necessary equipment.

This is in stark contrast to how Eric describes the situation at the energy company, as he describes the company as "extremely" slow. He says having extra monitors is very practical in his line of work, and that several of his co-workers have bought this equipment on their own initiative. Only after some months did his employer offer to reimburse employees for these purchases with a few thousand Norwegian kroner. He thinks they should have offered this much earlier.

A final aspect of physical infrastructure is space. While some may have a separate room for working, like Hector, others do not have this and has to work where they would normally relax after work. This has important consequences for the work—life boundary, which will be further discussed in section 5.4.

(3) The home situation is also an important component of working from home, and especially for employees working in the same house as their families. This is closely connected to the last theme on physical infrastructure, as limited space brings the family even closer together, so to speak. Charlotte puts it this way:

> (…) we don't have a very big house, so we don't have room for all this. (…) I don't want it to affect the house and the family more than necessary. And the kids have desks in their rooms and sit there, but we are not, I am not going to "rig up" in their room, so (…) my husband sits in the dining room, and I sit on a little desk in the living room, and then we have to try to finish up, and clear out [the work materials] as best we can to live a normal life (Charlotte).

With so many people working from home, she says that it can affect her concentration and focus if things get too hectic.

The number of family members in Christopher's household increased during the pandemic, as some of his children, now students, returned home. He says that this made it a bit cramped at home, also when considering Internet capacity. It took him some time getting used to, but now he thinks it works fine.

For Helen, working from home has not been easy, as she lives with family members with challenges. This was easier to handle when she worked in the traditional office but has become difficult to handle when she works from home. She has said to her employer that this results in reduced work efficiency, and she thinks that being required to work from home has been primarily unfortunate. Working from home can still be good thing on good days. She repeats that the circumstances in the home has to be right if working from home is to be a good arrangement.

We see that when working from home, different parts of the employees' lives that were previously separated, get mixed together. This can affect the employees' ability to concentrate on their work. This blurring of boundaries will be revisited and discussed more extensively in section 5.4. What is important to take away from this in this section, is that different family situations pose different challenges for working from home.

(4) The last important theme that emerged during the interviews, is that organizational norms have changed in the workplaces. As we saw in section 4.2, organizational norms played an important role in either encouraging or discouraging remote working. In this way, the impact of the space of flows (Castells, 2000a) was reduced as a result of workplace cultures that did not encourage working from home.

What has happened during the pandemic, however, is that working from home has achieved a very different status in the workplaces. Hector says that his impression is that his employer is going to allow more working from home in the future as well. For Eric, who described the most turbulent culture when it came to working from home, says that the pandemic has turned this on its head. Like Hector, his employer also indicates that employees will be allowed to work more flexibly. Other employees, that have not necessarily received explicit confirmation on this from their employers, say that they think that working from home will be more positively viewed after the pandemic, because it has been proven that it works.

In this section, important aspects of working from home during the pandemic has been analyzed. An important finding is that working from home is very often not built for the purpose of being used as an office. This can have consequences for ergonomics, and for the level of physical activity. Although this last point may not be considered an essential part for fulfilling an office's purpose, it has become clear that not having to walk across an

office building takes away an important physical dimension of the traditional office. Thus, I argue that it is indeed an important physical quality of the traditional office that is missing when working from home. The need to access proper computer monitors and similar equipment was also an important element to making working from home work properly. As we saw, there are big differences between workplaces when it comes to have quick the employers were to help their employees with acquiring this.

While a private home may not be built for functioning as an office, it is even less built for housing two adults in full-time jobs working from home, as well as children attending school digitally from home. This can affect employees' ability to concentrate on their work tasks to various extents. For Christopher, it was a situation that took some time getting used to, but eventually it worked out fine. For Helen, on the other hand, these mechanisms were more limiting. The family situation is thus another important factor affecting how it is to work from home.

Golden (2013) argues that research often fail to take into account the consequences of increased availability in both the work-to-family and family-to-work directions. With working from home becoming mandatory, I will argue that availability has increased drastically under the pandemic, as work has literally entered the private home. This will be further explored in section 5.4. For now, it is important to note that family life can have potentially crucial effects on the employee when working from home. Also, as Golden importantly argues, effects between work and family may go in both directions, and this will be further elaborated upon later.

The changes in organizational norms greatly affect the workings of the space of flows in practice (Figure 1), as discussed in section 4.2. Here, the organizational norms were shown to be an important limiting factor to the space of flows afforded by the workplaces' technical infrastructure. In this section, the technical infrastructure was shown to be adequate for working from home for all employees, except for Barbara. As the organizational norms that previously hindered working from home has changed during the pandemic, I will argue that the pandemic has functioned as a catalyzer that has forced workplaces to use these technologies. Now, we see a radically changed perception of working from home.

In conclusion, then, the space of flows has been greatly mediated by how the technologies that are its basis have been domesticated in the workplaces. The revolutionary consequences of the technologies envisioned by Castells have yet to come to full fruition, but the pandemic has changed the perceptions of working from home drastically, thus making the potential in the space of flows more accessible for employees. In addition to this empirical observation, there is also an important theoretical point to be made here; macro theories as those of Castells may benefit greatly from being applied in combination with micro theories, in this case domestication theory, to explain both greater changes in society, as well as why these may not be happening as quickly as initially expected.

The focus of this section has been how working from home has changed during the pandemic, with technical and physical infrastructure, family situation and changes in organizational norms as the main points of discussion. An aspect not discussed extensively here, is how work habits have changed during the pandemic. Has the transition to working from home changed these, or have they remained consistent despite the new situation? This will be explored in the next section.

5.2 New and old work habits during the pandemic

As shown in the previous section, working from home poses many challenges that were not present in the traditional offices. With so many changes to the office situation, it is important to understand how work habits have been affected. As the section title suggests, this section consists of two main parts. In the first, I point to important changes in work habits during the pandemic, as well as how some of these changes has had an impact on employees' digital skills. The second part highlights how many work habits have remained the same, but that some important "frames" surrounding them have changed.

The first important finding is that work hours have changed during the pandemic. This applies to most of the employees interviewed, in one way or another. Firstly, several employees report that they get to work later in the morning than they usually do, or that they wake up at a later time. Now that the office is just a few steps away from their bedroom, not all of the morning routines are necessary, for example commuting to work. Secondly, work hours are not as clearly defined as they used to be for some of the employees. This will be explored further in section 5.4, but is also an important aspect of changed work habits. Thirdly, for the employees in the culture department, it has become easier to stick to regular hours during the pandemic. This is because the cultural events they would normally attend outside regular hours, are not being held during the pandemic. Christopher says that is has become "calmer out there". In fact, Christopher has more time now than he used to have.

One of the most prominent changes to work habits during the pandemic, is the transition from physical to digital meetings. Barbara says that digital meetings is an important change, and that she communicates digitally with both colleagues and clients. How do these differ from their physical counterparts? And what do the employees think of them?

Christopher says that digital meetings are shorter and more effective than physical ones, thus freeing up time. Helen experience them as more "distant" than regular, physical meetings. For Benjamin, an important change is how they change the group dynamic among the attendees. He works remotely with colleagues working in another city and says that the dynamic in the digital meetings differ from physical ones. What he suspects, is that not all ideas are brought to the table as some of the group members do not talk that much in these meetings. This has to do with that they do not have "that eye contact". Thus, this way of working is not optimal for his projects. Charlotte has a similar experience. She has digital meetings with managers that are meant to maintain contact between management and employees. But with as many as 50 attendees, she says that these tend to end up as monologues. Some important characteristics of digital meetings, then, is that they are shorter, more "distant", and that they change group dynamics.

The attitudes towards digital meetings are generally positive.

> (…) we see it now, when we have been doing this for this long, that certain tasks, certain meetings and clarifications, if it is internal and we know each other well, then [digital meetings] work just fine on Teams[2] (Charlotte).

For Charlotte, then, important factors that make digital meetings work, is that the participants know each other, and what the purpose of the meeting is. Christopher has generally positive experiences with the digital meetings during the pandemic. For

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[2] Platform that offers video conferencing tools.

Benjamin, who is used to attending digital meetings before the pandemic as well, says that these work better when he works from home. This is because he avoids the disturbances in the open-plan office he usually works in. He thinks that he and his co-workers has achieved a good dialogue using Teams. They share screens, videos, models, drawings, and the like. He has also installed Teams on his phone, allowing him to attend the morning meeting while skiing, or driving. It is not always necessary for them to sit physically together, he says.

Despite many positive experiences with digital meetings, the employees are not without reservations. Helen says that digital meetings can be quite demanding, especially when she does not have an important role. Because of this, she avoids long digital meetings, and focuses on work where she has an active role. She did not consciously do this as much when she worked in the office. Christopher thinks that it is important to find the right balance between digital and physical meetings. This is because he thinks physical meetings between people are important. Charlotte expresses a similar sentiment. Although digital meetings can work well, she underlines that it is important that this option is used in a "smart" way. This means that digital meetings should not replace the physical ones, and that they must use digital meetings for "the right things".

All employees say that they miss contact with their colleagues when working from home. Therefore, attempts have been made to transfer some social arenas to the digital world. Hector finds these meetings a great help, as it makes it easier to start the workday from home to the same time as he would have in the office. Charlotte and her colleagues have continued having their morning coffee each morning, but now they do this digitally. She says that even though they have these and other digital meetings within her field, she does not get to hear what more peripheral colleagues are doing. In the construction consulting firm, too, they have some digital "gatherings". Barbara says that they can attend these to take a break from the work day.

Despite these digital versions of informal contact, it is apparent that it is hard to transfer the informal contact to the digital world. Elizabeth says that they also have their morning coffee digitally, but that it is not the same. For Hector, not having spontaneous conversations with colleagues is one of the biggest differences with working from home.

> (…) I feel that I have lost that conversation, in a way, that took place in the corridors or on the neighboring desk or around the coffee machine. (…) It is just as available with all the tools we have digitally, but someone has to take the initiative. It is not something that occurs spontaneosly if you, for example, meet someone by the coffee machine. (…) The threshold for making contact has perhaps changed (Hector).

To briefly summarize digital meetings during the pandemic, it can seem that there is a difference in their success between formal and informal meetings. For formal meetings where the goal is to complete work tasks, it works quite well, despite the downsides mentioned above. The informal meetings, on the other hand, have had a rougher transition. This indicates that the informal meetings are the ones that are the most difficult to digitize without losing important elements of them.

Another change in work habits that will only be briefly mentioned here, is that non-work activities have become more frequent during work hours. Both Eric and Charlotte do some house chores during their breaks at home, and Barbara likes to take a walk in the daylight during winter. How these activities play into the workday, and how it pertains to the work—life boundary, will be analyzed in section 5.4.

Under this dramatic increase in technology use for completing work tasks, the digital skills of employees have also increased. Eric points out that while they have not implemented many new digital solutions at his workplace, his skills with the existing tools have improved:

> (…) before [the pandemic], we had the opportunity to connect from home (…) we had the opportunity to upload to the software we're using, contract databases and such. But after the pandemic, [I] have become much better at using them, right? I have learning a lot more functionalities (Eric).

Benjamin, too, has experienced a significant improvement in both himself and others at his workplace:

> (...) I notice that now, we share document[s], the documents [just] flow back and forth. People are sharing screens, sharing chats, we can send messages to all meeting participants, and details on drawings. I think people have become skilled, and I think I have become skilled as well. And it has not been hard (Benjamin).

Elizabeth says that she has learned more about "digital worlds", for example Microsoft Teams. Charlotte agrees, saying that they have had a very steep learning curve when learning digital media and using them to communicate.

An important finding, then, is that the increased use of communication technology has had a big impact on the employees' digital skills. I will argue that this is strongly connected to the cognitive dimension of Sørensen's (2005) domestication model. How the employees learn to use technologies for communicating is highly dependent on having others to communicate with. With digital communication forms like digital meetings becoming the standard, this has fostered a more intensive learning environment for the employees. Some of the participants in this study say that they are provided digital courses for learning new work technologies, and they often have to make time in their schedule for attending these. During the pandemic, however, the cognitive dimension of these domestication processes has transitioned to a more "learning-by-doing" approach, which have made them more comfortable with using these technologies in a very short time.

While much has changed when it comes to work habits during the pandemic, there is also much that has remained the same. Barbara says that when the work day has started, work habits are not that different from what they used to be. Charlotte points out that the work habits connected to her "office related" tasks have not changed very much. Even the work hours have stayed the same for Elizabeth, as well as her work habits. Helen provides an interesting observation that seem to encapsulate what has changed for the employees. It is not necessarily the work habits that have changed, but the "*frames*" surrounding them. Examples of what she calls frames, is the informal contact in the office, keeping up to date on what related state entities are concerned with at the moment, and the feeling of being a professional in a professional environment.

The term "frames" emerges as an apt description of what the employees miss most about the office: Christopher misses his co-workers and lunch time; Eric misses meeting people in the cantina and company gym, as well as the photocopier; Barbara also misses the photocopier, as well as having professional discussions and conducting meetings over the table; Elizabeth misses her colleagues and their morning coffee and lunch; and Benjamin, as well, misses talking with his co-workers. The point in mentioning all these examples, is to highlight that the changing frames encapsulating work life is one of the most important changes. Although we have seen that there have also been changes that pertain to work

tasks more directly, it is hard to overestimate the importance of the social framing of work life.

In this section, we have seen how work habits have changed during the pandemic: work hours are less clearly defined; physical meetings have been replaced with digital meetings; informal contact with co-workers has declined; and non-work activities are more prominent during regular work hours. The increased digital skills were seen as a result of a changed learning environment in the workplaces, and the cognitive dimension of domestication processes provided a tool for understanding these changes. Further, it is clear that many work habits have also remained the same during the pandemic. Helen's term "frames" quite accurately describes this consistency, in that the surrounding aspects that encapsulate work habits have changed. In conclusion, some work habits have changed in important ways. At the same time, other work habits have remained the same, but may still feel different because of the changed "framing" of work life.

As discussed in section 4.3, there are differences between the companies when it comes to trust and control. In the next section, I will look at how this has changed during the pandemic, and if there are differences in how trust-based and control-based workplaces have dealt with the pandemic.

5.3 Trust and control: requirements for documenting work during the pandemic

When employees have worked from home, the physical distance to their closest manager has increased. Consequentially, the ways in which managers can visually control their employees during the pandemic, has been drastically reduced. As described in the theory chapter, Kassah (2007) found that utilizing digital control-mechanisms to maintain control led to the employees feeling they were under surveillance, and that they interpreted them as a sign that they were not trusted to do their jobs. Echoing these findings, Bernstrøm and Svare (2017) found that the monitoring of employees was negatively related to the level of trust employees felt. Managers experiencing loss of control, combined with new technologies for monitoring employees, thus present pitfalls that can have significant consequences for trust in organizations.

How, then, does this manifest among the employees interviewed in this study? Do they experience an increase in the ways they have to document the work they are doing? Are the managers' need for control undermining trust between them and their employees?

For Barbara, a noticeable change is that she has to update her timesheet every day. Before the pandemic, they kept daily timesheets and had until Friday to turn them in, but in practice this deadline was the following Monday. During the pandemic, however, the requirement is that they have to write up their hours every day. She says that some employees do not have that much to do, and that the management needs to keep an overview over who has available time.

However, Barbara is the exception among the employees interviewed in this study. Hector says that documentation requirements possibly have increased a little bit, but not significantly. None of the other employees have experienced any increase in requirements for documenting work, as these have largely remained the same as they were before the pandemic. Elizabeth says that there have been no changes in these requirements, but that,

on the contrary, their management is very concerned with their employees' health, underlining that they need to take breaks and not sit working until late at night.

This is contrary to what was expected prior to the interviews, but nevertheless provides important insights into trust and control during the pandemic. Even though most of the participants have not had any changes in requirements for documenting their work, this does not mean that trust and control in the workplaces have not changed during the pandemic. Apart from the construction consulting firm Barbara works in, I will argue that the workplaces have, in fact, become even more trust-based during the pandemic. This is because we see a significant decrease in ways employers can visually monitor their employees, *combined* with the fact that they have not taken steps to replace these direct forms of control.

Why, then, have the spread of new forms of monitoring not occurred during the pandemic? Based on theory on trust and control presented in section 2.3, I argue that there are at least three important reasons that might explain this: (1) trust-building before the pandemic; (2) the work is "self-controlled"; and (3) pre-existing processes towards more trust in the workplace.

Firstly, all workplaces represented in this study have existed for many years prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. Consequentially, managers and employees have had a lot of time to establish trust-relationships when working in the same physical location. Kassah (2007) argues that media with low communication complexity can reduce opportunities for groups members to form trust-relationships. Therefore, they may have benefited from the trust established before the pandemic, making the trust-relationships more robust when they could not see each other every day. A company founded during the pandemic, with only digital communication platforms, might have experienced this very differently, and would be an interesting topic for future research.

Secondly, we saw in section 4.3 that many of the work tasks the employees do are "self-controlled". In the absence of detailed time sheets, or in addition to them, work is controlled "automatically" as others depend on the results of the employees' work. In other words, control is not dependent on visual oversight or timesheets alone. Because of this, the transition to employees working from home did not warrant a dramatic increase in monitoring, as these mechanisms were spread across different ways of controlling employees' work.

Thirdly, as discussed in connection to the space of flows (Castells, 2000a), the freedom to do work from different locations and at different hours of the day has been increasing for a long time. These processes necessitate increased trust in employees, as they cannot be visually observed when distributed across different locations (Kassah, 2007). The transition towards more trust has thus been going on for a long time, where, in Kassah's words, trust and control are not seen as opposites, but where trust foster a form of indirect control based on expectations to the other group members' future actions. Although the pandemic indeed posed a major disruption to work life, several of the workplaces in this study was already on their way to a changed trust-control-relationship. In the context of this section, the pandemic has thus accelerated processes that were already happening. This might be an important explanation for why workplaces did not rush to implement digital monitoring systems, as this was in many ways the next step for them towards a more trust-based management culture.

Below, a graphic representation is presented (Figure 4), showing how the workplaces in this study have changed during the pandemic when it comes to trust and control. It is based on Figure 2 presented in section 4.3. As discussed above, most of the workplaces have not experienced any changes in requirements for documenting work, despite lack of visual oversight by their managers. The dashed arrows indicates that they have moved in the direction of becoming more trust based. As mentioned earlier, Barbara has to keep a tighter time sheet, so that her manager can keep control over work hours on a daily basis. The construction consulting firm is thus represented in the figure as having moved towards a more control-based management culture.
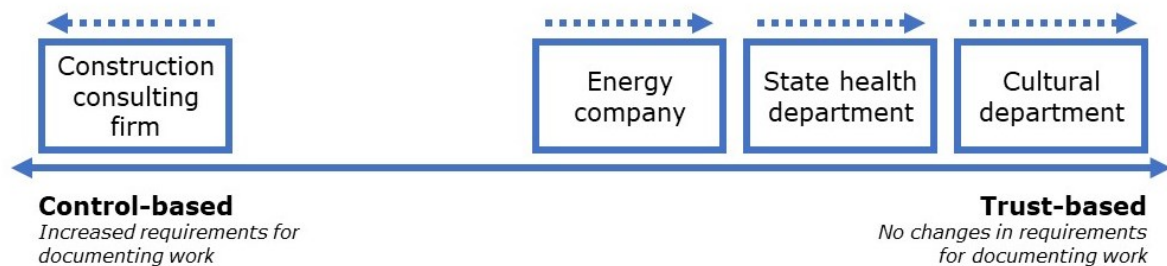

Figure 4: Changes in trust and control in the workplaces during the pandemic.

We have this far explored and discussed changes pertaining to working from home, work habits, and trust and control during the pandemic. In the next section, many aspects touched upon in these sections will come together in an analysis of work—life boundaries during the pandemic, and what happens when work time and leisure collide. The section is the last main point in the analysis chapters.

5.4 When work time and leisure collide

In section 4.4, the concept of *separators* and *mixers* was proposed, with the former category being the employees that keep a clear work—life boundary, and the latter blurring this boundary by mixing work time and leisure. Before the pandemic, almost all of the employees could be considered separators, with Benjamin falling somewhere in between the categories. With working from home as the new normal during the pandemic, work time and leisure both suddenly came to exist within the private home. How has this affected the employees' work—life boundaries? Are they still separators, or have they found new preferences during this period? Using Castells' theories on the space of flows and timeless time (Castells, 2000a) and domestication theory as theoretical tools, these questions will be explored in this last section before the chapter conclusion.

An important finding is that not all employees are separators after the pandemic, and that some of them now mix work time and leisure to a greater extent. In fact, the employees interviewed are now split down the middle when it comes to work—life boundary preferences. In this section, we will first look at those that have remained separators during the pandemic, and their experiences with maintaining clear boundaries. While some of these indeed happen to mix work and leisure, they are mainly trying to keep them

separated. Then, the same experiences will be explored among the mixers. Concluding the section is a discussion of these findings.

> I notice that I become, can become a bit restless when I work from home. In fact, a bit dizzy, that you don't move, that (…) work and workplace and the home, the free place in a way, it becomes one blob (Christopher).

Separators. The quote above is illustrative of how the disappearance of physical boundaries between work and leisure can feel for an employee. Christopher used to think he was very good at "disconnecting" from work, especially when leaving the physical office. This has become more difficult when his work station is at home, resulting in what he calls a "blob" (Norwegian: *grøt*). He notices that this makes him a bit less effective. Elizabeth makes a related statement, saying that her commute to and from work can help her clear her head, and that this routine has disappeared during the pandemic.

Charlotte also tries to separate work and free time clearly, as she can easily lose focus and needs work time to be defined. She says she does not find it very hard to keep them separated. However, she does experience that the private home being the location for both work and relaxation can make it a bit harder:

> And for me, used to home "being home", really have to pull myself together in order to think, "no, I'm actually at work", when I don't have a separate office but am located in the house. It is very strange after the weekend and such, and when we are at home so much, and then you walk down [the stairs] on Monday, [thinking], "no, now I'm at work". And then it looks just the same. Right? (Charlotte).

Christopher and Charlotte's statements indicate that the private home is an important physical manifestation of the notions that make up the concept of leisure or free time. When the same physical structures suddenly encapsulate work life, the boundaries between the previously separated parts of life become blurred. Thus, if one wants to maintain a clear work—life boundary, it is necessary with a conscious effort on the employee's part.

Elizabeth is also a separator during the pandemic but seem to handle boundaries without much difficulty. She keeps to the same work hours as in the office. An important point she makes, is that this might be easier for her because her husband works outside of the house, and they do not have children living with them that comes home from school.

Children is also an important keyword for Helen, who, as previously mentioned, lives with family members that might need extra attention. She wants to have a clear work—life boundary, but this is a challenge that can make it hard to maintain it. Apart from this, she does not do many non-work activities during the work day.

Both Christopher and Charlotte have children that live with them as well, and they notice that this does interfere with their workday. Christopher says that when working from home, his children might sometimes intervene in his workday, as he helps them with homework or goes for a drive to "get things". Charlotte may do some "football logistics" (organized activity for her children) and some private phone calls during work time.

Although the separators try to keep boundaries clearly defined, breaks during the workday inevitably pertains to home affairs when working from home. Helen sometimes puts on the washer or walks her dogs, and Christopher reads some newspapers or visits Finn.no[3]. He

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[3] Digital marketplace for second-hand items.

says that these activities function as breaks, as there are few natural breaks when working from home. Elizabeth agrees. During her workday, she may do some leisure-connected activities, like reading the news. Sometimes she needs a couple of minutes just to clear her head, especially after working with particularly demanding tasks.

> And of course, when you are at home, it is much easier putting on the dishwasher, [to] put some clothes in the washing machine. (…) I think, it is the same as if I were at the office and had walked down the corridor to speak to a colleague, just to have a little break (Elizabeth).

These activities are thus seen as breaks during the workday, rather than a mixing of work and non-work.

Mixers. For the mixers, non-work activities are much more prominent during regular work hours. In this group, these types of activities do not constitute mere breaks, but can be whole portions of the regular work hours. As a result, these work hours are caught up with at a later time.

In contrast to the other mixers, Hector might be considered a "reluctant" mixer. This is because his work—life boundary has become more permeable, without him wanting it to. Hector says that he is more available now than he was before the pandemic. He has work access on his phone, and says he is not good at disconnecting from work. His workday as defined be his regular work hours does not apply any longer. He remarks that this also has to do with his employer allowing for more flexibility.

> Putting work away, when [I] walk off the bus (…) when I come home and open the door and then I am (…) done [with work], I don't have that feeling anymore (Hector).

During the pandemic, when working from home, he has felt more conflicts between worktime and free time than before and thinks this has to do with him being more available. He also finds it hard to plan things, as he feels that his work is important. Free time does not always get prioritized above work. Now that he is much closer to his free time "as a place", his work activities and private activities have melted together more than they used to do. He finds it tiresome to combine work time and leisure when he is home. "It is nice having flexibility, but it does require more self-discipline" (Hector). He would like there to be a clearer line between work time and leisure.

Private activities he does during work hours are limited to a few private phone calls and emails, as well as taking out of the dishwasher. When working from home, and his free time is closer to him when working, he thinks that work time and free time need to "give and take". What separates him from the other mixers, is that it is not leisure activities during work hours that put him in the category – rather, it is more work hours during what used to be off-time.

For the remaining employees, Eric, Benjamin, and Barbara, the new opportunities to mix work and leisure to a larger to degree, has more positive connotations. Barbara notices that when she is working from home, work time and leisure blend a bit together. Sometimes, she goes outside or goes skiing for an hour around lunch time. The consequence of this is that she works an hour extra in the evening. She says her employer is very flexible, and that as long as she works the number of hours she is supposed to, there is no problem going skiing during work hours. This is a good thing, she says, "because the times we live in are a bit special" (Barbara).

Rather than trying to maintain a separation of work time and leisure during the pandemic, Eric has welcomed the opportunity to mix these as he likes. They have no formal rules for

separating work and free time in his company, only encouragement. He does leisure activities during work hours every day, for example taking a longer break to go for a run or walk the dog. Doing house chores, like washing clothes or prepare dinner, is something he considers a great advantage with working from home. To make sure no one needs him at work when he does these activities during work hours, he "locks" his calendar. He does this by scheduling a "private appointment" and is in this way guaranteed that he is not booked for any meetings.

Much like Eric, Benjamin has embraced the opportunity to mix work time and leisure during the pandemic. As he works several hundred hours extra each year, the traditional work—life boundary is highly permeated. In some periods, he has a lot of work he needs to get done, and he has felt that he just needs to accept that this will be at the expense of free time. He says that it is no problem taking some time off during the day, as long as he does what he is supposed to and catches up in the evening. However, he needs to be present at meetings he is required to attend.

Children is an important reason for breaking up the workday for some of the mixers as well. Eric has three adult children living in the same city as him, and as they know he works from home, it has been easier for them to ask him to drive them somewhere or come along for shopping. He does not consider these activities as just "service", but as nice things that he gladly uses an hour on if possible. He finds it hard to answer whether he wants a clear separation of work life and leisure. While he does want the old normal back, and do not view today's situation as sustainable in the long run, he thinks there are advantages with it. He thinks it is positive that he can have more free time in the course of a workday. When asked if he does anything to separate work time and leisure, he responds: "no, I think I'm more consciously mixing them, as I can make myself a bit more comfortable that way" (Eric).

When Benjamin's children are staying with him, he often loses a work hour or so, which he needs to catch up on after they are in bed. This is because they come home around 3 PM, and then he might need to prepare food for them or drive them to organized activities. He thinks that mixing time like this works well and thinks that it is better for his children. This is because they might feel that he is more at home when he mix like this.

Benjamin understands that many do not want to work outside regular work hours, but he thinks the situation he has chosen has given him increased freedom. At the same time, he acknowledges that it might be a bit stressing for his head to not disconnect from work. When asked if he wants a clear separation of work time and leisure, he says:

> No, I actually think it [has] been, the freedom I have now to maybe choose myself, I think that has been… So, I don't think I am looking for a clear separation (Benjamin).

The new situation during the pandemic has clearly opened up for mixing work and leisure to a much larger extent than before. How the employees deal with this varies greatly, and we see that during the pandemic the employees interviewed split equally between the separators/mixers-categories proposed. The separators try to maintain the boundaries as they were, despite work and leisure being situated under the same roof during the pandemic. Maintaining a clear separation can be difficult, as Helen describes, or it can be quite easy, as is the case for Elizabeth. We also saw that children at home can play an important role.

In contrast to this, we also saw that the mixers are more open to mixing work and leisure, and that half of the employees interviewed had transitioned to this category in the course

of the pandemic. With Hector as the exception as a more reluctant mixer, Barbara, Eric, and Benjamin see mixing as a more voluntary activity that gives them some advantages they did not have before. Eric says he can make himself more comfortable, while Benjamin points to increased freedom. Here as well, we saw how the employees' children were an important part of their non-work activities during regular work hours.

There is an interesting connection to be made to Figure 3, that showed different combinations of personal segmentation preference and workplaces segmentation norm. It also proposed the concept of the *conflict zone*, where personal segmentation preference is high, while the workplace segmentation norm is low. Based on the findings in the current section, I will argue that when working from home, there are new expectations that have entered the picture. Not only do the employee need to consider the workplace segmentation norm, but family may also demand attention during the work day.

This becomes especially apparent when considering the employees with children living at home. For Helen, this can be challenge, and in this way, family situation also contributes to gaps between personal segmentation preference and what is achievable. The same applies for Charlotte, Christopher, Eric, and Benjamin as well, although the consequences here are less negative. In fact, some employees see it as a positive aspect of working from home that they get to mix family life and work life. This means that increased involvement in family during work hours does not *need* to be experienced as a negative thing, but when it is, the employee is clearly pushed towards the conflict zone presented in Figure 3.

These findings correspond to what Golden (2013) highlights in her study, that the consequences of increased availability does not only have effects in the work-to-home direction, but also home-to-work. One of her main points of concern, is that existing literature tend to *either* take the perspective of the workplace *or* the domestic sphere. Now that the workplace *is* the domestic sphere, at least physically, the context for this thesis can provide findings that accommodates this gap in the literature.

Another important phenomenon that is empirically demonstrated in this section, is Castells' concept of the space of flows (2000a). As previously discussed, the advance in digital communication technologies has been paramount for the emergence of the space of flows and has made the physical location of work less important for employees. This prerequisite is important for all employees working from home. However, Benjamin has taken this a bit further. He has taken advantage of these possibilities by attending meetings while driving, or even skiing. When considering physical location, he has some of the most "extreme" practices in this study and can be seen as the embodiment of Castells' most grand expectations for future work life.

Especially helpful for understanding the mixers, is the concept of timeless time (Castells, 2000a). Desequencing is an important part of this concept that illustrates an important point, as the mixers disassemble and reassemble the contents of their days. This is possible because of communication technology that allows them to access and process the information they need for their work tasks, regardless of the time of day. It is also possible because of the nature of their work tasks, that not always depend on other people. Eric even "locks" his calendar to maintain this way of working, scheduling a "private appointment" when he wants to do non-work activities during regular work hours.

Now that important aspects of work life during the pandemic have been analyzed and discussed, a chapter conclusion will be presented. This will recapitulate important findings and discussion points from chapter 5.

5.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed and discussed the employees' work situation during the pandemic. Drawing on the findings in chapter 4, important changes in work life have been identified. In this section, I will briefly summarize the findings and discussions in chapter 5. Symmetrical to the chapter conclusion in chapter 4, I will point to which research sub-questions they address. I will also point to their corresponding section in chapter 4.

Section 5.1 seeks to address the first sub-question: *How have the role and attitudes towards working from home changed?* It corresponds to section 4.2, and identifies important changes. In this section, four important themes emerged: (1) technical infrastructure; (2) physical infrastructure; (3) family situation; and (4) changes in organizational norms. An important finding was that the participants had become more positive towards working from home. This has implications for the space of flows in practice (Figure 1): by alleviating some of the organizational norms that discouraged working from home, the space of flows has become more apparent for the employees. Another important aspect was that family situation is a substantial part of working from home, and that different family situations can have a significant impact on how working from home is experienced by the individual employee.

Section 5.2 pertains to new and old work habits during the pandemic, and addresses the second research question: *How have work habits changed?* Corresponding to section 4.2, several important changes were identified: work hours have changed; physical meetings have been replaced with digital ones; and informal contact between co-workers has declined. The employees' digital skills have improved during the pandemic, and this was seen as a result of a transition in the employees' learning environment from course-based to a more intensive learning-by-doing approach. Although several changes were identified, it also became clear that many work habits have remained the same during the pandemic. Helen's formulation of "frames" was applied as a useful term for describing how some parts of work life have remained the same, while the social structures encapsulating them have changed.

In section 5.3, changing requirements for documenting work during the pandemic was explored, with an aim to understand differences between trust-based and control-based workplaces. It builds on the discussions in section 4.3, and seeks to answer sub-question 4: *Is there a difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces dealt with the pandemic?* The findings contradicted initial expectations, showing that most employees did not experience any changes in documentation requirements. The exception was Barbara in the construction consulting firm. Three important reasons were proposed that might explain this: (1) trust-building before the pandemic; (2) the work is "self-controlled"; and (3) pre-existing processes towards more trust in the workplace. It was argued that the combination of reduced visual oversight and no increase in increased documentation requirements or digital monitoring, was an indication that most workplaces had indeed become even more trust-based during the pandemic, with the exception of the construction consulting firm. These changes were shown in Figure 4.

Section 5.4 focused on the consequences of work time and leisure colliding in the private home. This section built on the findings and discussion in section 4.4, and answers sub-question 3: *How has the relationship between work time, leisure, and expectations of availability changed?* The concept of *separators* and *mixers* was applied to understand how

the employees reacted to the new possibilities to mix work time and leisure during the pandemic. An important change was that the employees are now distributed equally between the two categories, in stark contrast to the situation pre-pandemic when almost all the participants were clearly separators. Whereas the separators tried to maintain clear work—life boundaries during the pandemic, the mixers welcomed the opportunity to mix these to a larger degree than they used to. The mixers then worked in the evening to catch up with lost work hours. One significant factor that affected work life across these categories, was the presence of children at home when working. This had different consequences for different employees. The concept of space of flows (Castells, 2000a) was applied to understand important prerequisites for these new work patterns, and timeless time served as an important analytical tool for understanding how mixers desequence their days to make room for leisure activities during regular work hours.

This summary of important findings and discussion points from chapter 5 concludes the analysis chapters. The next chapter is the thesis' conclusion, where both chapter 4 and 5 will be brought together to point to the most important findings, tendencies, and discussions pertaining to changes in work life during the pandemic. Also, the way forward towards the "next normal" will be discussed.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I will summarize the findings and discussions in chapters 4 and 5, and in this way provide a conclusion to the thesis' research question:

How has work life changed during the pandemic?

To do this, the chapter will first be structured around the four sub-questions proposed in the introduction:

1. How has the role and attitudes towards working from home changed?
2. How have work habits changed?
3. How has the relationship between work time, leisure, and expectations of availability changed?
4. Is there a difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces dealt with the pandemic?

After this, I will discuss how these findings help answer the main research question. Here, I will also connect my findings to how the employees interviewed envision work life in the "next normal". Following this section, I will provide a brief reflection on how the selected theory and concepts have contributed to understanding these changes. To conclude the chapter, and this thesis, I will point to some limitations with my study and suggest some areas for further research.

6.1 Important changes in work life during the pandemic

(1) *How has the role and attitudes towards working from home changed?*

One of the most important findings pertaining to this question, is the dramatic change in the status of working from home. Prior to the pandemic, working from home was often considered irregular, and sometimes even as suspicious. And where this option was considered less problematic, it was still used only occasionally. The factors discussed that could explain this, was (1) technical infrastructure, (2) organizational norms that encouraged or discouraged working from home, as well as (3) the type of work planned for the day.

Findings on how this has changed during the pandemic brings attention to the second factor: organizational norms. When the employees talk about how working from home has changed during the pandemic, it is not great improvements in technical infrastructure that stand out. Indeed, for most of the participants, technical aspects did not hinder them from working from home. Rather, it is the organizational norms that have changed. Working from home is no longer considered abnormal and inferior to the traditional office but has become a more equal alternative to working in the office. Even though it is not necessarily a complete equal, this shift in attitude is significant, and strengthens the individual employee's freedom to choose where to work.

The role of working from home has also changed because working and attending school from home has become quite normal during the pandemic. Where working from home

before the pandemic often meant being home alone, this is no longer the case. While some of the participants interviewed did work alone at home, many did not. With family and work operating inside the four walls of the private home, what it means to work from home has also changed during the pandemic. Working from home full time is also something quite different than doing so only occasionally, which has become evident in that employees may not always have the room for the equipment they normally use in the office.

This change has been conceptualized through Figure 1, where the space of flows in practice was proposed as a result of both Castells' (2000a) concept of the space of flows, and organizational norms that mediate how available the space of flows are for employees in practice. The severe shift in attitudes towards working from home has alleviated some of the discouragement employees received on working from home before the pandemic. During the pandemic, then, the space of flows and its associated promises of radical changes in work life, have become more apparent in a relatively short amount of time.

(2) *How have work habits changed?*

Work habits during the pandemic are characterized by both change and consistency. Some important aspects that have changed are work hours, meetings, and informal contact. Work hours have changed for many participants, in that they do not keep to the regular work hours anymore. How this affected work—life boundaries were further explored in connection to sub-question 3. Further, physical meetings have been replaced with digital ones. The success of these meetings was experienced differently between participants, but work-related digital meetings was shown to work quite well for certain types of meetings. Informal contact between co-workers have declined during the pandemic, an aspect of work life the participants missed. The digitalization of these interactions did not work out as well as the work-related ones.

The decline of informal interaction between employees is related to the aspects that have not changed, what Helen called "frames". What she emphasizes, is that many work habits have remained the same, while aspects that encapsulate these have changed. The frames surrounding work life thus serve as an important expression of how the employees have experienced changes in work life during the pandemic. While there are some work habits that have changed, the frames are more important to describe important changes. In this way, many work habits might have remained the same but still feel very different because it is no longer packaged in all the little things that make a traditional workplace.

This poses the question of how well these frames are acknowledged in the concept of the space of flows. While it might be possible to work remotely, and with the space of places being rendered less relevant than before, the fact that informal contact can be hard to digitalize points to an obstacle for the realization of the space of flows. I will argue that the work technology available today may offer all the technical infrastructure to work from home, but the technology for communicating with co-workers is not adequate for the space of flows to be fully realized. Although phone calls, video calls, chat, mail, and other communication platforms have been around for a long time, technology has yet to reach the level where digital communication is more or less the same as live, physical communication. Already highlighted through the proposed concept of space of flows *in practice*, the space of flows needs to be considered in light of social cultures, and many aspects of these cultures have yet to be fully transferrable to the digital. This helps to partly explain why the frames Helen speaks about can be felt so clearly among the employees.

Further, the increased use of digital tools among the employees was argued to have fostered a more intensive learning environment, where employees *have* to use the technology that facilitates remote working. Thus, the cognitive dimension of the domestication processes (Sørensen, 2005) in the workplaces have changed. This was argued to be an important reason for why the participants report to have gained increased skills in the digital tools in their workplaces. Increased digital skills, then, is an important consequence of work habits becoming more digital.

(3) *How has the relationship between work time, leisure, and expectations of availability changed?*

To understand these relationships, an important concept was proposed: *separators* and *mixers*. The former describes employees looking for a clear work—life boundary, and the latter denotes those that mix work time and leisure. Prior to the pandemic, almost all participants could be categorized as separators. Drawing on the terminology in Park et al. (2011), the workplaces were also categorized as either *separating* or *non-separating* workplaces, depending on the segmentation norm in the respective workplace. Conflict arose when the employee wanted to maintain a clear work—life boundary and the workplace had a tradition for blurring this boundary (Figure 3). This was empirically demonstrated in the case of Helen, where there was a clear discrepancy between her preferences for keeping a clear work—life boundary, and her workplace's culture for work activities in the evenings.

When it comes to how the relationship between work time, leisure and expectations of availability have changed during the pandemic, one of the most important findings is that the participants now distribute evenly between separators and mixers. This shows that several of the participants have taken the opportunity to mix work time and leisure to a larger extent than they used to, now that they work from home and can mix more easily. Importantly, it also shows that not all employees saw these new mechanisms as liberating, but instead tried to keep the work—life boundary unchanged from how it used to be prior to the pandemic. The separators correspond to the findings of Crowe and Middleton (2012), which found that employees set boundaries around work-technologies in order to maintain their separation preferences. Again, we see how a domestication perspective helps nuance Castells' concepts, by showing that while the technology presented might be the same, employees deal with them and domesticate them in profoundly different ways.

These relationships have also changed in the way that previously separated parts of life now exist at the same time in the same place – the private home. This was shown most evidently in the case of family and children. Employees' children play an important part of working from home for both separators and mixers and has important consequences for the relationship between work time and leisure. However, it affected the employees differently, as their family situations differed greatly. What is clear is that when family, leisure, and work collide in the private home, it introduces new challenges employees need to handle in order to maintain their preferred balance between work and leisure.

(4) *Is there a difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces dealt with the pandemic?*

Prior to the pandemic, the employees interviewed did not seem to feel they were under surveillance, nor did they express feelings of being mistrusted by their employers. Based on the data from the interviews, three important aspects of trust were proposed: (1) mobility, or the level of freedom to work where they want; (2) level of detail required in

timesheets; and (3) the visibility of employees' deliveries. The workplaces were placed on a trust-control-spectrum (Figure 2), and it was argued that the workplaces represented in this thesis are positioned more towards the trust-end of the spectrum. The figure thus showed how they were placed on this spectrum in relation to each other.

During the pandemic, the workplaces had in general not become more control-based, with the exception of the construction consulting firm. Thus, this firm went from being the most control-based among the companies before the pandemic, to becoming even more control-based after the outbreak. The employees from the other workplaces did not experience any increase in requirements for documenting work, and it was argued that these workplaces had become even more trust-based, as they had not compensated for a reduction in visual control with increased requirements for documentation or monitoring of the employees. Three important reasons were proposed that might explain why increased monitoring did not take place: (1) trust-building before the pandemic; (2) that the work is "self-controlled"; and (3) pre-existing processes towards more trust in the workplace.

The construction consulting firm was already the most control-based before the pandemic among the workplaces represented in this thesis and has moved even further towards that end of the spectrum in the course of the pandemic. The remaining workplaces have moved towards a more trust-based management style. While one might not draw any clear conclusion from this, what we see is that the most trust-based workplaces did not suddenly turn to strictly control-based workplaces, or vice-versa. To answer sub-question 4, then, the most control-based workplace reacted to the pandemic with increased control, while the remaining trust-based workplaces did not. In other words, the difference in how trust-based and control-based workplaces dealt with the pandemic is that the most trust-based workplaces have become even more trust-based, while the most control-based (the construction consulting firm) has become even more control-based.

What remains to be seen, is how this will transpire after the pandemic. Will these changes in trust and control remain, or will we see an increase in control mechanisms when working from home? When the employees were required to work from home, more trust was in many ways necessary. It will therefore be important to follow these developments in the time ahead.

6.2 The next normal

In this thesis, I have studied employees that find themselves in a work situation that is unprecedented during the last decades, and their experiences with maneuvering in this new landscape. The pandemic is still not over, and it is impossible to say for certain how it will affect work life in the future. However, after talking with the employees during the interviews, there are some things that they seem quite certain will outlast the pandemic and become part of the next "normal". With the findings and discussions presented in the analysis chapters in mind, I will formulate a concluding answer to the thesis' main research question: *How has work life changed during the pandemic?*

It has become clear that work life has changed dramatically during the pandemic, and that this is evident in all the sub-questions investigated. While all the aspects discussed represent important changes during the pandemic, there is one overarching element that seems to pertain to most of them, and that all participants brought up when asked how they thought work life would become in the next normal: *increased flexibility*. While the

multitude of findings in this thesis could produce a long list of how work life has changed during the pandemic (see chapter conclusions 4.5 and 5.5 for an overview), I will argue that what we see is increased flexibility pertaining to many aspects, two of which are work—life boundaries and the physical location of work.

Although Castells' visions of how the transition from the space of places to the space of flows will affect work life have yet to come to full fruition, the changes during the pandemic must be considered another major shift towards this. The pandemic is not a technological event per se, but this thesis shows that it has fostered great development in how we use the technology that was already available to us. And, importantly, that how the technology is used is heavily dependent on the preferences of the individual employee, and how they choose to domesticate it.

6.3 Theory in empirical context

As part of this thesis' closing statements, it is important to reflect on the theory applied in it. How have the theories and concepts acted as analytical tools in the thesis? And how does this thesis contribute to add nuance to these theories? In this section, I will briefly point to some of the most important aspects of this.

One of the two theoretical perspectives constituting this thesis' theoretical framework, is Castells' theories on the network society (2000a). Especially the concepts of *space of flows* and *timeless time* have been important. The space of flows has been useful for understanding new ways of working, where the physical location of work has been rendered less relevant than it used to be. During the pandemic, when many employees have had to work from home, the space of flows has served as an important prerequisite for this practice to be possible. At the same time, I have highlighted through the concept of space of flows *in practice*, that the technical means for these practices are not enough to make them a reality. The organizational norms in the workplaces have been shown to have a great mediating effect on the realization of the potential that lies in the space of flows. This is an important nuance to the theory highlighted in this thesis.

Timeless time has been an important concept when trying to understand the employees' work practices during the pandemic, in particular the *mixers*. This group of employees now desequence and reassemble different parts of their lives to their own liking, challenging the traditional work—life boundary. However, an important point made in this thesis, is that it is not given that employees will use these new possibilities to desequence their days. The implication of this, is that the technical means for timeless time does not necessarily make time timeless for employees – it is up to them if they want to blur work—life boundaries. This is supported by the findings in this thesis, where the realization of Castells' concepts is shown to be highly dependent on how employees domesticate the technology.

Domestication theory has thus served as an important theoretical tool for showing nuances in Castells' concepts. Domestication processes in the workplace mediated the space of flows, as organizational norms prior to the pandemic often discouraged working from home. Also, employees' domestication processes have a mediating effect on timeless time, as shown above. The perspective found in domestication theory has also served as a more overarching view of how the processes studied can be understood. Steering away from deterministic ideas, this perspective helps us avoid analyzing the data through the notion

that this is about what technology *does to* the employees. Rather, it opens up for an understanding of "co-production" (Skjølsvold, 2015), where the users are seen as active users that shape the technology. However, I will argue that this perspective benefits from being applied together with macro theory, like Castells' theories on the network society. Especially in the context of work life, where the individual employee is restricted by organizational norms and other demands concerning work-related technology-use, it is important to acknowledge that the employee's agency to shape technology is not without limits.

I have also relied on literature more specific for the topic, which have helped gain a greater understanding of how the findings in this thesis relates to the broader academic field. A reflection on all these would be too extensive to fit into this conclusion, and I will therefore highlight three previous studies that have provided essential concepts and perspective for my analysis. Firstly, the article from Park et al. (2011) has been important for understanding the importance of organizational norms in the workplace. Also, the concept of the *perceived segmentation norm* became essential in the development of Figure 3. Secondly, Kassah's (2007) study has provided useful tools for discussing trust and control during the pandemic. The pitfalls of digital monitoring of employees, as well as how control-mechanisms based on visual oversight disappears in distributed groups, became important discussion points in my study as well. Thirdly, Golden's (2013) comments on existing literature tending to *either* take the perspective of the workplace *or* the domestic sphere, has been important for the construction of the analysis, as I have aimed to accommodate this gap in the literature.

6.4 Limitations and future research

Although this thesis makes important contributions to the emerging understanding of work life during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to point out some limitations. The first pertains to the time period studied, as the study is conducted in "the heart of the storm", so to speak. This is not a longitudinal study, and follow-up studies are necessary to ascertain which changes that actually outlast the pandemic, and which were emergency solutions that will be abandoned when possible. Reflections were made on this in this chapter but needs to be followed up on in future studies.

The second limitation is the generalizability of the study, as the number of participants totals eight. However, this study aims to be explorative and to map some important challenges, aspects and dimensions that have emerged during the new situation under the pandemic. With eight participants, I cannot be sure that all these have been covered, but I will argue that I have unveiled many of them and proposed some important concepts and figures that can help understand these new phenomena. The coining of the concepts *separators* and *mixers* is one example of how the thesis has conceptualized important elements of pandemic work life, and of modern work life in general. Also, the variety of experiences presented in the thesis indicate that the employees interviewed represent a wide range of how employees out there have experienced working during the pandemic. Future research can nevertheless benefit from studying these phenomena in a larger sample, and the concepts and findings presented in this study, can provide useful tools for their research designs.

A third limitation is that the employees interviewed are all employed in information intensive professions. However, many different professions have been affected by the

pandemic. Other professions will likely have different challenges related to them, for example those related to health care, service, and industry. These professions provide interesting focus areas for future research. Particularly, it would be interesting to see how the findings in this thesis differ from those found among employees in other professions, and which are more universal across professions.

Lastly, the thesis has not focused on more classic sociological variables, such as gender, age, socio-economic status, education, and so on. I have interviewed employees in their 20s and 50s, with most of them belonging to the latter age group, and it would be interesting to know how the experiences discussed differ or are consistent across age groups. Future research could therefore focus on these areas as well, to identify how experiences with pandemic work life differ between employees of different genders, social backgrounds, and of different ages.

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Appendix A

Mail til informanter

Invitasjon til deltakelse i forskningsprosjekt om å være arbeidstaker i et digitalisert arbeidsliv

Hei,

Jeg ble tipset om deg fra [sett inn navn], og lurer på om du kunne tenke deg å stille til et intervju i et forskningsprosjekt/masteroppgave om å være arbeidstaker i et digitalisert arbeidsliv. Det tar ca. 60 minutter, og alle data vil være anonymisert i den ferdige masteroppgaven. Intervjuet vil foregå via videosamtale.

Jeg er masterstudent i medier, kommunikasjon og informasjonsteknologi ved institutt for sosiologi og statsvitenskap på NTNU. Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke hvilken rolle informasjons- og kommunikasjonsteknologi spiller for skillet mellom arbeidstid og fritid for arbeidstakere. Mer informasjon finner du i vedlagte informasjonsskriv.

Jeg ville satt stor pris på om du vil stille. I undersøkelsen ønsker jeg en kvinne og en mann fra hvert foretak. Dersom du i tillegg kunne tipset meg om en [kvinne/mann] fra din arbeidsplass som kan tenkes å ville delta i prosjektet, hadde det vært veldig fint. Intervjuene vil foregå separat.

Dersom det er noe du lurer på er det bare å spørre.

Ser frem til å høre fra deg!

Med vennlig hilsen

Markus Engeland

Tlf: 944 37 383

Appendix B

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
"Friheter og begrensninger i et digitalisert arbeidsliv"?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvilken rolle IKT (informasjons- og kommunikasjonsteknologi) spiller for skillet mellom arbeidstid og fritid. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål
Med IKT har arbeidslivet endret seg enormt, på mange forskjellige områder. I dette forskningsprosjektet er fokuset på hvordan bruken av slik teknologi har vært med på å forandre skillet mellom arbeidstid og fritid. Der arbeidstid tidligere var begrenset til den tiden man var på kontoret/arbeidsstedet, er det i dag mulig å jobbe både andre steder enn kontoret og til andre tider enn vanlig arbeidstid. Med dette har også skillet mellom arbeidstid og fritid blitt mer utydelig. I dette forskningsprosjektet ønsker vi å undersøke hvordan bruken av IKT har konsekvenser for dette skillet.

I prosjektet skal dette undersøkes gjennom flere forskningsspørsmål:
- Hvordan ser arbeidstakerne på mulighetene IKT tilbyr dem i sin arbeidshverdag?
- Hvilke forventninger er knyttet til å være tilgjengelig for arbeidsgiver når man kan nås til enhver tid?
- Hvordan formes disse forventningene? Er det en gjensidig forhandling mellom arbeidstaker og arbeidsgiver, eller foregår dette mer «ovenfra og ned»?
- Hva regnes egentlig som arbeidstid i dag?
- Er IKT med på å gjøre arbeidstakere mer eller mindre fri når det kommer til å administrere egen arbeidstid?

Dette er sentrale spørsmål i forskningsprosjektet.

Prosjektet er en masteroppgave under masterprogrammet «Medier, kommunikasjon og informasjonsteknologi» ved Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet (NTNU).

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Institutt for sosiologi og statsvitenskap ved Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet (NTNU) er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?
Utvalget for prosjektet er arbeidstakere i offentlig og privat sektor, der arbeidstakerens oppgaver er fysisk mulig å gjøre på andre steder enn arbeidsplassen og til andre tider enn den vanlige arbeidstiden. Du er spurt om å delta fordi du oppfyller disse kriteriene.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du deltar på et intervju. Det vil ta ca. 60 minutter. Intervjuet vil inneholde spørsmål knyttet til forskningsspørsmålene beskrevet ovenfor. Svarene vil bli anonymisert. For å registrere intervjudataene vil det bli tatt lydopptak og notater fra intervjuet.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger
Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.
- Det er kun studenten og veileder for prosjektet som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil vi erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data. Lydopptaket og notatene vil også lagres adskilt fra navn og kontaktopplysninger.

Ingen av deltakerne vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonen, og eventuelle sitater fra intervjuet er anonymisert.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?
Opplysningene anonymiseres når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er 1. juli 2021. Personopplysninger og lydopptak vil også slettes ved prosjektslutt.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?
Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet (NTNU) har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?
Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
- Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet (NTNU) ved Hendrik Storstein Spilker (epost: hendrik.spilker@ntnu.no / tlf: 73591849)
- Masterstudent Markus Engeland (e-post: markus.engeland@gmail.com / tlf: 94437383)

- Vårt personvernombud: Thomas Helgesen (e-post: thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no / tlf: 93079038)

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Hendrik Storstein Spilker   Markus Engeland
(Forsker/veileder)   (Masterstudent)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Friheter og begrensninger i et digitalisert arbeidsliv», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix C

Intervjuguide

Før intervjuet

- Sende informasjonsskriv og samtykkeskjema til informantene

Introduksjon

- Takk for at du stilte opp
- Intervjuet er delt opp i 6 kategorier. Den første tar for seg litt generelt om ditt yrkesliv og utdanning, andre og tredje om arbeidsvaner og fjernjobbing før og etter korona, fjerde og femte omhandler det å være tilgjengelig og om fritid, mens den sjette vil dreie seg om digital kompetanse. Til slutt følger en avslutning med mulighet for å legge til ting.
- Signering av samtykkeskjema

Generelt

- Hvor lenge har du jobbet i *bedrift*?
- Hva er du utdannet som?
- Kan du kort beskrive din jobbkarriere?
- Kan du kort beskrive din yrkestittel og arbeidsoppgaver?
- Hvor gammel er du?

Arbeidsvaner og mulighet for fjernjobbing *før* korona-nedstengning

- Hadde du mulighet til å jobbe hjemmefra eller utenfor det fysiske arbeidsstedet?
- Hvor stor andel av arbeidet gjorde du hjemmefra?
- Hva anser du som arbeidstid?
- Liker du best å jobbe på kontoret eller hjemmefra?
    - Hvorfor det?
- Hva synes du om å kunne jobbe andre steder enn kontoret?
- Hva synes du om å kunne jobbe til andre tider enn den ordinære arbeidstiden?

Arbeidsvaner *etter* korona

- Pandemisituasjonen som oppsto i fjor førte til at mange måtte på hjemmekontor. Hvordan har det vært å måtte jobbe hjemmefra?
- Hvordan har dine arbeidsvaner endret seg etter korona?
- Hva har du savnet mest fra å jobbe på den fysiske arbeidsplassen?
- Hva oppdaget du var bedre med å jobbe hjemmefra?

- Hvordan har nedstigningen artet seg på din arbeidsplass?
- Hvilke konkrete tiltak er satt i verk på arbeidsplassen?
- Hvordan har arbeidsgiver håndtert situasjonen?
- Hvilke nye krav har du fått fra arbeidsgiver etter korona?
  - Har det forandret seg hvordan du må dokumentere arbeid/arbeidsinnsats på?
- Hvor fornøyd er du med arbeidsgivers håndtering av situasjonen?
- Hvor fornøyd er du med hvordan du selv har håndtert situasjonen?
- Hvordan tror du dette blir senere når vi får det mer normalt igjen?

Om å være tilgjengelig

- Hvilke forventninger opplever du rundt det å være tilgjengelig for arbeidsgiver utenfor arbeidstiden?
- I hvilken grad føler du at du selv har mulighet for å påvirke forventningene ovenfor deg som arbeidstaker med tanke på det å være tilgjengelig utenfor arbeidstid?
- Er det noe du skulle ønske var annerledes med tanke på disse forventningene?
- Er det noen retningslinjer på arbeidsplassen for hvordan fjernjobbing-teknologier skal brukes?

Fritid

- Hva er fritid for deg?
- Hvordan håndterer du varsler angående jobb som tikker inn på mobilen når du har fri?
- Opplever du ofte konflikter mellom krav fra arbeidstid og krav fra familie og fritid? Når føler du at du kommer i klem?
- [Også vil jeg bare minne om at dette er anonymt]
- Håndterer du fritidsaktiviteter i arbeidstiden?
- Griper noen ganger fritid og familie inn i arbeidstid?
  - Hvordan håndterer du det?
- Ønsker du et skarpt skille mellom arbeidstid og fritid?
  - **HVIS JA:** Gjør du noe selv for å skape et slikt skille?
  - **HVIS NEI:** Hvorfor ikke?

Digital kompetanse

- Hvordan synes du det er å sette seg inn i nye datasystemer og digitale løsninger på arbeidsplassen?
- Er det slik at slike systemer som oftest forbedrer arbeidshverdagen din?
  - Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?
- Hvordan er opplæringen i slike systemer på arbeidsplassen?
- Kan du gi eksempler på gode nye digitale systemer/løsninger?
- Og har du noen eksempler på ikke fullt så gode nye systemer?
- Hva er gevinstene med slike systemer? Hva er tapet/hva er det man mister?

Avslutning

- Er det noe vi ikke har snakket om som du synes er viktig for dette temaet?

- Tusen takk for at du ville stille til intervju